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We must combat religious bigotry, especially Islamophobia

by Maureen Fiedler

NCR Today

My friend, Rabbi David Saperstein, did it again. He called out Islamophobia for what it is. And he named it while it was in progress.

There's a history here. Shortly after 9/11, he did the same thing: He issued a press release decrying the fact that Muslims in the United States were being vilified as a group for the actions of a few. I remember so well what he said then: "We are Jews, and we understand what that form of discrimination means ... and where it can lead. We stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers." His declaration then was a catalyst in moving me to begin broadcasting Interfaith Voices.

Now, this man of integrity is doing it again.

It seems that Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.) and other members of Congress sent letters to the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, Defense and State, alleging that respected government officials and organizations are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The charge was leveled against Huma Abedin, deputy chief of staff to Secretary Hillary Clinton, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and ISNA President Imam Mohammed Magid, who also leads the All Dulles Area Mosque in Northern Virginia.

(It should be said here that the Muslim Brotherhood itself is a mixed bag, with a wide variety of approaches to both Islam and government within it. But it is viewed negatively -- and without nuance -- in our media here in the U.S.).

In response to the charges, Rabbi Saperstein said simply, "The Reform Movement, and I personally, have

worked with Ms. Abedin, Imam Magid and ISNA for many years. All have worked on behalf of U.S. interests at home and abroad, built relationships across religious lines and affirmed U.S. constitutional values."

Then he called it what it is: "These letters reflect a general pattern of Islamophobia that touches too many areas of our society."

And while I'm on the subject, I also want to decry the cover of *Bloomberg Businessweek* for its anti-Mormon bias and disrespect. It has Jesus saying to a young, kneeling Mormon: "And thou shalt build a shopping mall, own stock in Burger King and build a theme park in Hawaii that shall be largely exempt from the frustrations of tax ..."

Rabbi Saperstein is a guide on this. We must stand against religious bigotry whenever and wherever we find it.

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