

Keith Ellison's Stealth Jihad

by Denis MacEoin

“Who is Keith Ellison?” There are no simple answers. Throughout a checkered career, this liberal American politician has adopted many guises and presented different messages. He is an African-American who has moved from the fringe to the center of politics. He is a Democrat with a predictably liberal voting record, yet he consorts with groups and individuals that represent a threat to democracy and America. He is a convert to Islam but challenges Islamic orthodoxy on numerous issues legislatively. He identifies strongly with his faith, yet the details of his conversion and his current sentiments as a Muslim are obscure. He considers himself a friend of Israel¹ but, at other times, has appeared on the same platforms with speakers vocal in their opposition to the Jewish state and their support for terrorist groups that have murdered its citizens.

For many, he holds out hope of increasing Muslim influence in the U.S. government. At present, he is only one of two Muslims serving in Congress, the other being André Carson. He has strongly encouraged his fellow Muslims to engage in politics saying,

Getting engaged, getting involved, running for office, helping people run for office, organizing your community—these are the things that are going to make a change come about. We have to build the kind of country that we want with the help of some people who are like-minded. We cannot leave that responsibility to anybody else.²

Others, however, worry that he has too great a sympathy for Islamist radicals, of being at best naïve in his associations, and at worst a fifth columnist, someone whose status within the House of Representatives provides cover for anti-American discourse and, possibly, anti-American actions.

He is forty-six and a relative newcomer to Congress with the potential to be re-elected to office for some time to come. In due course, more Muslims will stand for state and federal office, which will almost certainly lead to the creation of a minority

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1 Natasha Mosgovaya, “Head to Head/Rep. Keith Ellison, Do You Think the US Could Live with an Iranian Bomb?” *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), May 24, 2010.

2 “Ellison Inspires Voters at 1st ‘Rock the Muslim Vote’ Townhall Forum,” Muslim Public Affairs Council, Sept. 24, 2008.

caucus in which Keith Ellison will be a senior member. It is time to look more closely at Congressman Ellison and his history.

THE NATION OF ISLAM

Ellison was born in 1963 into a Catholic family in Detroit. Almost nothing is known of his childhood and teenage years. He studied economics at Wayne State University and in 1982, in his sophomore year, converted to Islam. He has been extremely reluctant to reveal more than a glimpse of the motivations behind his conversion: In a December 2006 interview (about one month after his election to Congress), Ellison said,

I have been a Muslim since age 19, and I am 43 now. Of course my faith strengthens me and guides me. How I came to it is a deeply personal matter, and I'm not ready to talk about it now.³

However, in a more recent interview with Al-Jazeera's Riz Khan, he was more forthcoming:

Ellison defended Louis Farrakhan as a role model for black youth.

I can't claim that I was the most observant Catholic at the time [of my conversion]. I had begun to really look around and ask myself about the social circumstances of the country, issues of justice, issues

of change. When I looked at my spiritual life, and I looked at what might inform social change, justice in society ... I found Islam.⁴

As testimonies about conversion to Islam go, this is somewhat atypical as it is rare for converts to have mulled over wide political and social issues before conversion.⁵

3 Alan Tuttle, "Congressman-Elect Keith Ellison: An Interview with the First Muslim Congressman," *The Philadelphia Jewish Voice*, Jan. 2007.

4 "Riz Khan's One on One—Keith Ellison," Al-Jazeera TV (Doha), Feb. 20, 2010.

The spiritual dimension of Ellison's conversion receives just a passing mention. Nothing seems to be known about what mosque he attended, what books he studied, whether he went to Islamic classes or conferences or engaged in any of the religious activities in which young converts usually involve themselves.

What is known is that, for several years, he associated with or belonged to the Nation of Islam (NOI). Ellison himself denies that he was ever a member of the NOI,⁶ then as now under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, an anti-white, anti-Semitic, anti-establishment demagogue.⁷ In a letter sent in May during the 2006 congressional campaign to the Minnesota Jewish Community Relations Council, Ellison claimed that his association with the NOI had lasted for only eighteen months about the time of the Million Man March in 1995.⁸ However, there are problems with this assertion.

