



Council on American-Islamic Relations Florida
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Dear GOP Leadership:

As a representative of the nation's largest Muslim Civil Rights and Advocacy organization and Chief Executive Director of one of the largest civil rights groups in Florida, I am asking you to take a strong stand against recent xenophobic trends and actions taken by certain GOP members and clubs clearly designed to marginalize the American Muslim community and result in unconstitutional laws that harm our state and serve to undermine the long-term credibility of the Republican Party.

Our office has documented a disturbing pattern of Florida GOP clubs and organizations inviting anti-Muslim extremist to events that promote fear and hatred of the entire Muslim faith and community, often under the guise of just targeting "radicals."

One of the most recent events was advertised by the Lake County Republicans website using the following description: "If you believe that Islam is just another religion (and not a threat to America and the world)... then you especially need to hear this presentation."

This fear-mongering of Islam and American Muslims is leading to anti-Muslim legislation in Tallahassee that is both useless and that will harm our state.

While some Florida GOP clubs and organizations are coordinating anti-Muslim events, certain Republican Legislators like Alan Hays are as a result introducing bills that are driven by anti-Muslim sentiment. The most recent example of this type of legislation is SB 864 and SB 386. Simply put, the Florida GOP continues to alienate the Muslim community by direct action of some and silence of others.

If you remain silent while party organizations invite Islamophobic speakers and GOP legislators support bills driven by anti-Muslim bias, your party risks alienating one of the fastest growing groups of American voters.

The GOP cannot afford to continue to alienate a minority growing in influence, especially in a key swing state such as Florida. In 2000 Bush won Florida in large part due to the Muslim swing vote. Past efforts to Demonize minorities has not paid off. It appears that the lesson of not tolerating bigotry is being learned at the national level, as illustrated when RNC Chair Reince Priebus asked RNC member Dave Agema to resign after he made anti-Muslim remarks. Locally, Republicans have expressed great concerns that Islamophobic sentiments by some GOP leadership that do not reflect the traditional values of the Republican Party and undermine GOP credibility and sustainability.

Florida now has 150,000 registered Muslim voters, 68% of whom see themselves as certainly or likely to participate in state and national elections. Florida's Muslim voters reflect the diversity of the state:

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39% of Muslim voters consider themselves Moderates, 28% Liberal, and 20% conservative. 48% said jobs and the economy was their primary concern when voting, while 27% chose education, 15% said health care and 15% said foreign policy.

The American Muslim Community is also the most racially diverse faith group. Many may be surprised to learn that Islam is now the largest religious faith in the US after the Christian denominations and American Muslims average a higher education and household income than the national average. American Muslims condemn violence and terrorism and are as concerned with protecting the security and liberty of America as their neighbors of other faiths.

People certainly have a right to use double standards and take things out of context to promote fear and hatred of religious minorities. But you must recognize, that if the Florida GOP allows such actions to go unchallenged in the name of the GOP, both the GOP and our state will be tarnished.

We are asking you to stop enabling the “**Legislative Bullying**” of Muslims and other minorities in Florida by ceasing to support legislation by Republican Leadership, when it is clear that such legislation is driven and supported by those who openly promote an anti-Muslim/Islam agenda.

Senator Alan Hays has tried to pass **SB 386** for the past three years. It is based on a model piece of legislation written by Islamophobe David Yerushalmi.

Yerushalmi is head of the anti-Islam hate group Society of Americans for National Existence (SANE), which once offered a policy proposal that would make "adherence to Islam" punishable by 20 years in prison, called for the immediate deportation of all non-citizen Muslims and urged Congress to declare war on the "Muslim Nation."

Legislatures have claimed that they do not care about the origin of the bill, only its current content. This sends the message that legislation based on fear, bigotry and intolerance is okay when you target Muslims and other minorities.

As a lawyer, I believe the origin and history of legislation is just as important as its content, as courts will look to legislative histories in order to interpret and apply the law.

The only organizations in support of SB 386 are documented hate groups like David Caton’s Florida Family Association and ACT for America. The bill is opposed however, by several civil rights and legal groups, including CAIR Florida, the ACLU, EMERGE USA, the American Bar Association, and sections of the Florida Bar.

In earlier years, the bill targeted the Muslim community by name, however, thanks to the efforts of civil rights and advocacy groups, the bill has been watered down to only target “foreign law” by name. SB 386 will still however have the practical effect of limiting the freedom of minorities to freely exercise their faith tradition.

There is no need for this bill. Hays has to date not been able to cite one instance where this bill could have solved a real problem and America’s most respected legal organizations have described this bill as a “solution in search of a problem.” We have enough unsolved real problems in Tallahassee and cannot afford to waste time trying to solve imaginary ones.

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Our State and Federal constitutions, already serve as the greatest protection for the rights of all Americans. We do not need legislation supported by anti-Muslim/Islam extremist to protect us, especially when such legislation violates the Bill of Rights by limiting the free exercise of religion.

SB 864 is another piece of legislation that Senator Alan Hays introduced that's mirrors the efforts of Act For America, a documented hate group. This legislation will require every school district to select its own textbooks on its own, and could solely be based on the vote of laypeople. Hays introduced the Bill after the hate group, Act For America, sent protesters to get a 1,000-page world history textbook banned in Volusia County because it has a 30-page chapter on Islamic history. Students in Volusia gathered the signatures of 500 students asking the school board not to give in to the demands of what they called "Anti-Muslim book burners." Its practical effect will be that the 67 school districts will be required to waste time and resources selecting textbooks on their own, resulting in inconsistent educational material across the state and higher textbook prices, in a process that will be heavily influenced by special interest and religious groups attempting to censor books that cover historical facts they don't like.

It is no surprise that Hays is sponsoring needless and harmful legislation when the Lake County Republican (LCR) clubs which support Hays often invite speakers who paint Islam as a threat. This irrational fear leads to the support of bad legislation which then not only harms religious minorities, but also our state as a whole. The GOP must not allow the actions of Hays and other Florida GOP clubs to define the Florida GOP as intolerant of religious minorities. GOP leadership must take a stance against hate driven legislation being promoted in its name.

The state legislature is not the proper venue for politicians to carry out their crusades against religious minorities and advance their personal religious agendas. Nor can we afford to fight non-existent threats, when our state has many more pressing issues from jobs and the economy, to healthcare and education that need to be addressed.

We write you to ask you to do your part to stop empowering Hays' continued attempts to Bully Florida Muslims by promoting needless legislation that is harmful to our State.

Please find attached the following:

1. Legislative Fact Sheet explaining opposition to SB 864
2. Legislative Fact Sheet explaining opposition to SB 386
3. Florida Bar International Law Section Paper Opposing SB 386
4. Reports published by CAP, ISPU, and the ACLU on the myths that promote support for SB 386.

In consideration of the above, we hope that we can count on you to stand against events and legislation that promote fear and hate against religious minorities in our state. Such events and legislation not only is harmful to the Florida GOP, and to religious minorities, but to all Floridians. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance in getting a better understanding of your American Muslim constituents and the civil rights issues that affect them.

Sincerely,
Hassan Shibly, Esq.
Chief Executive Director
CAIR-Florida

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