



# REPORT from the Capital

## BJC confronts anti-Muslim tone in U.S. Congress

WASHINGTON — The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, along with a coalition of groups, has raised concerns over sharp rhetoric and scheduled congressional hearings targeting American Muslims.

On Feb. 1, the BJC joined 50 legal, human rights and faith organizations in urging U.S. House leaders to raise concerns about planned hearings on the “radicalization” of American Muslims. Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, plans to focus a hearing on homegrown terrorism, including the Fort Hood shooting and attempted Times Square bombing, both plots hatched by American-born Muslims. At press time, the hearings were set for the week of March 7.

King has accused U.S. Muslim leaders of failing to cooperate with law enforcement officials and said that 80 percent of American mosques are run by extremists, a figure that Muslim leaders and scholars dispute.

“Singling out a group of Americans for government scrutiny based on their faith is divisive and wrong,” the coalition wrote in a letter to House Speaker John Boehner and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi. “No American should live in fear for his or her safety, and Congress should not help create a climate where it is acceptable to target a particular faith community for discrimination, harassment, and violence.”

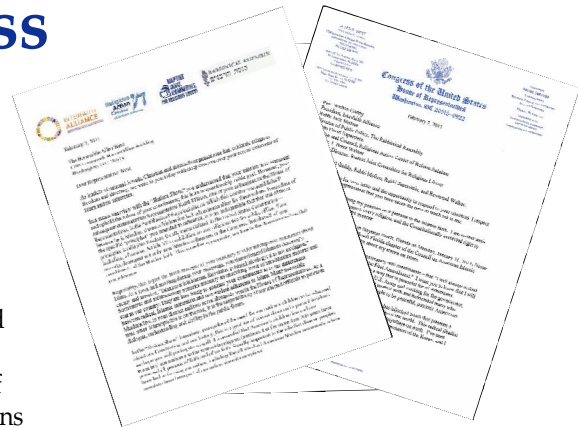
The letter asked Boehner and Pelosi to urge King to use the hearing “to address all forms of violence motivated by extremist beliefs” in a full and objective way.

Groups signing the letter include Amnesty International USA, the Interfaith Alliance, and dozens of local and national Muslim groups.

“I don’t believe it warrants an answer,” King said of the letter. “I am too busy preparing for the hearings.”

On Feb. 2, BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker joined leaders from the Interfaith Alliance, The Rabbinical Assembly and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism to denounce a freshman congressman’s comments that the first Muslim in Congress represents the “antithesis” of American values.

Rep. Allen West, R-Fla., defended his



Read the letters at [BJCOnline.org/letters](http://BJCOnline.org/letters).

remarks the same day, telling the leaders that he is “neither anti-Muslim nor anti-Islam.”

West’s original comments, made in a recent interview, were directed at Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., who in 2006 was elected as the first Muslim member of Congress. West said Ellison represents “the antithesis of the principles upon which this country was established. You have to just be able to challenge each and every one of their assertions.”

In the letter, the religious leaders said, “Although your laudable decision to offer yourself for public service in no way disqualifies you from discussing your own faith, we urge you not to use the prestige of your position ... to proselytize for one religion or demonize another.”

The letter included West’s previous comments “characterizing Islam as America’s enemy” and his assertion that “Islam is a totalitarian, theocratic political ideology; it is not a religion.”

In his response to the letter, West said he was not criticizing Ellison’s Muslim faith, but rather his support of the Council on American-Islamic Relations and its history of “supporting violent anti-American and anti-Israel terrorist organizations.”

Although the religious leaders asked West to apologize to Ellison and to his own Muslim constituents, West’s response stopped short of an apology.

“It appears to me that you have the very same goals as I do,” West wrote, “To keep our freedom intact and ensure that the foundations upon which this country was founded are never jeopardized.”

—Religion News Service & Staff Reports

Magazine of the  
Baptist Joint Committee

Vol.66 No. 3

March 2011

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# Obama administration amends conscience clause regulations

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration rescinded some of the Bush-era expansions of conscience clause exemptions for health care workers while maintaining protections for workers who do not want to take part in abortions.