On the death of NOI founder Elijah Muhammad, his son Warith Deen Muhammad inherited the movement only to transform it soon after into a new group based on authentic Sunni Islamic principles (later, the American Society of Muslims). Louis Farrakhan remained with Warith Deen Muhammad's organization for a few years, only to break away in order to reestablish the original Nation of Islam in 1978. The NOI was widely condemned within the orthodox Muslim community, which considered Farrakhan's organization to be so far from doctrinal truth, it could not even be regarded as Islamic.⁹ While NOI converts have often later moved into normative

5 See, for example, Uriya Shavit and Frederic Wiesenbach, "Muslim Strategies to Convert Western Christians," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2009, pp. 3-14; "Converts (Reverts) to Islam," Islam Awareness website, accessed June 17, 2010; "Converts to Islam: Stories of New Muslims," accessed June 17, 2010.

6 *The Washington Post*, Sept. 11, 2006.

7 "Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam," The Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, Tel Aviv University, accessed June 17, 2010.

8 Scott W. Johnson, "Louis Farrakhan's First Congressman," *The Weekly Standard*, Oct. 9, 2006.

9 Michael Young, "The Problem with the Nation of Islam," *Islam for Today*, Aug. 1, 2001.

Islam, there seems to be no evidence of Muslim converts moving the other way; Ellison may be trying to conceal the truth behind both his conversion and the length of his tenure with the controversial NOI.

Despite these disclaimers, Ellison's open support for the NOI for over a decade is a matter of public record. After earning his economics degree in 1987, Ellison moved to Minneapolis and enrolled at the University of Minnesota Law School. While there, he wrote several columns under the pseudonym Keith E. Hakim, in which he spoke respectfully of Farrakhan and defended the NOI's national spokesman and Farrakhan's right-hand man, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, notorious for his anti-white, anti-Jewish, and anti-gay opinions.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Ellison used other pseudonyms, including Keith X Ellison¹¹ and Keith Ellison Muhammad.¹²

Ellison's involvement with the NOI resurfaced in 1995. He helped to organize the Minnesota contingent of Farrakhan's Million Man March and appeared onstage alongside Khalid Abdul Muhammad, who, according to the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* proclaimed, "If words were swords, the chests of Jews, gays and whites would be pierced." Muhammad was already infamous by the time of the march; indeed, by the 1970s and 1980s, his hate speech and Holocaust



U.S. representative Keith Ellison places his hand on an English translation of the Qur'an once owned by Thomas Jefferson. His wife Kim (center) holds the book as he is sworn in as the first Muslim member of Congress by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (left) on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., January 4, 2007. Standing with him are his children Amirah, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Ellison was born into a Catholic family in Detroit. In 1982, during his sophomore year at Wayne State University, he converted to Islam.

denials were well known and continued into the 1990s.¹³ Just two years before the rally in a 1993 Kean College, New Jersey speech, Muhammad had described Jews as "hook-nosed, bagel-eatin', lox-eatin' impostors,"¹⁴ a speech that elicited a 1994 resolution of censure from both houses of the U.S. Congress.¹⁵ In his 2006 letter to the Minnesota Jewish Community Relations

10 Johnson, "Louis Farrakhan's First Congressman."

11 Keith X Ellison, "Editorial cartoon insulted our intelligence," *Insight News* (Graphic Services, Inc.), Nov. 6, 1995.

12 "Keith Ellison-Muhammad will run for house 58B seat," *Insight News*, 1998; *The Washington Post*, Sept. 11, 2006.

13 "Khalid Muhammad's Message," The Nizkor Project, accessed June 18, 2010; Barry Mehler, "African American Racism in the Academic Community," *The Review of Education*, Fall 1993; "Muslims and Afrocentrics speak out," conference, New York, Dec. 22, 1991; "Transcript of Mohammad's November 9 Speech," *Barnard Bulletin*, Nov. 23, 1992, p. 12-3, Dec. 7, 1992, pp. 14-6, Dec. 14, 1992, pp. 10-7.

14 "Kean College Lecture 'Khalid Muhammad,'" *The New Jersey Record*, accessed June 18, 2010.

15 *Amendment 1368 to Senate bill 1150*, U.S. Senate, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., Feb. 2, 1994; *H567: Condemn Speech by a Senior Representative of the Nation of Islam*, U.S. House of Representatives, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., Feb. 3, 1994.

