

## Rothman Calls for Full Investigation of Alleged Religious Discrimination at NIH

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### Rothman Calls for Full Investigation of Alleged Religious Discrimination at the National Institutes of Health

Reps. Kirk and Ackerman Join Rothman in Expressing "Grave Concern" about Reported Anti-Catholic and Anti-Semitic Practices by NIH's Chief Chaplain

(Washington, DC)—Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ), joined by Reps. Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Gary Ackerman (D-NY), this week called on the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fully investigate allegations of widespread religious intolerance in the management of the NIH chaplain's office. Specifically, Reverend O. Ray Fitzgerald, former director of the NIH's Spiritual Ministry Department, has been accused of anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic practices and of firing Catholic Priests and Jewish Rabbis who spoke out against him. Though Rev. Fitzgerald is no longer in charge of the office, NIH continues to employ him.

"Rev. Fitzgerald reportedly instituted policies that were biased against Catholics and Jews. He organized schedules so that the Catholic chaplain could not minister to all of the Catholic patients in the hospital and he limited access to religious services for orthodox Jewish patients. It is our understanding that when chaplains in his office protested his actions, Fitzgerald simply had them fired," wrote Rothman, Kirk, and Ackerman in a letter to Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D., Director of the NIH. "This type of discrimination against and mistreatment of colleagues of different faiths should not be abided."

Fitzgerald was found to have engaged in the illegal practice of firing employees that voiced concerns about religious discrimination. In January, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission declared that Rev. Henry Heffernan, a Catholic priest who was fired in 2004, was the target of "discriminatory and retaliatory animus."

In addition, a Greek Orthodox lay minister, Edgar Rogler, and a Jewish Rabbi, Reeve Brenner, have said that they were fired for testifying on behalf of Heffernan and against Fitzgerald. Rogler has also alleged that Fitzgerald made frequent anti-Semitic comments about Brenner, referring to him as "the butthead Jew" and "the crass Jew."

In their letter to Dr. Zerhouni, Rothman, Kirk, and Ackerman concluded: "While Rev. Fitzgerald has been replaced as director of the Spiritual Ministry Department, we were shocked to learn that he is reportedly still employed by NIH as a chaplain. We urge you to take a leadership role in conducting a full investigation into this matter. Pending the results of such an investigation, we call on you take the appropriate actions, and if necessary punitive measures against Rev. Fitzgerald, to ensure that religious tolerance is promoted and protected at NIH."

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