On Feb. 18, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued its revised guidelines, which govern medical staffers who object to procedures for religious or moral reasons. The rules will take effect 30 days after their release.

The department said in a statement that it is “building upon provisions of the Bush administration rule that established an enforcement process for federal conscience laws, while rescinding the definitions and terms of the previous rule that caused confusion and could be taken as overly broad.”

At the end of his term, President George W. Bush signed an expansive executive order cutting off federal funding for organizations that deny doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals the ability to refuse providing a variety of services pertaining to contraception, fertility and end of life issues.

The debate over conscience regulations involves a range of ethical dilemmas arising from situations such as a physician’s refusal to prescribe birth control pills or a patient’s fear of discrimination because of his or her sexual orientation.

The new rule states that the now-rescinded regulation “caused significant confusion as to whether abortion also includes contraception.” Federal law does not include

contraception in a definition of abortion.

Since 1973, federal statutory law has provided an exemption for health care providers who have religious objections about providing abortion or sterilization services, and the new rule maintains those protections. HHS also called for new initiatives to clarify the complaint process for medical professionals who feel coerced or discriminated against.

HHS responded to critics who suggest rescinding the 2008 rule would prompt Roman Catholic hospitals to close, saying those medical facilities “will still have the same statutory protections afforded to them as have been for decades.”

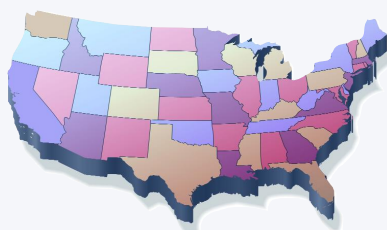
The department said definitions in the 2008 rule also created confusion about whether conscience protections permitted medical staffers to refuse treatment to entire groups of people based on moral or religious beliefs.

“They were never intended to allow providers to refuse to provide medical care to an individual because the individual engaged in behavior the health care provider found objectionable,” says the new regulation.

“The rights of conscience are important, but they must be balanced with the ability of patients to get the services they need,” said Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director J. Brent Walker.

HHS received more than 300,000 comments about the 2008 rule, with more than half of them opposing the department’s plans to eliminate it.

—Religion News Service & Staff Reports



## State updates

If you have a question about a religious liberty issue in your state, the Baptist Joint Committee is a resource for you.

### Michigan: penalties for church disruptions

The senate passed a bill that would increase the penalty for disrupting a religious service. The bill does not define a disruption, but the penalty could include up to 93 days imprisonment, a fine up to \$1,000 and community service. It is already a misdemeanor to disturb religious services in the state. The sponsor told local media that freedoms of speech and assembly do not trump freedom of religion.

### Oregon: bill would end faith healing protections

A bill would remove special legal protection for parents who treat seriously ill children with faith healing instead of providing medical treatment. It would remove spiritual treatment as a defense, and it would

subject parents to mandatory sentencing. The measure is a response to an Oregon City church with a history of children dying from treatable medical conditions.

### Utah: lawmaker shelves religious bill

A state representative is shelving the “Religious Liberty Recognition and Protection Act,” which would make exercising religious beliefs a “valid defense to claims of discrimination.” The bill could have undermined ordinances that ban discrimination. He said the issue was too important to be rushed. The bill could come back in next year’s session.

—Cherilyn Crowe

# REFLECTIONS

## Preventing religion from becoming lethal

The continuing-to-unfold events in the Middle East provide an occasion to think about the relationship between religion and politics among the three Abrahamic faiths: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Although religion has not been front and center in the democracy movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Libya, it lurks in the background and, for many, motivates what might look like a purely secular uprising. Of course, the recent bombing of the Coptic Christian church in Alexandria, Egypt, and the assassination of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab in Pakistan, are stark reminders of the dangers presented by religious extremism and the dire consequences that emerge when religious zeal fuses with deadly civil power.

Dr. Charles Kimball, in his now classic work "When Religion Becomes Evil" (published after September 11), reminds us that religion is arguably the most powerful and pervasive force on the planet and, as such, has the capacity for ghastly evil as well as great good. A Baptist minister teaching at the University of Oklahoma, Kimball expounds on what he calls five major warning signs of human corruption of religion: 1) absolute truth claims, 2) blind obedience to a charismatic leader, 3) establishing the "ideal" time, 4) end-justifies-the-means ethics, and 5) declaring holy war.

