



REPORT from the Capital

Former BJC General Counsel named head of White House faith-based office

WASHINGTON — The White House announced March 13 that Melissa Rogers, former general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, has been named the director of the administration's faith-based office.

Rogers will lead the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, an office first opened by President George W. Bush in 2001 and continued under President Barack Obama. A focus of the office under both administrations has been encouraging partnerships between public and private entities to help meet the nation's social service needs.

A 2010 executive order issued by Obama addressed many of the church-state separation concerns voiced by critics of the Office. It amended prior federal policy by clarifying the government's responsibility to ensure that partnerships are on secure legal grounds and do not violate the First Amendment's ban on government promotion of religion. It incorporated many of the recommendations made by a task force Rogers led that was charged with reforming the office. That task force was composed of a group of religious and community leaders, including BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker.

Walker lauded Rogers' selection.

"I am so happy for Melissa, and proud of her, too," Walker said. "Her leadership in the church-state field — as the BJC's general counsel and as chair of the task force charged with reforming the office — has made her the perfect choice to fill this important position in the Obama administration.

"Melissa possesses a keen understanding of the First Amendment's religion clauses and is sensitive to practical issues of their application," Walker said.

BJC General Counsel K. Hollyn Hollman, who succeeded Rogers, said she looks forward to Rogers' leadership in the White House office.

"Since the opening of the faith-based office, the Baptist Joint Committee's focus has been safeguarding the standards that

make private-public partnerships successful and consistent with constitutional standards that protect the religious liberty of individuals and social service providers," Hollman said. "As a proven leader and expert on church-state law, Melissa is the most knowledgeable and capable person I can imagine to lead at this time.

"I am hopeful she will be able to provide leadership throughout the implementation of the Obama administration reforms as well as offer thoughtful consideration for any additional reforms," Hollman said.

Rogers has served as director of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity Center for Religion and Public Affairs and as a non-resident senior fellow at The Brookings Institution. She also teaches courses on church-state relations and Christianity and public policy within the divinity school. Rogers previously served as the executive director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in Washington, D.C. She has co-authored a case book on religion and law for Baylor University Press, *Religious Freedom and the Supreme Court*. During her tenure as BJC General Counsel from 1999 to 2000, Rogers helped lead a diverse coalition that was instrumental in bringing about the enactment of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000.

Rogers earned her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, where she was a member of the National Moot Court Team and a Legal Writing Instructor. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Baylor University.

Rogers succeeds Joshua DuBois, who stepped down from the office in February to teach, write a book and launch an organization.



Rogers

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—Jeff Huett

House passes church funding bill

BJC says FEMA grants would harm religious liberty

The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill Feb. 13 to allow houses of worship damaged by Hurricane Sandy to receive disaster aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, despite warnings by advocacy groups that the measure flouts the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state.

House members voted 354-72 for HR 592, the Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act of 2013. The bill, co-authored by Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., and Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., has been referred to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty was among groups asking Members of Congress to think twice before passing legislation that could have serious consequences for religious liberty.

"The First Amendment's Establishment Clause prohibits government from providing outright grants or similar financial support to churches and other houses of worship," the BJC said in a letter to Members of Congress.

The letter said the Supreme Court has clearly stated that direct monetary contributions of taxpayer dollars to religious institutions create "special Establishment Clause dangers."

"Simply put, we do not allow taxpayer dollars to build churches," it said. "We likewise should not allow taxpayer dollars to be used to rebuild churches."

The Baptist Joint Committee said the damage wrought by Superstorm Sandy in the Northeast United States presents an instance where "moral and humanitarian instincts" may seem at odds with the Constitution's ban on the establishment of religion.

"Happily, we have ways to empathize with and provide aid to churches and other religious organizations damaged by the terrible storm," the letter said. "Repairs may be

Natural disasters and other times of crisis serve as a call to action for citizens of faith.

When we answer that call using voluntary, private donations, we reflect the very best of America's longstanding commitment to religious liberty for all.

—BJC letter to Members of Congress

financed by denominational efforts, private foundation grants and contributions of the faithful.

"Additionally, insurance proceeds are available for rebuilding efforts, and churches and houses of worship may be eligible to obtain low-interest, long-term loans under the Small Business Administration disaster loan program for damages not covered by insurance."

In its letter, the BJC said when we, as citizens of faith, respond to a natural disaster "using voluntary, private donations, we reflect the very best of America's longstanding commitment to religious liberty for all."