Reps. Keith Ellison (right) and Brian Baird (pointing) tour Gaza, February 19, 2009, marking the first time that U.S. lawmakers had entered the Hamas-controlled Palestinian territory in four years. The two men visited the United Nations headquarters in Gaza City and toured homes that had been destroyed in Israel's three-week military campaign but did not meet with representatives of Gaza's Hamas leadership.

Council, Ellison wrote that he “did not adequately scrutinize the positions and statements of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan, and Khalid Muhammed [*sic*].”¹⁶ As both men were nationally infamous, it is hard to lend credence to Ellison’s seeming ignorance.

In fact, Ellison had defended Farrakhan in 1995. Writing as Keith X Ellison, he published a column for *Insight News*, in which he condemned a *Star Tribune* editorial cartoon lampooning NOI’s leader as a role model for blacks because of his anti-Semitism. Ellison wrote:

Minister Farrakhan is a role model for black youth; however, he is not an anti-Semite. He is a sincere, tireless, and uncompromising advocate of the black community and other oppressed people around the world. Despite some of the most relentless negative propaganda anyone has ever faced, most Black

people regard him as a role model for youth and increasingly, a central voice for our collective aspirations.¹⁷

Despite this spirited defense, Farrakhan’s statements before and after this column belie the claim.¹⁸

In 1997, two years after the Million Man March, Ellison continued to defend the NOI while displaying further tolerance for hate speech. In October of that year, Joanne Jackson, executive director of the Minnesota Initiative Against Racism (MIAR), created an uproar by saying to a group meeting held in Temple Israel Synagogue that she considered Jews “the most racist white people I know.”¹⁹

At a subsequent MIAR board meeting, according to the *Star Tribune*, Ellison defended Jackson on behalf of the Nation of Islam, stating, “We stand by the truth contained in the remarks attributed to [Ms. Jackson], and by her right to express her views without sanction.”²⁰

HIS RECORD IN CONGRESS

A year later in 1998, Ellison ran for the Democratic-Farmers-Labor Party nomination for state representative, going by the name Keith Ellison-Muhammad. In this, his first outing, he was unsuccessful, but in 2002, having dropped Muhammad from his name, he was elected to the

16 Gabriel Schoenfeld, “Jews, Muslims, and the Democrats,” *Commentary Magazine*, Jan. 2007; Andrew Walden, “Farrakhan’s Candidate,” *FrontPage Magazine*, Sept. 19, 2006.

17 Ellison, “Editorial Cartoon Insulted Our Intelligence.”

18 “Farrakhan in His Own Words: On Jews: On ‘Jewish Conspiracies,’ On the Holocaust, On Jewish involvement in the slave trade, On Israel, On Dialogue with Jews,” *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed June 18, 2010.

19 Scott Johnson, “Who Is Keith Ellison? 2” *PowerlineBlog*, June 5, 2006; idem, “Louis Farrakhan’s First Congressman.”

20 Johnson, “Louis Farrakhan’s First Congressman.”

Minnesota House of Representatives and re-elected in 2004. As a state representative, he showed signs of a more balanced attitude, something that was later to emerge more clearly when he became a national representative. For example, in 2004, he led an ethics complaint against State Rep. Arlon Lindner after Lindner made remarks in the state congress, saying homosexuals had not died in the Holocaust.²¹ Ellison was backed by sixty other members of the Minnesota State House and by U.S. Senator Norm Coleman.²² In the end, the vote on the motion of censure failed in a 2-2 draw in the Minnesota House Ethics Committee.²³ Lindner was eventually denied the Republican nomination in the 2004 elections; for his efforts, Ellison picked up support from the local Jewish publication, *American Jewish World*.²⁴

In 2006, Ellison ran for the U.S. Congress and won with 56 percent of the vote in Minnesota's fifth congressional district.²⁵ His election was controversial, sparking some extreme reactions to the fact that he was a Muslim²⁶ and asked to be sworn into office on a Qur'an.²⁷

