

## Faith-Based Hiring, No Faith-Based Serving

*Should the Obama Administration let faith-based programs that receive government grants discriminate against those they hire or serve?*

- 1.....The only justification for government grants to faith-based programs is public proof that the programs *benefit the general public with secular values* which otherwise would have to be met by a greater outlay of public (government) money than the amounts of the government grants.
- 2.....The benefits should be to the *general* public, not the special public of the particular faith-based institution providing the program. No discrimination in those being served.
- 3.....The question is loaded by "discriminate against." The American spirit is "Down with discriminating against!" Preferable would be a neutral way to ask the question: "limit their hiring and serving to those of their own faith?" It's two questions. I've already answered the second: Faith-based programs receiving government money should not limit those being served to those of the faith-based institution's own particular faith.
- 4.....The first question: Should faith-based programs receiving government money be free to limit their hiring to those of their own particular faith? My answer is yes. The esprit de corps of any faith-based institution and its programs is dependent, not only for vigor but for existence itself, on shared worship and fellowship. The presence of otherwise-minded employees would put a damper on *communio sanctorum*, the particular faith's common speech and camaraderie, the peace and joy of labor among the like-minded.
- 5.....The First Amendment to our Constitution expresses a many-splendored wisdom, unique in the history of human government. One of the radii of that wisdom is the prevention of church and state from damaging one another. Requiring faith-based programs to practice open hiring would *damage* the programs by diluting their esprit de corps, and *reduce* the programs' ability to provide the public services the government grants presume.
- 6.....Fairness is an understandable and reasonable argument for open hiring where public money is involved. But *shared faith* among the employees of a faith-based program is a need and value supervening fairness, which is not (as some argue) an absolute value.
- 7.....The American way of "church and state" never has been "separation," a word not occurring in our Constitution. Rather, it has been such *interaction* as promotes the general welfare without impeding the Constitutional freedom or compromising the integrity of either state or church. Those are the guidelines for the Obama administration's decisions regarding the government's public-interest support of faith-based programs.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | FEBRUARY 17, 2009; 9:07 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

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Please tell me if I am way off base here. I think that it is important that the word "discrimination" be defined so we know exactly what we are talking about. Discrimination is interpreted differently by different groups of people. For example, an Arab-American may be turned down for a job because that individual is really not qualified for the job. However, the Arab-American sees it as discrimination against his/her race because of American relations with Middle East Countries, and particularly the Arab world. So in the eyes of the Arab-American he/she was discriminated against, or was the employer making a judgment about the individual's abilities based on his/her nationality? Or was the individual really not qualified?

My point here, first is that the word "discrimination" has very broad connotations, and is really sometimes hard to define. In my opinion, all discrimination is wrong, but not all that I perceive as discrimination may be viewed as such by others.

This, then, brings me to the point that no funding from the government should be poured into faith-based organizations simply for this very reason because once the organization accepts this funding, it opens itself to secularism in the sense that, once it does so, it should not be allowed to discriminate against anyone different from that organization. In the organization's discrimination of others, the government is condoning their discriminatory actions by funding them. It would seem to me that both be kept separate, and if it isn't, then a definition of, and what constitutes discrimination, should be established to the satisfaction of all. Personally, I do not think that this can be achieved, as each person's perceptions vary, and it is our perceptions that allow us to think whether something is discriminated against or not.

POSTED BY: GBIRDHOUSE | FEBRUARY 17, 2009 6:35 PM  
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I could not disagree with the author more. What he proposes is nothing but a back door to massive discrimination in our economy.

For example churches in the United States are overwhelming segregated by race. Imagine if Southern states contracted with faith based organizations to provide teachers. They could effectively make the profession white only.

And how can an organization that can't even work members of other faiths in something like a soup line provide a welcoming environment for members of other faiths to use their services.