"Public funding of houses of worship threatens to undermine religious autonomy and impermissibly involve government in the private affairs of religious bodies," the letter said. "It is simply not a good idea — however our heart-strings are tugged — to give churches access to the public till."

Other groups opposing the measure included Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the American Civil Liberties Union. Supporters include the American Jewish Committee, Family Research Council, National Association of Evangelicals and U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops.

During floor debate, Rep. Smith said current law discriminates against houses of worship by denying them access to funds that are available to other nonprofit organizations, such as museums, performing arts centers and zoos.

"It's unconscionable that foundational pillars of our communities damaged by Sandy — synagogues, churches, mosques, temples and other houses of worship — have been categorically denied access to these otherwise generally available relief funds," Smith said.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said the bill's purpose is laudable, but there are "real constitutional problems" in its passage.

"This bill would provide direct cash grants to rebuild houses of worship," Nadler said. "Direct government funding of churches, synagogues and mosques has always been held to be unconstitutional, and the decisions of the Supreme Court establishing that principle remain good law to this day."

Nadler also complained that the bill was not considered in a committee and rushed to the floor in just a few days. "One would think that we were naming a post office rather than passing legislation with significant constitutional implications that could alter the relationship between government and religion," he said.

—Bob Allen, Associated Baptist Press
and BJC Staff Reports

GUEST VIEW

Reclaiming religious liberty for my family

Growing up as a Native American in the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe of Eastern Oklahoma offers an interesting perspective on issues regarding religious liberty. While raised in the middle-class suburbs of Tulsa, the heritage and culture of the Creek people offered me roots for nourishment and valuable lessons for life. One such lesson came from hearing the heartbreaking story of my Creek relatives. Their story poured the foundation for my strong support for religious liberty and church-state separation.

Eloise Boudinot, my great-grandmother and full-blood Creek, felt the stinging bite of state-sponsored religion. As a young girl, she and her sister, Ruby, were residents at the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School near Oklahoma's border with Kansas. At the hands of Christian missionaries and under the oversight of government employees, these young girls were forced to practice a religion they did not know nor understand.

One cannot help but be influenced by such family experiences. The story of my great-grandmother and her sister teaches me the importance of religious liberty and keeping church and state separate. In their case, the egregious behavior by the United States government and Christian missionaries represents the importance of adhering to the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The first violation of religious liberty came at the hands of the Chilocco Christian missionaries. They cut the young girls' long black hair into a more appropriate "Christian" style. For many Native Americans, long hair remains a sacred symbol. Next, the girls were often whipped simply for speaking the Creek language. English was the only acceptable communication for good Christian children. Finally, they were forced to attend weekly church services. If they missed without pre-approval, they were whipped for their absence. All of this took place under the watchful eye of the federal government and at the hands of Christian missionaries.

The First Amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; ..." When state-sponsored institutions enact religious boundaries upon innocent citizens, then the First Amendment has been breached. When citizens are forced to follow another religion against their own culture, even unknowingly as was the case with my great-grandmother and her sister, then the state stands in violation of the Free Exercise Clause.

Abuses against the establishment and free exercise clauses have lasting repercussions. When the wall separating the church and state is breached, all involved parties suffer greatly from those infractions. When young children are involved, it becomes even more egregious. Because of the experiences she endured at the hands of Christian missionaries, my great-grandmother rejected the church.

Roger Williams, the great 17th century champion of religious liberty, often wrote about the wilderness of the world intruding upon the Edenic garden of the church. John Barry, writing about Williams in *Roger Williams and The Creation of the American Soul*, offered these thoughts:

Government was comprised of people in the world. He [Williams] recoiled at the idea of allowing this worldly wilderness to intrude upon the Edenic garden of the church, and he was convinced that any breach of the wall between them — any involvement either of a magistrate on churchly things or of the church in government — would bring the wilderness into the garden. (p. 330)

For my great-grandmother, the garden of the church was not only intruded upon by the wilderness of the world, it was infested with snakes. Each time I hear of situations when religion is used as tool for indoctrinating children with the help of government endorsements, I cannot help but think about the two young Native American girls in Oklahoma years ago. No matter how good the intentions are by those thinking they are doing the Lord's work, violating one's rights tramples the Constitution, deludes the meaning of the Gospel and causes harm to both the afflicted and the agitator.

