

# OBAMA'S FAITH-BASED PROGRAM TESTS THE FAITHFUL

On February 5, the Obama administration said that its newly designed Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will decide on a case by case basis whether a funding request violates the Constitution. Joshua DuBois, who will head this initiative, said, "People on both sides are going to be a little uncomfortable with that." At issue are the hiring rights of religious social service organizations that receive federal funding.

During his bid for the presidency, President Obama said that religious organizations that receive federal monies should not have the right to determine who works for them. But with this announcement, the president decided to play it safe and tiptoe in the middle.

Sending requests on a case by case basis to lawyers to examine the constitutional questions is a ruse: We already know what the law says. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, in Section 702 (a), specifically allows an exemption for religious organizations in hiring. The legislators who passed this historic act knew that for the government to deny religious organizations that receive public monies the right to determine who should service its constituents would effectively neuter them. This position is as true now as it was then.

On the same day, the administration announced that the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will expand its domain by working with the National Security Council "to foster interfaith dialogue with leaders and scholars around the world." Bunk.

We asked what in the world does servicing the poor and promoting responsible fatherhood—two of the four priorities

outlined by DuBois—have to do with having the National Security Council sit down with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for a chat? This is just another way to gut faith-based initiatives.

We need a test case that will force the Obama administration to walk on one side of the street.