

Theocracy Alert

Theocratizing FEMA and pregnancy

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October 17, 2005—In the aftermath of hurricane Frances' strike on Florida in 2004, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) used relief funds to [buy votes](#) for George W. Bush. But the administration's use of FEMA to advance its agenda was just beginning.

In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the FEMA web site promoted donations to [Pat Robertson's "Operation Blessing"](#) as well as more than 20 other religious organizations. Sometimes FEMA simply listed the main offices of churches. But there were more theocratic machinations still to come.

As [reported](#) by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), in late September FEMA altered its policies to allow for the retroactive "reimbursement" of churches and religious groups that helped with evacuees. In her October 4 [letter](#) to the Philadelphia Inquirer, FFRF co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor made the case:

The unprecedented change in policy by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to retroactively "reimburse" churches and religious groups for helping hurricane evacuees is bad business—and worse government.

There should be no payment or reimbursement where there was no prior contractual agreement. FEMA's plan will open the floodgates for future reimbursements without government contract or public oversight.

Money is fungible. Any tax dollars given to churches for "reimbursement" can and will be used for anything—including proselytizing and prayer. Churches and denominations already get taxpayer subsidy through tax exemptions under the assumption they are charitable. But churches are uniquely exempt from filing IRS forms other charities must file, and they do not account for their finances to the public or the government.

If a church expects or accepts payment from the taxpayers, then it is no longer charitable. Once again, churches get the credit, while taxpayers get the bill.

There was no legal "prior contractual agreement." That being the case, one would think that if the federal government is going to reimburse churches and religious organization that helped, they should also reimburse other groups that helped, including gay and lesbian organizations. But it's highly unlikely anyone in the [Bush theocracy](#) is considering doing that. "Equality" and "ethics" are definitely not among the ["traditional values"](#) they advocate.

No one begrudges any of the help given to victims of Katrina and Rita, but the Bush administration's latest means of funneling federal tax money to churches and religious organizations that will, undoubtedly, use the money to advance their common theocratic agenda is repugnant to anyone who believes in the idea of separation of church and state. (It should also be of major concern to those worried about the ever-deepening budget deficit [messianic warrior](#) George W. Bush and his administration are racking up.)

Will Samaritan's Purse, the "relief" organization run by [Billy Graham](#)'s son Franklin, be receiving "reimbursements?" As an Associated Press [story](#) pointed out, "The organization has been criticized for delivering gift bags to displaced children that include Christian tracts and a stuffed lamb that plays 'Jesus Loves Me.'"

Emergency relief shouldn't be a bribe or come with a sermon. The "[about us](#)" on the Samaritan's Purse web site makes clear their "relief" is both bribe and sermon:

We are an effective means of reaching hurting people in countries around the world with food, medicine, and other assistance in the Name of Jesus Christ. *This, in turn, earns us a hearing for the Gospel*, the Good News of eternal life through Jesus Christ. . . . Our *ministry* is all about Jesus—first, last, and always. [italics mine]

That's "Jesus" according to the gospel of Franklin Graham, of course. On October 3, Graham gave a speech at a conference hosted by [Jerry Falwell](#)'s Liberty University. When talking about Katrina and New Orleans, Graham said "There's been satanic worship [there]. There's been sexual perversion. God is going to use that storm to bring revival. God has a plan. God has a purpose."

Although he didn't overtly claim Katrina was "God's wrath" against non-believers and homosexuals, Franklin Graham certainly used the idea: believe, do and live as We tell you to, or "God" will whack you again. Intimidation and fear are the *modi operandi* of religious fundamentalists and evangelicals. Not surprisingly, bigotry is the main weapon of theocrats. All the above were well represented in legislation proposed by [Indiana state Senator Patricia Miller](#) (R-Indianapolis).

Sen. Miller wields considerable power in relation to health care in Indiana. She is the chairwoman of both the Health Finance Commission and Select Joint Commission on Medicaid Oversight. She also serves on the FSSA Evaluation Committee that "studies the organizational structure of the Office of the Secretary of Family and Social Services, the state's largest agency," and the Health Care Account Advisory Board that "makes recommendations to the governor, the Budget Agency, and the General Assembly concerning the priorities for appropriation and distribution of money from the Indiana Health Care Account."

The Health Finance Commission she chairs was scheduled, on October 20, to decide whether to recommend Senator Miller's latest legislative initiative to the General Assembly. Senator Miller wanted to make it illegal for gays, lesbians and single people in Indiana to use reproductive science to assist them in having a child. Her bill defined "assisted reproduction" as "causing pregnancy by means other than sexual intercourse, including intrauterine insemination, donation of an egg, donation of an embryo, in vitro fertilization and transfer of an embryo, and sperm injection."

Sen. Miller intended to legislate much more, as the Washington Blade [reported](#):

A doctor cannot begin an assisted reproduction technology procedure that may result in a child being born until the intended parents have received a certificate of satisfactory completion of an assessment required under the bill. . . .

The required [assessment] information includes the fertility history of the parents, education and employment information, personality descriptions, verification of marital status, child care plans and criminal history checks. Description of the family lifestyle of the intended parents also is required, *including participation in faith-based or church activities*. [italics mine]

Not only would gays, lesbians and single people be automatically excluded, so would atheists, agnostics and those who choose not to participate in faith-based or church activities. One has to wonder if Miller's definition of "faith-based" activities included those associated with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Or was her intent to exclude all non-Christians?

Miller said she realized her bill would be “enormously controversial.” Aside from theocratic socio-genetic engineering, apparently Senator Miller also has a talent for understatement. And like her fellow faith-based Republicans, she also has a talent for bald-face [lying](#): “We’re not trying to stop people from having kids; we’re just trying to find some guidelines,” said Senator Miller.

A day or so after her proposed legislation drew media attention—and what GOP spokeswoman Jamie Jorczak called “a firestorm” of criticism—Senator Miller withdrew the bill. Her one-line explanation read, “The issue has become more complex than anticipated and will be withdrawn from consideration by the Health Finance Commission.”

Senator Miller, your “issue” and the point of your proposed legislation were always clear and quite simple: legalize theocratic bigotry, homophobia and unprecedented government intrusion into the most private area of Americans’ lives.

If you’re so concerned about children and their well-being, senator, why aren’t you and other sanctimonious Republicans—as well as so-called “pro-family” lobbying groups such as James Dobson’s Focus on the Family and Louis Sheldon’s Traditional Values Coalition—campaigning for programs and legislation that would provide social and legal recognition, economic security and health care benefits to the 8 to 10 million children currently being reared in families headed by same-sex parents? Or perhaps your “concern” and their “pro-family” claims are nothing more than steaming bovine-produced fertilizer.

Miller’s “1984” proposal is dead for now, but as Matthew Tully [reported](#) in The Indianapolis Star, “Miller has not ruled out resurrecting the idea when the General Assembly meets in January.”