It is one thing when you are thinking of a soup kitchen run by a bunch of nuns. But imagine a rape crises center staffed only by Muslims wearing Burka's or Post Traumatic Stress counseling service run for veterans in a Mosque that loudly plays calls to prayers in Arabic over the loud speakers.

It is just inconceivable that we could trust religious organizations that claim a moral right to dictate the behaviour of nonbelievers constantly from the pulpit and through political commentary not to abuse Federal monies.

I will not pay taxes to people who believe they have right to impose their beliefs on my private behavior. If an organization can't even get through a work day with people of other faiths than they need to be kept as far away from tax payer money as possible.

POSTED BY: ROBERTLEEHOTCHKISS | FEBRUARY 17, 2009 5:16 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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During the previous administration, I worked for the federal contractor that provided technical support for the faith-based initiative known as the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF). Much was made about the Bush Administration's innovativeness in providing public dollars to support the work of faith-based organizations. This was inaccurate. Government support through a network of grants and contracts has been provided to religious organizations for non-sectarian social services for the past 50 years.

What was new was allowing federal funds to be used to support religious and quasi-religious activities under the guise of social services. This happened with a wink and a nod through the Capital Compassion Fund and related faith-based initiatives. This cannot be allowed to continue in the Obama Administration.

Additionally, I witnessed first hand, technical assistance training on how CCF grantees could legally discriminate against people they didn't want to hire based on religious predilections. As an American, I was and continue to be offended that taxpayer dollars would be used to exclude any group of people. This, as well, cannot be allowed to continue.

Yet, beyond these challenges, there is the wider, Constitutional issue of the separation of church and state. The previous administration – certainly not the most respectful of the Constitution in general – somehow believed that the separation clause was up for grabs. It is not.

We are all diminished when government can use its substantial weight to assault the Constitution by funding the peculiarities of religious entities. Let's hope that President Obama, as a constitutional scholar, will safeguard these vital protections by curtailing the ability of any organizations – faith-based or otherwise – from using taxpayer dollars to discriminate against anyone.

I have written more on this issue on my blog: <http://www.501cweb.com>

POSTED BY: WJFREEMAN1 | FEBRUARY 16, 2009 11:00 AM  
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There is that which we refer to as the Department of Labor. It is quite clear on the matter of discrimination. Unless churches plan to secede from the Union, I see no reason why they should not adhere to DOL requirements.

"The only justification for government grants to faith-based programs is public proof that the programs benefit the general public with secular values which otherwise would have to be met by a greater outlay of public (government) money than the amounts of the government grants."

I'd go considerably further myself, but for the moment will respond based on the conditions you set forth. The "public proof" has not been offered; hence, let us end this "faith-based" nonsense immediately.

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | FEBRUARY 16, 2009 5:54 AM  
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Yes, I should have gone further in my opinion, Mr. Elliott.

I think many religious organizations will probably proselytize while they are involved in this social assistance move and others will not. Since we are all paying for this, religious and non-religious alike, special attention should be placed to assure that no religious organizations use this as a recruiting opportunity. If the government would be directly involved in this procedure, being secular, there would be no worry about them trying to recruit people to become secular. Because there is no secular organization, or secular "church", or tight secular group that needs to convert religious people to secularism.

I want to make clear that in my opinion there are many positive things to pick up from religion. I just don't mention the good shepherd because he will do a good work. We have to worry about the rotten apples. This being said, I don't think this is a good move from the government as it opens up a significant gap for the lowest religious characters to take advantage of this occasion as a new recruiting opportunity. Who's going to control if religious organizations are proselytizing while giving out assistance?

When I speak about bible addicted crackheads I'm referring to evangelicals. I see that they take the bible as literally as possible, to a point in which it becomes an addiction. The symptoms of any addiction are the same as the ones they show for the bible. So what they are really doing is replacing a previous addiction for another (the bible). I don't see this in any other religious group.

When I'm talking about religious ignorance, I'm basically referring to people who become intolerant of other people because they have another religion or no religion. Something that I think is unfortunately too frequent in religion.

