



Liberal Clergyman Calls Boehner a 'Disaster for Religious Liberties'

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(CNSNews.com) -- He probably hasn't even moved all of his furniture in yet, but newly elected House Majority Leader John Boehner is the subject of an attack from a group of Leftist clergy members angered by the Ohio congressman's support of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative.

"The election of Congressman Boehner to be majority leader has the potential to be a disaster for the religious liberties of all Americans," Rev. Welton Gaddy, president of The Interfaith Alliance (TIA), declared.

Boehner, who represents Ohio's 8th District, was elected Feb. 2 as majority leader. He defeated two other candidates, including acting Majority Leader Roy Blunt of Missouri.

Gaddy told **Cybercast News Service** that "Congressman Boehner would use the machinery of the federal government to impose religion on people turning to the government for basic services.

"That's a violation of the Constitution and it is a serious compromise of religious liberty," Gaddy said.

TIA was founded in 1994, as a "non-partisan, clergy-led grassroots organization" that is "dedicated to promoting the positive and healing role of religion in a nation and challenging those who manipulate religion to promote a narrow, divisive agenda," according to its website.

The group's 150,000 members include Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs "as well as many Agnostics and Atheists," according to the TIA website.

Gaddy's many complaints about the Bush administration have focused on the president's judicial nominees and Bush's handling of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath in the Gulf Coast. He has also frequently attacked religious conservatives, as in the Feb. 3, press release in which he declared that "the religious right is wrong -- wrong for America and bad for religion."

In Boehner's case, it is his support of federal grants for faith-based and community organizations that has drawn Gaddy's ire.

"[Boehner] has voted for amending the Constitution relating to school prayer. He has injected a kind of required religion into anti-poverty programs. He has been a part of initiatives to support religious employment discrimination," Gaddy charged.

Boehner "took a bill reauthorizing Head Start that came out of committee with bipartisan unanimous support, and then on the floor he rejected the religious discrimination clause," according to Gaddy.

He also accused Boehner of taking "a stand against any kind of address or redress related to the proselytizing situation at the Air Force Academy," a reference to Air Force Academy graduate Mikey Weinstein, who has sued the Air Force for allegedly pushing evangelical Christianity on cadets.

Ed Patru, spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said The Interfaith Alliance is merely "a front group for left-wing partisan Democrats."

"Interfaith Alliance tends to believe that pro-abortion, pro-gay marriage, liberal Democrats who want to drive God out of the public sphere are the only people capable of protecting religious liberty," Patru told **Cybercast News Service**.

Boehner's press secretary, Don Seymour insisted that his boss supports religious freedom.

"He has worked consistently to allow faith-based groups the opportunity to participate in federal job training and Head Start programs without forfeiting their civil liberties," Seymour told **Cybercast News Service**.

"He firmly believes we must protect the civil liberties of faith-based organizations willing to help offer services in federal programs. This means protecting their Civil Rights Act hiring rights in current programs, and restoring these protections to federal programs from which they have been stripped."

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