In a new book to be released in April titled "When Religion Becomes Lethal,"

Kimball examines what happens when these warning signs are not heeded and state-sponsored violence erupts in the name of religion. Kimball explores the explosive mixture of politics and religion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. He devotes several chapters to each of the three "religions of the Book," providing a quite helpful primer of their history, current configuration and relationships to one another, all in the context of the way they view the proper connection between religion and politics.

Recognizing that these three are by no means monolithic in their views on religion and politics, Kimball contends that the truth is always found between the extremes of theocracy on the one hand and rank secularism on the other. He shows convincingly that "the moderate and flexible cen-

ter of every faith tradition has helped it to survive in the face of extremism."

Kimball concludes with the optimistic expectation that violence in the name of religion is not inevitable. Kimball outlines how the "children of Abraham" have much in common — theologically, politically and practically — and, with education and dialogue, the dynamic, work-in-progress relationships among the groups can have a happy outcome. The widely-reported conjoiner of Coptic Christians and Muslims in Cairo's Tahrir Square is an encouraging example of this cooperation.

While acknowledging the many shortcomings in the way we in this country balance the relationship between church and state, Kimball suggests that "the United States offers the most helpful and constructive model for negotiating the explosive mix of politics and religion today." He calls for civility in the rough-and-tumble debate of our vital democracy and affirms the neutrality of government in matters of religion as indispensable to the solution.

I agree. The United States is one of the most religious and most religiously diverse nations on the face of the earth. Despite our religious passion and pluralism, we — for the most part — have been able to avoid the religious conflicts that have punctuated history and continue to plague most of the world today. Our commit-

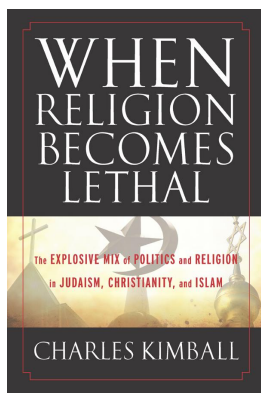
ment to religious freedom implies a responsibility to respect the religious liberty of others and to provide an example to other nations. We should model a generous attitude of religious freedom for all and zero tolerance for violence in the name of religion. This commitment requires us — Christian, Jewish and Muslim Americans alike — to stand up against extremism and call out the miscreants in our own faith traditions.

The vast majority of the world's religions — including these three that account for more than half of the earth's population — are historically and essentially rooted in teachings associated with love and respect for our common humanity. And, out of this "moderate and flexible center," we must vow to find a common ground and a peaceful outcome for all of us.



J. Brent Walker  
Executive Director

"We should model a generous attitude of religious freedom for all and zero tolerance for violence in the name of religion."





# American attitudes toward Muslims show support, mistrust

## New poll reveals how many perceive adherents to Islam

Americans had not heard much about the scheduled March congressional hearings on the radicalization of U.S. Muslims, yet more than half thought it was a good idea, and nearly as many believe Muslims here have not done enough to fight extremists in their midst, according to a new poll.

At the same time, 62 percent say American Muslims are an important part of the religious community, and a clear majority — 72 percent — say Congress should investigate religious extremism anywhere it exists, not just among Muslims, according to a PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll released Feb. 16.

Peter Gottschalk, co-author of “Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy,” said the findings reflect the impact of recent waves of anti-Muslim rhetoric surrounding burning the Quran and opposing the construction of mosques.

“The Muslim community has been fairly successful at demonstrating themselves as neighbors, but the question becomes are they good neighbors?” said Gottschalk, chairman of the religion department at Wesleyan University.

“There’s a double standard that Muslims are responsible for extremism by people who happen to be Muslim, but all Christians aren’t responsible for abortion clinic bombers or the KKK.”

The poll, conducted by Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with Religion News Service, was released as House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Peter King, R-N.Y., prepared to hold hearings on the threat of homegrown Islamic extremism during the week of March 7.

