

September 17, 2013

In Honor of the Constitution, End Religious Preference

by
Toni Van Pelt

When President Obama declared that he firmly supports the principle of separation of church and state in his new Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, ISHV founder Paul Kurtz reminded him of his campaign promise not to permit employment discrimination in faith-based programs—a holdover provision from the Bush Administration that remains untouched in the new funding directive. "We urge President Obama to eliminate any programs of religious organizations misusing social services federal tax dollars," Kurtz said.

That was back in 2009 when President Obama first took office.

Since its inception in 2010 ISHV has been actively working to end religious preference in law and public policy.

Today ISHV lobbies against the on-slaught of religious amendments, acts, resolutions and offices brought on by Congressional members, federal offices and the White House.

ISHV belongs to the Liberty and Justice Coalition and the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination working to end the overt and covert preferential treatment afforded religious organizations in law and public policy.

Of great concern is the interference by the Catholic bishops in the Affordable Health Care Act provision on birth control, religious hiring discrimination in taxpayer funded programs, the refusal to appoint humanist chaplains in the military, coercing beneficiaries including children into prayer, the list goes on.

Recently ISHV coalition partners met to discuss the current state of church/state separation in light of the State Department's announcement of the creation of the new office earlier this month, as well as the ongoing litigation over required preventive healthcare coverage for women, including contraception. Panelists discussed the influence of religion on public policy and women's reproductive health and examined the difference between the protections owed to people of faith from all traditions and the privileging of any one faith's view over others in civil law.

"The impact of undue deference shown to particular religious individuals or organizations continues to be seen in the ongoing saga of health insurance reform. Conservative faith voices, such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, seek exemptions from laws and regulations with which they disagree, especially those related to women's rights," Hutchinson

said. "Yet these same voices also expect privileged treatment when it comes to public funding, federal grants and other benefits of civil society. This imbalance is not only anathema to the Catholic tradition of social justice, but it flies in the face of the American value of true religious liberty." [stated Sara Hutchinson of Catholics for Choice](#). We couldn't agree more.

"President Obama, please honor your campaign promise and the U.S. Constitution, end religious privilege as we know it in the U.S. government. Protect our secular democracy." urged Toni Van Pelt, ISHV public policy director.