Both the church and government are better off when left to their separate objectives. One has the objective of being the presence of Christ to the world, while the latter makes certain every citizen has the right to embrace or reject religion under the guidance of individual conscience. May we learn from the mistakes of our past in order that no child or citizen feels the stinging bites of snakes in the garden. Let our citizens and the church always remain free.

Dr. R. Mitch Randall is pastor of NorthHaven Church in Norman, Okla. He was elected chair of the BJC Board of Directors in October 2011.



Mitch Randall
BJC Board Chair

"The story of my great-grandmother and her sister teaches me the importance of religious liberty and keeping church and state separate."

Bill in North Carolina Senate would permit elective Bible classes in public high schools

Public high schools in North Carolina could offer elective Bible classes if a bill introduced in the state Senate Feb. 26 is adopted by the General Assembly.

The bill by state Sen. Stan Bingham of Denton, N.C., would permit boards of education to authorize courses on the Old or New Testaments, or both, for 9th to 12th grade students.

Teachers would be required to “follow federal and state law in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views, traditions, and perspectives of the students” and “not endorse, favor or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward any particular religion, nonreligious faith, or religious perspective.”

Sixteen other senators have agreed to co-sponsor the proposal. K. Hollyn Hollman, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, said conducting Bible classes in public schools can be done “within constitutional parameters that prohibit schools from advancing religion” but added it can be difficult.

“The legislature, and any schools that offer the courses, need to think through and clearly articulate the reasons for such courses and how they will be conducted,” she said. “The classes should be designed for legitimate educational purposes, such as teaching about the Bible’s literary value or influence in history, as opposed to for devotional purposes.”

Texas public schools encountered those challenges when the

state legislature adopted similar legislation in 2007. Though Texas law mandates neutrality in teaching Bible courses, a study this year by the Texas Freedom Network claimed many school districts largely ignored that requirement — and enforcement has been spotty.

The Texas Freedom Network, a religious liberty advocacy group, found that instruction often presented a conservative Protestant perspective, including a literal interpretation of the Bible, and that Judaism was interpreted “through a distinctly Christian lens.”

The group also found many Bible classes maintained “that the Bible provides scientific proof of a 6,000-year-old Earth...and that the United States was founded as a Christian nation based on biblical Christian principles.”

Last year public schools in Buncombe County, N.C., — which includes Asheville — grappled with issues related to religion in the classroom, after some parents protested when Gideon Bibles were distributed to students on campus during school hours.

In December, the county’s board of education reviewed a new regulation, not yet adopted, that would require each school to set aside one day a year on which religious and non-religious organizations would “make available written materials” at an event held after school hours, according to the *Asheville Citizen-Times*.

—Robert Dilday, *The Religious Herald*



From the BJC’s *Blog from the Capital*

More state legislatures considering religion



BY BJC BLOGGER DON BYRD

So many religion-themed bills are being proposed and advanced in state legislatures these days, it’s hard to keep up.

In **Texas**, a resolution was introduced Feb. 25 that says the legislature “support(s) prayers, including the use of the word ‘God,’ at public gatherings as well as displays of the Ten Commandments in public educational institutions and other government buildings.”

In **North Carolina**, meanwhile, a bill would add a Bible study elective to the public school curriculum (see the story at the top of this page). The bill, as written, only names the Bible as an option.

In late February, I [Don Byrd] posted about proposed legislation in Kentucky that would raise the standard of scrutiny on state action that burdens religious exercise. The version that came out of committee required a “compelling government interest” for **any** burden on religious exercise. After an amendment, however, the version that passed the House and Senate was amended to add one important word to the legislation: “substantial.” That change means the bill that was sent to the governor would require that highest level of judicial scrutiny only for “substantial burdens” on religious exercise.

Tennessee is considering legislation that would allow student religious

organizations to discriminate in membership. So is **Virginia**, where a constitutional amendment about religion in schools is also making its way through the legislative process.

Oklahoma is pondering a student academic freedom bill that is all about religion but dares not mention the name. The one in **Missouri** is more direct about its interest in creationism (and probably has worse prospects for passage as a result).

A version of this story appeared on Blog from the Capital. Keep up with the blog online at BJCOnline.org/blog or BJCmobile.org/category/blog. You can contact Don at Don.Byrd@comcast.net.

