

## Bill Protecting Religious Freedom Signed into Law

With Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve watching, United States President Bill Clinton signed into law on 16 November 1993 a bill protecting religious freedoms.

“This is probably the most significant thing in terms of protecting U.S. religious freedom that has happened in our lifetime,” observed Elder Ballard of the historic moment. “It is significant for two reasons: first, it restores religious freedom back to its original position when the Bill of Rights was conceived two centuries ago; and second, it has united dozens of religious and civic organizations in a common cause.”

The bill, sponsored by Senators Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, and Edward M. Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, overturned a 1990 Supreme Court ruling that allowed the federal, state, or local government to interfere with religion as long as they merely had rational reasons for doing so and did not specifically target any group. Prior to that ruling, such interference was allowed only if government could prove a “compelling” interest. The new law restores that standard.

Sixty-eight religious and civil liberties organizations supported the bill, which took three years to pass the House and Senate. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve testified twice before Congress in favor of the bill—this being only the third time in the existence of the Church that an official Church representative has been sent for that purpose.

At a press conference held after the bill was signed into law, Elder Ballard remarked: “The Church is extremely pleased that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 was signed into law today. We express our appreciation to the president of the United States, the members of Congress, and to the other members of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion for their vision, leadership, courage, and determination to protect our religious freedom. ... For members of the Church, this legislation implements into federal law a vital principle embodied in our church’s Eleventh Article of Faith.”