



William J. Murray

The Chairman's Action Report

Religious
Freedom
Coalition

June 29 , 2005

RFC ON THE HILL

The presence on Capitol Hill of the Religious Freedom Coalition really does have an effect on the actions of our Congress. While there are many fine social conservative organizations in the United States, there are very few with offices in the Washington, DC area. The office of the Religious Freedom Coalition is located just a few blocks from the Capitol complex. As a result virtually every day the Religious Freedom Coalition is involved with congressmen, Senators and members of the Bush Administration and various agencies such as the State Department. It is virtually impossible to report on every meeting and event the staff of the Religious Freedom Coalition participate in here in the nation's capital. Below are some of the highlights of meetings and events from the past two weeks.

PARENTS RIGHT TO KNOW

On Tuesday morning, June 21st the Religious Freedom Coalition participated in a press conference with Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) as he introduced the Parents Right to Know Act of 2005. Both Peggy Birchfield, our Executive Director, and I were present at the news conference. Senator Coburn's bill would require federally funded Title X clinics to give a parent five (5) days notice before giving a minor child contraceptive drugs or prescription devices. The House version of the bill sponsored by Congressman Todd Akin (R-MO) has passed the House by a wide majority in previous sessions of Congress. The bill has never had strong Senate backing before. Now, because Senator Tom Coburn is a medical doctor he brings new power to the bill in the Senate.

At the news conference Senator Coburn was able to report on the adverse effects of giving children these kinds of drugs from his own knowledge as a practicing physician. He pointed out that as a medical doctor he cannot give anyone under the age of 18 medical treatment or prescribe any drug without parental consent; however, a Title X clinic can give a child potentially life threatening contraceptive drugs without even notifying a parent. He told of one case in which clinic personnel gave contraceptive pills to a 15 year old girl who had a family history of a blood clotting disorder, something no doctor would ever have done. This is important legislation that we will continue to support.

DEFAMATION OF CHRISTIANS

On the afternoon of that same day, RFC's Peggy Birchfield escorted Don Feder to a meeting inside the Capitol Building to introduce his new organization to a group of conservative Senators and active conservative groups who work on Capitol Hill. Besides being a well known columnist for the Boston Globe, Don Feder has written extensively about the Middle East and has been a leader in exposing the false and biased reporting coming from that area. As a Jew he has become increasingly frustrated by the assault on Christianity in secular America. He sees the modern day hostility toward Christians as similar to the anti Semitic attitudes that historically preceded persecution of the Jews. His new organization, Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation (JAACD) is attempting to rally the Jewish community in defense of Christians in our secular society.

Jews are now standing up for Christians while many *Christians* now cower in the corner afraid to show their faith in public!

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Some of the Jewish supporters of JAACD include Mona Charen, Barry Farber, David Horowitz, Mort Klein, Rabbi Daniel Lapin and Michael Medved. The Religious Freedom Coalition frequently arranges meetings on Capitol Hill for the leaders of organizations which do not have offices in Washington, DC.



Senator Brownback (center) speaks with RFC supporters at June 21st reception in Washington, DC

RFC CAPITOL HILL RECEPTION

On that same Tuesday the Religious Freedom Coalition held a reception to promote our new Bethlehem Project at the Capitol Hill Club. The private club is located directly across the street from the Cannon House Office Building which houses the offices of more than one hundred congressmen.

Several congressmen and Senators had promised to attend the fund raising reception to help us attract potential donors. Among those who were listed as our guests were Senators George Allen (R-VA) and Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS). Congressmen Todd Akin (R-MO) and Trent Franks (R-AZ) also attended our reception. Congressman Akin was holding his own fund raising event in the same building just down the hall from us. In all there were several receptions involving congressmen and Senators in the building at the same time.

Congressman Trent Franks is a huge fan of Winston Churchill and stole the show at our reception with several very long Churchill votes. I first met Trent Franks and his wife more than twenty years ago when I spoke at an event in Arizona. At the time he was just developing an interest in politics and had not yet run for public office.

The reception had a much larger impact on Capitol Hill than just fund raising. Major coalitions of groups the Religious Freedom Coalition is associated with distributed information promoting the event by both fax and e-mail. By the day of the event there was not a congressional office in Washington that had not been exposed to the Bethlehem Project and the persecution of Christians in Palestinian controlled areas. The reception was as much about educating congressmen and Senators as it was about raising funds.



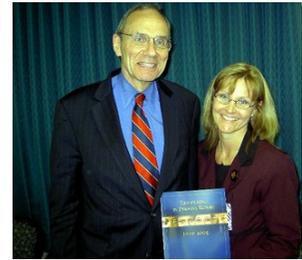
William Murray introduces Trent Franks (R-AZ)

The event raised several thousand dollars to keep Bethlehem as a “diverse” community. By helping with scholarships to Christian schools and helping to provide jobs, the Bethlehem Project will assist Christians who remain in Bethlehem.

RFC ON THE O'REILLY FACTOR

Just a few days earlier our own Peggy Birchfield appeared on the O'Reilly Factor. This show, hosted by Bill O'Reilly on the FOX News network, is the number one rated cable news program in the United States. Peggy was invited on the program because of her continuing work with Ambassador John R. Miller in the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The Religious Freedom Coalition provides information and suggestions to Ambassador Miller's office on human trafficking which is the modern day name for slavery.