Thank you for replying.

POSTED BY: BIOS | FEBRUARY 15, 2009 2:15 AM  
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TO BIOS:

You say "Money should not be the only reason" "for government to fund faith-based organizations," but then proceed not by giving additional reasons (as your wording would lead the reader to expect) but by implying that there should be NO reason.

YOUR reason for NO money is (to use an analogy) that the served may catch a disease (viz., religion) from the servers. Yes, when you go to doctors, you may catch some diseases from them. And a parallel literal truth: Stay away from hospital if you want to avoid catching some sickness.

Two failures:

1

You do not mention negatives the served could pick up from NON-"faith" servers.

2

You do not mention positives the served could pick up from "faith" servers.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | FEBRUARY 12, 2009 2:19 PM

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Item 1 mentions money as the only reason for government to fund faith-based organizations. Money should not be the only reason, because the apparent money savings do not take into account many social problems that would be created which are not easily measured in terms of money. Specially problems related to growing numbers of religious people translating into increased ignorance and bible addicted crackheads (depending on which faith gets the grant) in the general population stemming from proselytism while giving out assistance. More religion could certainly add a larger dose of intolerance and violence to society.

POSTED BY: BIOS | FEBRUARY 12, 2009 12:55 AM

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So far, no commenter has mentioned my main point, which is stated in my section 1: "...a greater outlay of public (government) money...."

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | FEBRUARY 11, 2009 9:12 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Faith based charities can have their \*place\* ...but not as big religiously-driven discriminatory ways to 'privatize' our social obligations.

Must be over and above.

If you need to \*hire\* someone to perform a task, you cannot open up a job, then discriminate with public money.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | FEBRUARY 11, 2009 3:59 PM

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The reality here, Reverend, is that there are a lot of Fundie-agendaed charities, including the Salvation Army, for one. also Catholic Charities, who've repeatedly shown they would rather be conditional about who they serve, or in fact \*hire to keep the big bucks books as supposedly public-serving nonprofit companies\* than help anyone at all.

The fact is they want public money to pursue their agendas, and no oversight, and are perfectly willing to put people on the street to make political points.

They can do that on their own time, never mind keep subsuming what the US Government is \*supposed\* to be doing, and then hold some poor people hostage to demand their way about hurting queers and non-Christians.

I keep hearing how much more charitable you Christians are than anyone else.... Why is it then that you aren't willing to follow the same rules as anyone \*else\* receiving government money?

Mr. Elliott -

I appreciate your thoughtful post. I'll take a little exception to two aspects of it:

1. You want to carve out an exception for religionists - and only religionists - in allowing them to discriminate in hiring when receiving Federal funds. There is absolutely no basis, per our secular Constitution, for allowing that; the only reason would be to loosen hiring rules solely to help religious organizations vs. secular organizations. And that is not legal.

2. *"The American way of "church and state" never has been "separation," a word not occurring in our Constitution. Rather, it has been such interaction as promotes the general welfare without impeding the Constitutional freedom or compromising the integrity of either state or church."*

That's not really true. While 'separation' doesn't occur in the Constitution, neither does 'privacy', or separation of powers, or the interstate commerce clause. Nor is 'Trinity' in the Bible.

Yet the First Amendment had its clear genesis in the Jefferson's and Madison's Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty, clearly stating that in the eyes of government, religion and non-religion were equal. It was Virginia that insisted it wouldn't ratify the new Constitution unless a Bill of Rights would be added including such things. Madison wrote up his version of a Federal First Amendment...and in the end, the Congress passed an even broader measure, much to his and Jefferson's pleasant surprise.

When asked by a religious group to provide his understanding of the First Amendment, it was Jefferson, with his Attorney General, who wrote that the intention of the whole thing "was to erect a wall of separation between Church and State". Considering the source, the subject, and the time, I think the meaning is pretty clear.

Dave Huntsman

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