



PEOPLE
FOR THE
AMERICAN
WAY

NEWS NEWS NEWS

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People For the American Way Joins "In Defense of Freedom" Coalition to Ensure Protection of Constitutional Rights and Civil Liberties

People For the American Way today joined a broad, ideologically diverse group of organizations to announce the "In Defense of Freedom" coalition. Coalition members will work together to ensure that regulatory and legislative responses to the recent terrorist attacks do not undermine Americans' constitutional rights and civil liberties.

Statement by People For the American Way President Ralph G. Neas

We are proud to stand in defense of freedom with so many other friends and allies, as well as people with whom we frequently disagree on matters of public policy.

We are united in our support for appropriate efforts to bring to justice the people who planned and helped carry out last week's brutal terrorist attacks. And we are united in our conviction that we must not allow our immediate pursuit of justice to do long-term damage to the basic rights and freedoms that are at the core of what it means to be an American. In order to minimize the risk of that kind of damage, it is important that Congress take the time to carefully examine the legislation - some of it troubling - that the administration is proposing.

This is a time for bipartisanship, and we praise those political leaders who have drawn us together in the midst of overwhelming loss. But our commitment to serving the national interest in this time of crisis requires that we also be on guard against the potential for self-inflicted harm. We must not allow our own anger and fear to cause us to act in ways that violate Americans' civil liberties and erode the free society that Americans are rallying to defend.

We are concerned about the potential for far-reaching consequences, perhaps unintended, when sweeping legislation is enacted swiftly. Because good intentions do not necessarily ensure good public policy, we call on members of Congress to carefully consider the implications of legislation that comes before them.

For example, the administration's new legislative proposals seems to grant extraordinary power to the attorney general to detain people indefinitely on

vaguely defined grounds, with limited judicial oversight. Rushing to vote on that kind of legislation without hearings or meaningful review could lead to consequences that we would long regret.

We urge Congress and the administration to make decisions that reflect a commitment to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the principles of a democratic society, and accountable government.

We appreciate the visible stance taken by the President and other leaders against discrimination and harassment of Americans who are, or are perceived to be, Arab-American or Muslim. We urge that policies ensure that individuals will not be targeted solely based upon their race, religion, ethnic background, or appearance. And we urge President Bush to call for passage of the strengthened federal hate crimes legislation that is pending before Congress. His embrace of this needed legislation at this critical time would ensure its swift enactment into law.

People For the American Way's 500,000 members and activists are guardians of the Constitution and the democratic values that sustain our free society. We believe that we can act both expeditiously and wisely, and protect our nation's security while remaining true to the values that we hold dear.

Let us demonstrate the strength of our pluralistic and democratic society by safeguarding both the social values and the legal principles that sustain it. The world is watching. And so are members of People For the American Way and the members of our coalition partners. In this time of national crisis, we stand together with our fellow Americans in defense of freedom.