The poll examined attitudes toward both the hearings and American Muslims, analyzing the responses by gender, age, most trusted news

source, and religious and political affiliation.

Overall, men, viewers who trust Fox News, white evangelicals and Republicans are more likely to think the hearings are a good idea and to believe Muslims want to establish Sharia law in the United States.

Those groups are also among the most likely to say they feel “well informed” about Islam and the “religious beliefs and practices of Muslims.”

These groups are not necessarily more

knowledgeable, however — just more confident in their beliefs, researchers explained.

Researchers said a person’s preferred news source is significantly correlated to how much they worry about American Muslim extremism.

“What we’re seeing here is a significant Fox News effect,”

explained Daniel Cox, PRRI research director. “We even see differences among Republicans who trust Fox News most and those who trust other media.”

Muslim activists said the hearings — and the poll’s findings — reflect the work they still have to do to correct negative messages about domestic Islam and counter with positive examples.

A “sober,” “objective” hearing “would be an opportunity for the Muslim community to shine, because we know the kind of actions that the community has taken (against terrorism),” said Corey Saylor, legislative director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

“But, given King’s track record, any reasonable person would have a concern about the direction he’s going to take.”

The PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll was based on telephone interviews of 1,015 U.S. adults between Feb. 11 and 13. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

—Nicole Neroulis, Religion News Service

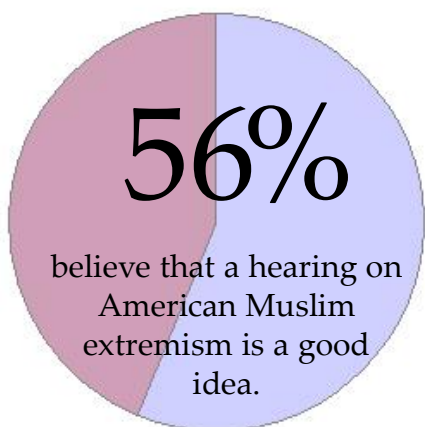
“There’s a double standard that Muslims are responsible for extremism by people who happen to be Muslim, but all Christians aren’t responsible for abortion clinic bombers or the KKK.”

—Peter Gottschalk

# What does the poll say?

The Public Religion Research Institute and Religion News Service examined Americans' attitudes toward Muslims, analyzing its results by religious affiliation, political affiliation and most trusted news source. The survey of 1,015 U.S. adults was conducted between Feb. 11 and 13.

In February, nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  had not heard anything about the hearings to investigate U.S. Muslim extremism.



46%

believe American Muslims have not done enough to oppose Muslim extremism.



6 out of every 10

believe Muslims are an important part of the American religious community. There is strong agreement on this across political and religious affiliation groups.

Respondents were split over whether they feel well informed about Islam and the beliefs and practices of Muslims.

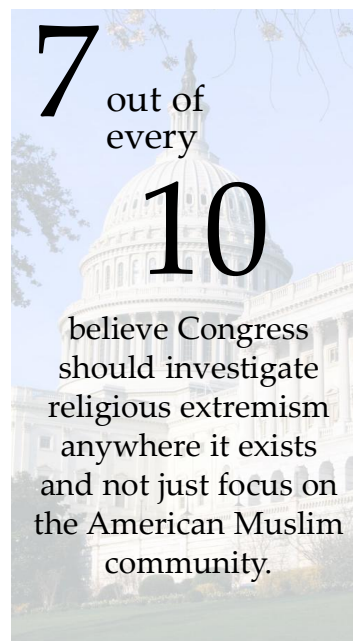
45%

say they are well informed

45%

say they are not well informed

There is **no difference** between Republicans and Democrats on how well informed they feel about Islam. However, those who most trust Fox News are much more likely than those who most trust CNN or those who most trust broadcast news to report feeling well informed.





K. Hollyn Hollman  
General Counsel

# HollmanREPORT

## Voucher debate reflects important lines to be drawn in protecting religious freedom

**“Religious teachings should be funded by voluntary contributions, not through compulsory taxation.”**

Recent congressional hearings aimed at building support for a voucher program in the District of Columbia provided a new opportunity for engaging in an old debate. The idea of publicly funded educational vouchers that can be used for tuition at private schools, including private religious schools, has been debated for decades. For good reasons, however, voucher programs remain relatively rare.

