

one more

From: Burns Strider

RELEASE IN PART
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To: Clinton Hillary hdr22@clintonemail.com

Subject: one more

Last email (for a while, I promise!)... I'm just so fascinated and captivated by the Intl. Religious Freedom office... I'm resending the memo I sent you on Dec. 29 simply as a reminder of some of my earlier findings and take on this office...

TO: SENATOR CLINTON
FROM: Burns Strider
DATE: Monday, December 29, 2008

RE: Findings Concerning the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom

I've had the opportunity to briefly study the basic structure of the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) and hear from several who have worked at IRF or have had close working relationships over the years. I knew very little about this office prior to the last few weeks, therefore, my findings should be taken on that fact. There is much deeper knowledge and understanding to garner. But, this should act as cursory or starting information.

I will put my finding in bullet form and keep them short.

Findings:

- It was interesting to me that all who have been associated with IRF at State are quick to volunteer that they are not associated with the Commission on International Religious Freedom (I believe both were created by the same 1998 Act). They want it known up front that the Commission is a Presidential commission entity and is not part of State. Some go farther by suggesting the commission accomplishes little or nothing and is solely a place to provide titles to certain people. At least on the staff level there is animosity and no working relationship.

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- Apparently the staff of IRF has grown over the Bush years. All of those I talked to but one is either a Democrat or from the progressive faith community. And, all of these described the IRF staff as "not effective," "right wing partisan," "right wing ideologues," and "religious right adherents." They said the office is not helpful. One person told me that the Amb at Large over IRF (Hanford I believe) is a nephew or close relationship to outgoing NC Senator Dole. Regardless, the IRF office from top to bottom is described by Democrats and/or faith progressives as larger than once was, partisan, hostile and ineffective. The one Republican I talked to, a Pentecostal minister I've helped with passports, etc for mission purposes over the years praised the office for both its attentiveness to his needs and "yearly reports on religious status" around the globe. Apparently, the office releases a yearly report about the religious freedom/activity around the globe.
- Everyone I talked to discussed the total insular nature of IRF within State. Just through listening I think most of the insular nature is driven by other departments and probably a systemic reason be it on purpose or not. In other words, IRF does little or no coordinating with other bureaus within State. This creates two things: 1.) It's the total focus inward and outward for those interested in religious freedom - this issue doesn't relate much with the rest of State and 2.) there is no involvement of religious issues with the rest of State. It seems that the Bush Administration has allowed this. They have allowed IRF to operate largely in their own corner, possibly focused on a personal or partisan agenda of seeing to the needs and message of particular faith communities but not the whole faith community. And, the subsequent and tragic other result has been a lack of understanding and knowledge by the larger community at State of the impact, influence and nuances of how religious and faith traditions, customs and belief impact daily short term and long term decisions of political entities throughout the world.
- Its two pronged: serving the faith communities and informing diplomacy (micro and macro). MICRO: If the IRF is reaching out to, listening to, meeting with ALL the US sending/mission a