BJC joins coalition supporting ban on religious discrimination in Violence Against Women Act

WASHINGTON — A key provision in the new Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) prevents religious discrimination with taxpayer dollars, but its inclusion was not a foregone conclusion during the legislative battle to reauthorize the bill. The Baptist Joint Committee joined a broad coalition in contacting Members of Congress when one proposed version did not include that provision.

The version of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2012 passed by the U.S. Senate this year contained the important nondiscrimination clause, which prevents federally funded religious discrimination with the government grants the legislation provides to various organizations. However, a substi-

tute version of the bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives did not contain the same protections. The BJC joined 59 other groups in sending a letter to each Member of the House alerting them to this discrepancy and expressing opposition to the removal of the protections.

"In our view, effective government collaboration with faith-based groups does not require the sanctioning of federally funded religious discrimination," the letter said.

The letter pointed out that "religious organizations may prefer co-religionists in hiring when using their own private funds," but it objected to allowing organizations to use government money to hire

based on religion.

The substitute version of the bill failed in the House, and lawmakers passed the Senate version, which includes the protection, with a 286 to 138 vote. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law March 7.

Other groups signing the letter included American Jewish Committee, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Anti-Defamation League, Interfaith Alliance, NAACP, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Texas Freedom Network, The Sikh Coalition, Union for Reform Judaism and United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society.

—Cherilyn Crowe

Scholars seek to reclaim a dirty word: 'secularism'

A February conference at Georgetown University in Washington focused on cleaning up what many Americans consider a dirty word — secularism.

The goal of the conference, called "Secularism on the Edge," was, in part, to define what secularism is and what it is not. It drew participants from France, Israel and the United States — all countries with strong secular and religious strains.

"(Secularism) is a guarantee of two things: freedom of religion and freedom from religion," said Jacques Berlinerblau, a Georgetown professor, conference organizer, and author of *How to be Secular*.

"In a perfect world, it balances the citizen's need of those two fundamental rights."

Secularism is not, Berlinerblau continued, a synonym for godlessness or atheism or any other form of anti-religiousness. Secularism is interested in maintaining government's disinterest in religion, he said.

How successful the United States has been at separating religion and government was the subject of the first session, an interview conducted by Berlinerblau of John Fea, a professor of American history at Messiah College and author of *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*

Berlinerblau showed a film clip of John F. Kennedy's famous 1960 speech before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in which he proclaimed that his belief that "the separation of church and state is absolute" and that presidents' religious views should be private.

Berlinerblau then showed a clip of President Barack

Obama speaking at an Easter prayer breakfast about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. Berlinerblau looked at Fea and asked, "Are these presidents of the same country?"

How the United States went from Kennedy to Obama in less than 50 years formed the bulk of the interview, with discussions of the rise of the religious right in the 1970s and how secularists — who can be both religious and nonreligious — failed to respond.

Other sessions at the conference explored secularism in France, where there has been conflict over how much the government can regulate Islamic dress in public spheres, and in Israel, a secular state where religious groups, particularly ultra-Orthodox Jews, wield heavy influence. There was also a focus on American "nones," those who claim no religious affiliation and whose ranks have grown to 19 percent.

"I think we should have had this conference 25 years ago," Berlinerblau said. "What happened then is that secularism had its butt handed to it by the Christian right, Islamists around the world and the ultra-Orthodox Jews. Secularism was sleeping."

Fea, an evangelical Christian, and Berlinerblau, an atheist, found that they agreed more than they disagreed. Both argue that the Founding Fathers were "to a man," in Fea's estimation, religious believers — but not necessarily Christians. Some, like Jefferson, were deists.

And both agreed that religion and government should not mix.

—Kimberly Winston, Religion News Service



Berlinerblau

RNS photo by Jay Premack



K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

HollmanREPORT

Protecting religious freedom in schools

"In some cases, well-meaning Christians simply do not understand how the Establishment Clause works to protect religious freedom."

This year marks 50 years since the U.S. Supreme Court decided *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* (1963), one of the "school prayer" cases that held that a state law requiring daily Bible readings in public schools is unconstitutional under the Establishment Clause, as applied to the states. Along with *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), a case decided the year before that struck state-written prayers recited each morning, the *Schempp* decision explained the way the Establishment Clause operates to ensure religious liberty differently than the Free Exercise Clause. A violation of the Establishment Clause does not depend on a showing that government forced religious practice. Instead, the Court recognized: "When the power, prestige and financial support of government is placed behind a particular religious belief, the indirect coercive pressure upon religious minorities to conform to the prevailing officially approved religion is plain." Government should avoid even the symbolic union with religion.