Seven years ago Congress established what became known as the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, the first federally funded, private school voucher program in the United

States. The five-year pilot program provided a voucher of up to \$7,500 for about 1,000 of the District’s more than 45,000 public school students per year. Most of the participating private schools were religious schools. Evaluations of the program from the federal government’s non-partisan General Accounting Office and

a congressionally mandated evaluation by a private entity found various problems and little evidence of improved education. Specifically, the studies found that the participants did not come from the schools that were most in need of improvement, many schools that accepted voucher students did not meet accreditation and other quality education standards, and student achievement did not show statistically significant improvement. While the program was phased out in 2008, new efforts are underway to reauthorize and expand the program.

The BJC has long opposed vouchers. While we affirm the right of parents to choose a religious education for their children, we oppose using public funds to support religion. Religious teachings should be funded by voluntary contributions, not through compulsory taxation. Voucher programs that provide tuition to religious schools violate the freedom of conscience of taxpayers who have the right to insist that the government remain neutral in matters of religion. In addition, government funding of religious education tends to jeopardize the autonomy of religious schools, bringing regulations or political pressures that threaten the schools’ religious character.

While the U.S. Supreme Court narrowly

upheld a Cleveland, Ohio, voucher program against a federal constitutional challenge in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), the Court did not say that such programs were required or recommended. Voucher proponents continue to face major hurdles because many state constitutional provisions provide greater protection against public funding of religious institutions. In addition, in most places, public opinion opposes vouchers. Whether couched in constitutional or public policy terms, the church-state concerns raised by voucher programs remain a considerable factor in voucher debates. Religious liberty requires both protecting the right of individuals to pursue a religious education and keeping the government from advancing religion. As in many religious liberty debates, some advocates fail to distinguish between an individual’s right to freely exercise religion and the government’s responsibility not to advance it.

During a recent hearing, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., a long-time voucher proponent, skated right over the difference between a family’s choice to send its child to a religious school and the taxpayer expectation that public money will not be used to advance religion. In response to one witness, he said, “What if instead of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program being funded by tax dollars, some wealthy individual came forward, created a foundation and then created this opportunity scholarship program? I think everybody would embrace it. So what’s the difference that we’re putting public money into this?”

The difference is vast. While there are many ways to reform public education, none of them require or should permit using taxpayer funds for religious education. In recent years, voucher proponents have sharpened their tactics and tailored some proposals to address criticisms. For example, the D.C. program under consideration in Congress couples tuition vouchers with additional funding for public schools. Voucher advocates have done little, however, to allay religious liberty concerns or to demonstrate that vouchers are the answer to the public school problems they purport to address.



## Obama renominates religious freedom ambassador

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has resubmitted for Senate approval his choice for a new ambassador at large for religious freedom, the White House announced Feb. 7.

Obama first nominated Suzan Johnson Cook, an American Baptist minister who worked as a domestic policy adviser during the Clinton administration, to the post last June. That nomination expired in December.

The ambassador at large position, created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act to monitor violations of religious freedom abroad and to recommend appropriate responses by the United States, has been vacant since Obama took office. The president has been criticized for not filling the post.

Cook's nomination appeared to be on track last year, needing only the approval of a majority in the Senate. A senator's use of a parliamentary maneuver postponed a vote until after the congressional session ended in December, and the nomination expired.

—Bob Allen, *Associated Baptist Press*



Cook

## Supreme Court rejects Ten Commandments case

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Feb. 22 chose not to revisit its decision to strike down displays of the Ten Commandments in two Kentucky courthouses.

The high court ruled in 2005 that the Ten Commandments displays outside two county courthouses violated the Constitution's First Amendment. After that ruling, the counties unsuccessfully attempted to revise and repurpose the displays as secular.

—Richard Yeakley, *Religion News Service*

## Mark your calendars for the annual RLC Luncheon

Celebrate the BJC's 75th anniversary at this year's Religious Liberty Council Luncheon at 11:30 a.m. on June 24 in Tampa, Fla. James Dunn, former BJC Executive Director, will deliver the keynote address and receive the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award.