Peggy was invited on the program with Bill O'Reilly because of remarks he had made about Aruba and other Caribbean islands during the continuing investigation of the disappearance of Natalee Holloway while on a high school graduation trip. Bill O'Reilly wanted an expert to confirm human trafficking in the islands to give the public some statistics. While on the program Peggy said she doubted that Natalee was a victim of trafficking, but that other girls and boys have disappeared and been forced into prostitution.



Ambassador Miller and Peggy Birchfield introducing 2005 report on human trafficking

IRAN AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Later that week I was in a meeting with Ambassador Miller a few blocks away from the Capitol Building where he was discussing the 2005 annual report on human trafficking. During the lunch I spoke to him about a situation in Iran he was not aware of. Iran has been given a Tier 2 status by his Office to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking and the annual report said they had made progress and cited arrests connected with a secular prostitution ring. Iran, however, is strictly Islamic and woman can be traded like animals.

I pointed out to Ambassador Miller that Iranian Mullahs conduct legal "temporary" marriages lasting from 30 minutes to one year, involving girls as young as nine years old. I told him how these girls were then divorced by verbal command from the "husband," and they and their children turned out into the street. The Ambassador appeared shocked by the information and I promised to supply him with the documentation by the end of the day, which of course, our office did supply. We had obtained this information during our work with the Alliance for Iranian Women.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

On the morning of June 27, 2005 members of the Religious Freedom Coalition staff were on hand at the Supreme Court Building for decisions to be rendered on the Ten Commandments. Staff members were in line to get in the building at 7:30 AM. The Court decided virtually nothing other than to allow continued legal action by the ACLU. The Court ruled against a display of the Ten Commandments at a courthouse in Kentucky and then ruled that a granite display of the same Commandments on State property in Texas was OK. With that kind of split decision the ACLU will continue their attack on every Ten Commandments display in the nation. While in front of the Supreme Court, Peggy was interviewed by ABC News and several newspapers. In the past the Religious Freedom Coalition has supported several Jurisdiction Acts in Congress to strip the Federal Courts of their right to make decisions to remove the Ten Commandments.

RFC AND THE SUDANESE AMBASSADOR

RFC's Scott Parker participated in a roundtable discussion with Ambassador Khidir Haroun Ahmed of Sudan hosted by the Institute on Religion and Public Policy. The Ambassador tried to center the discussion on Sudanese history and culture, while most of those assembled wanted to focus on the conflict in Darfur. Our Scott Parker, however, pressed the ambassador about religious freedom in the new Sudan. The ambassador stated that the new constitution contains a bill of rights guaranteeing freedom of religion; however Shari'a law continues to be implemented. "Shari'a [Islamic law] is a very sensitive subject," he said. For the next three years he envisions a nation of two systems with one applying to non-Muslims, including foreigners, and the other applying to Muslims.

Although the ambassador painted a promising future of tolerance and respect, a southern Sudanese Christian present at the meeting was somewhat less than confident that all people would be free. Scott Parker is the director of our Bethlehem Project.

OTHER LEGISLATION

The meetings and events above are just highlights. Every week RFC staff members with congressmen and Senators on almost a daily basis. During the last two weeks either myself or Peggy Birchfield have held meetings with congressmen Todd Akin, Bobby Jindal, Ernest Istook, Trent Franks, Steve King, John Hostettler, Steve Chabot and Joe Pitts just to name a few. Beside Senators Coburn and Brownback named above we also held meetings with Senators Kyle and Santorum in the last two weeks. These meetings included such legislation as the Pledge Protection Act.

BETHLEHEM PROJECT

Above I mentioned Scott Parker who has joined our staff to work on helping to improve the situation of Christians in the Middle East. Scott will be leading our efforts with the Bethlehem Project to raise funds for scholarships to Christian schools for Christian children in Bethlehem and other Palestinian Authority controlled areas.

In August I will return to Bethlehem to help put in place the infrastructure to deliver the aid that is needed to keep Christian families in Bethlehem. In October I plan to accompany a church group to Bethlehem in hopes they will help with Christian education there. We as Christians should not, we cannot, abandon our brothers and sisters there, and we cannot turn over the birthplace of Christ to those who despise His gospel message.

Bethlehem is now just 20% Christian, down from 85% just a few decades before. It is our prayer that the programs we are putting in place will help enable Christians to stay in Bethlehem.

Christian converts from Islam in other areas of the “West Bank” suffer greatly. These men and women have the word “Muslim” printed on their birth certificates and live in villages that are 99% Muslim. They are often arrested and accused of being Israeli sympathizers and receive death sentences. Over the past two years the Religious Freedom Coalition has sold handmade olive oil soap to assist these families who can find no work at all. The soap is made at their homes and sent to the men in hiding in Israel before it is shipped to us. Scott Parker is now working to recruit churches to sell the soap so that the proceeds can be used to assist Christians in the Holy Land.

Our presence in Washington is important to our projects overseas, particularly in Bethlehem. The high profile of our efforts in Bethlehem are a direct result of our relationships with congressmen and Senators. Please pray for our success both in Washington, DC and in Bethlehem.



William Murray and Saeed who is a Christian convert from Islam. Saeed cannot return to his village.

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William J. Murray, Chairman

Religious Freedom Coalition, PO Box 77511, Washington, DC 20013

(202) 543-0300 * www.rfcnet.org