While the rule in *Schempp* and other constitutional principles governing religion in the public schools are firmly settled, there is always a steady stream of controversies over religion in the public schools. It makes for lively discussion, as I recently experienced while serving on a panel about religion in the public schools at the American Bar Association mid-year meeting in Dallas, Texas. The session was sponsored by the State and Local Government Law Section of the ABA and organized by an attorney with decades of experience representing government. It was another effort to expand understanding of the religion clauses in a highly sensitive setting. Other panelists included a public university attorney and a litigator who represents school districts and officials in Texas, each of whom brought substantial experience to the discussion.

There is no doubt that many difficult situations are avoided by having the right policies in place and good relationships between school administrators, students, parents and the community. After all, there is plenty of room for religious speech in public schools, firmly protected under current law. Students may pray silently during the school day or aloud with others during non-instructional time. Student religious clubs must be permitted to meet on the same terms as similar non-religious clubs. So, why are there so many conflicts? Sometimes it is a lack of education. But, during the course of our discussion, several attorneys spoke with firsthand knowledge of the challenges that are often more cultural than legal, when an issue arises about prayer at

school events or the treatment of religion in the curriculum.

In some cases, well-meaning Christians simply do not understand how the Establishment Clause works to protect religious freedom. Unfortunately, many times battle lines are drawn quickly and harshly, with those who want to share their faith claiming to be victims of hostility, even in communities where their beliefs dominate. In a small Texas town, for example, cheerleaders and their parents sued their public school last fall because the superintendent, responding to a complaint and relying on the advice of counsel, would no longer permit them to display banners with Scripture verses that players run through before games. It should not have been a surprise that someone would question the practice in light of the Supreme Court's decision in *Santa Fe vs. Doe* (2000), which held that student prayers broadcast on the school public address system at football games was unconstitutional. The cheerleaders, clad in school uniforms and taking center stage on school property during a school-sponsored event, displayed religious messages to the crowds.

The cheerleaders, however, argue the school's decisions violate their constitutional rights to free speech and free exercise of religion. A state judge awarded the cheerleaders an injunction, allowing them to continue the practice temporarily, and set a trial date in June. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott weighed in, expressing his opinion that the banners were permissible because the school "neither made the decision to include a religious message on the cheerleaders' banner, nor provided any direction as to the content of the cheerleaders' message." The governor also chimed in to support the cheerleaders, raising the stakes and making it harder to work out a solution.

Despite wide agreement that public schools have a responsibility to avoid government sponsorship of religion and protect the religious liberty of their students, it seems difficult for some communities to avoid using the machinery of the public schools to promote religion. There are better alternatives. When the same issue arose in Georgia a few years ago, the community learned about the rights of students and responsibilities of the school. Instead of suing the school, individuals responded by holding signs with religious messages in the stands, and others made greater efforts to communicate their faith in ways that did not speak for the school. That's a constructive solution that protects the religious liberty rights of all people.

Shurden Lectures set for April 9-10

The 2013 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State are April 9-10 on the campus of Stetson University in DeLand, Fla. BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker will deliver three presentations over the course of two days, centered around the theme: **Religious Liberty and Church-State Separation: "Oh, What a Touchy Subject!"**



Walker

APRIL 9

5 p.m. First Principles: God-given, but government protected

APRIL 10

3 p.m. First Freedoms: Accommodate religion, but don't advance it

5 p.m. Religion and Politics: How did we do in 2012?

The lectures are free and open to the public. All three will be in the Stetson Room in the Carlton Union Building on the campus of Stetson University. No registration is necessary. Visit BJCOnline.org/lectures for more information or contact Jeff Huett at jhuett@BJCOnline.org.

Walker to speak at 2013 ABC/USA Biennial dinner in Kansas

Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, is the speaker for the 2013 ABC/USA Biennial dinner of the Roger Williams Fellowship. The event will be held from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on June 22 during the 2013 ABC/USA Biennial and Mission Summit in Overland Park, Kan. Tickets for the meal will be \$37, payable in advance through the official registration process. To make your reservations, please visit www.americanbaptists2013.com and click on "Register" at the top of the site. Seating is limited.