The luncheon is held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly. Tickets soon will be available for purchase online. Get the latest information online at [www.BJOnline.org/luncheon](http://www.BJOnline.org/luncheon).



Scan this QR code on your smartphone or visit [BJOnline.org/luncheon](http://BJOnline.org/luncheon) to watch video of last year's keynote address.

## Obama names new advisers to council on faith-based programs

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has named new members to his advisory council on faith-based programs, but the list of appointments is also drawing questions about a lack of diversity from minority faiths.

The list of 15 names released Feb. 4 for the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships has no prominent Muslim or Hindu leaders.

The White House would not comment on the diversity of the panel but said the list will be expanded later with 10 additional names.

"We look forward to announcing the additional members at a later date, at which point the 25 members will begin the process of producing recommendations to improve the government's partnerships with faith-based and other nonprofit organizations," said White House spokesman Shin Inouye.

The new panel members include four denominational heads — Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church; Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Greek Orthodox Archbishop Demetrios; and the Rev. Nancy Wilson, moderator of the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Churches.

Evangelical leaders include Lynne Hybels, co-founder with her husband Bill of Willow Creek Community Church, and Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. Anderson is senior pastor of Wooddale Church in Edenton, Minn., an interdenominational evangelical church with ties to the Baptist General Conference.

Jewish officials include Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative rabbis, and Susan Stern, special adviser on government affairs to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Other appointees include: Andrea Bazan, president of Triangle Community Foundation in North Carolina; Angela Glover Blackwell, founder of PolicyLink, a California-based nonprofit that seeks economic equity; Brian Gallagher, president of the United Way Worldwide; and Sister Marlene Weisenbeck, an officer of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The first Council worked with task forces to make recommendations to improve the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. That group completed its work last March. Obama signed an executive order in November that reflects some of the first group's recommendations for reforming the office.

BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker, who served on the task force on reform of the office, hopes the new Council will continue the work started by the first group.

"Last year we were able to make significant progress, especially in our recommendations on reforming the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, most of which the president incorporated into his recent executive order," Walker said. "I trust this advisory council will build on that good work as it carries its projects forward."

— *Religion News Service, Associated Baptist Press & Staff Reports*



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- ☐ National Missionary Baptist Convention
- ☐ North American Baptist Conference
- ☐ Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- ☐ Religious Liberty Council
- ☐ Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

## REPORT

from the Capital

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Report from the Capital (ISSN-0346-0661) is published 10 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee. For subscription information, please contact the Baptist Joint Committee.

## Topics announced for 2011 Shurden Lectures

Make your plans now to attend the 2011 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State. The lectures are April 4-5 at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Ky.

Melissa Rogers, the director of Wake Forest University Divinity School's Center for Religion and Public Affairs and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, is the speaker. Rogers is a former BJC General Counsel and served as the first chair of President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.



Rogers

Rogers will deliver three lectures in the John L. Hill Chapel on campus:

- ◆ Monday, April 4 at 4 p.m.:  
**Keeping Faith Free: Religious Expression in American Public Life**
- ◆ Tuesday, April 5 at 11 a.m.:  
**A Christian and American Case for Defending Muslims' Free Exercise Rights**

- ◆ Tuesday, April 5 at 4 p.m.:  
**Continuity and Change: Faith-Based Partnerships under Presidents Bush and Obama**

Georgetown College was the first Baptist college founded west of the Allegheny mountains. You can learn more about it

at [www.GeorgetownCollege.edu](http://www.GeorgetownCollege.edu).

The college is in downtown Georgetown, Ky., 12 miles north of Lexington, Ky., and about 70 miles from Louisville, Ky., and Cincinnati, Ohio. For more information about the town, including attractions and lodging, visit [www.GeorgetownKY.com](http://www.GeorgetownKY.com).

In 2004, Walter and Kay Shurden made a gift to the Baptist Joint Committee to establish the annual lectureship. Designed to enhance the ministry and programs of the Baptist Joint Committee, the lectures will be held at Mercer University every three years and at another seminary, college or university the other years. For more information, visit [www.BJCOnline.org/lectures](http://www.BJCOnline.org/lectures).