Walker's address is titled "Directing Traffic at the Intersection of Church and State: A Report from the Nation's Capital." He will bring a message about the importance of religious liberty and church-state separation to Baptists in history and talk about current church-state issues. All Baptists and others who value religious liberty and separation between church and state are invited to attend this important dinner event.

The Roger Williams Fellowship is a grassroots group with historic Northern Baptist roots and includes many Baptists across denominational lines and diverse theological convictions working together to further Baptist principles and our heritage of religious freedom.

Questions may be directed to Jerrod Huguenot at 802-447-2287 or jhuguenot@yahoo.com.

New York City sues Orthodox shops over dress code

The New York City Commission on Human Rights is suing ultra-Orthodox Jewish business owners in Brooklyn because they posted signs calling on customers to dress modestly in their stores.

The commission said the owners, whose businesses are located in an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood, violated human rights law with signs that read: "No shorts, no barefoot, no sleeveless, no low-cut neckline allowed in this store."

Ultra-Orthodox Jews practice a strict form of Judaism; men, women and older children are expected to wear clothes that cover their arms, legs and necklines.

Clifford Mulqueen, deputy commissioner and general counsel to the Human Rights Commission, told the *Haaretz* newspaper in Israel that the signs "are pretty specific to women. It seems pretty clear that it's geared toward women dressing modestly if they choose to come into the store, and that would be discrimination."

The seven business owners deny the charges.

Marc Stern, associate general counsel at the American Jewish Committee, told Religion News Service that the commission's suit appears to unfairly single out Hasidic Jews.

"It's at least perplexing and maybe worse that the only type of code that the commission has challenged are those that seem to have a religious basis, even though they're gender neutral."

Devora Allon, the attorney representing the businessmen, said that "no customer has ever been denied service at the stores on the basis of how he or she dressed."

—Michele Chabin, *Religion News Service*

Canada names minister for religious freedom

TORONTO — After nearly two years of delay, Canada named its ambassador for the Office of Religious Freedom.

At a mosque north of Toronto on Feb. 19, Prime Minister Stephen Harper named Andrew Bennett to head the office.

"Around the world, violations of religious freedom are widespread and they are increasing," Harper said in a speech at the Ahmadiyya Muslim community center and mosque in Vaughan, Ontario.

Bennett, a Catholic, is dean of Augustine College, a Christian liberal arts college in Ottawa.

Harper first promised to create an Office of Religious Freedom during his 2011 campaign. Creating and staffing the office has not been without controversy. Bennett was reportedly the third, possibly fourth, person to be offered the post.

In 2011, a closed-door meeting organized by the government was criticized by some scholars because four of the six consultants were Christian, while the other two were Jewish and Baha'i.

Critics have said the office is a misguided attempt to inject religion into foreign policy. Some have expressed concern that it would be biased toward attention to the persecution of Christians.

—Ron Csillag, *Religion News Service*



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REPORT

from the Capital

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Tickets for Religious Liberty Council Luncheon go on sale April 1

NEW CBF EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR TO SPEAK, RECEIVE AWARD

Make plans to join friends of religious liberty and the Baptist Joint Committee at this year's Religious Liberty Council Luncheon, to be held June 28 in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly. Tickets for the event will be on sale beginning April 1.

Religious Liberty Council Luncheon
Friday, June 28
11:30 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.
Sheraton Greensboro at Four Seasons
Imperial Ballroom D
Greensboro, N.C.

This year's speaker is Suzii Paynter, the newly elected executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Before serving in her role at CBF, Paynter was the director of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and of the BGCT's Advocacy and Care Center. She has led efforts to address a variety of public policy areas, including hunger, child and maternal nutrition, ending human trafficking, life issues, juvenile justice, foster care, immigration and education. In that role, she was an

active member of interfaith efforts to affect legislation and policy, and she has been an advocate for religious liberty issues, literacy and early intervention for high-risk children.



Paynter

At this year's event, Paynter will receive the BJC's highest honor — the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award — for her work defending our first freedom.

If you cannot make it to Greensboro, you can still be part of the luncheon. You can sponsor a table in honor of your church or favorite college or seminary and encourage others to attend. Or, you can purchase a ticket that we will give to a seminary student who would be unable to attend otherwise.

Starting April 1, tickets can be purchased at BJCOnline.org/luncheon or by calling 202-544-4226. For more information, contact Taryn Deaton at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org.