Ellison's record in Congress has been in line with broad Democratic and liberal policy, and he has made no attempt to use his position to advance projects with an overtly Islamic or Islamist bent. Sometimes, in fact, he has done quite the opposite. For example, on March 21, 2008, on the eve of the summer Olympics to be held in Beijing that year, he issued a statement criticizing both the Chinese and Sudanese governments over their policies in Tibet and Darfur²⁸; many a Muslim would not have openly condemned a

Muslim country such as Sudan in this way. Ellison has praised religious freedom in the United States, saying, "Religious tolerance has a much longer pedigree in America than some of the intolerance we've seen lately."²⁹ This perspective would run counter to the viewpoint, embodied in much Muslim jurisprudence, in which restrictions on nonbelievers are a doctrinal and legal requirement.³⁰

Ellison defies Islamic norms in other ways. He is pro-choice, not just for the first trimester, but beyond. Most Muslim jurists do not permit abortion after four months; some not at all.³¹

He supports emergency contraception for those serving in the armed forces while most Muslim scholars permit contraception only in limited circumstances and not for what may be deemed a licentious purpose.³² He permits interest on credit cards; Islam forbids the taking of interest

under any circumstances. He opposes job discrimination based on sexual orientation despite the fact that homosexuals are discriminated against by Islamic law in an extreme way and approves of same-sex marriage, something unthinkable in Islam. He has called for the enforcement of laws on anti-gay hate crimes while Islamic law demands the execution of homosexuals.³³ He opposes the death penalty, which is a regular punishment under Shari'a law and sup-

Ellison called for CAIR supporters to apply for jobs in the incoming Obama administration.

21 *News and Features*, Minnesota Public Radio, Apr. 24, 2003; "Minn. Kampf-Politics—Minnesota state representative Arlon Lindner," *The Advocate*, Apr. 15, 2003.

22 *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 12, 2003.

23 *News and Features*, Minnesota Public Radio, Apr. 24, 2003.

24 *Citypages*, Sept. 1, 2006; Johnson, "Louis Farrakhan's First Congressman."

25 "Official Election Results—Nov. 7, 2006," Minnesota Secretary of State.

26 *WorldNetDaily*, Dec. 6, 2006.

27 *USA Today*, Dec. 1, 2006.

28 *The Minnesota Post*, Mar. 24, 2008.

29 McClatchy News Service, Mar. 7, 2007; Melissa Rogers, "Representative Ellison and State Department Join Hands on Public Diplomacy," *Melissa Rogers*, Mar. 7, 2007.

30 See Yohanan Friedman, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2003).

31 See, for example, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Abortion from an Islamic Perspective," *Islam Online*, Jan. 18, 2004; "Abortion: Forbidden at All Stages?" European Council for Fatwa and Research, *Islam Online*, Dec. 13, 2004.

32 "Is Contraception allowed in Islam?" Islam Awareness, accessed June 18, 2010.

33 "Islam and Homosexuality," Mission Islam, accessed June 18, 2010; Denis MacEoin, "Why Do Muslims Execute Innocent People?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2006, pp. 15-25.

ports the regulation but not the banning of online gambling: In Islamic law, all forms of gambling, even insurance, are prohibited. He has also voted to support federal funding for homeland security, which some elements in the Muslim community denounce as a thinly-veiled assault on the *umma* (Islamic nation).³⁴

On a personal level, when in Minneapolis, Ellison attends the Masjid an-Nur mosque,³⁵

Ellison spoke at no fewer than three fundraising dinners for CAIR.

whose imam, Makram El-Amin, he has known since 1996.³⁶ El-Amin has a reputation as an advocate of interracial harmony and, in particular, interfaith relations. In addition, Ellison has publicly denounced the architect of Muslim extremism, Sayyid Qutb

(1906-66), calling him one of several theorists “responsible for what we would regard today as violent extremism with what I call a Muslim veneer.”³⁷ All in all, Ellison could be viewed as a garden variety liberal politician, someone whose youthful associations have been jettisoned in favor of a more sober but still progressive approach to American governance and efforts to achieve social justice.

THE CAIR CONNECTION

But things are not as simple as they look, and Ellison may not be quite the reformed public official that he appears to be. Not long after sending the 2006 letter to the Minnesota Jewish Community Relations Council, Ellison received major funds to help finance his imminent election campaign from several Muslim organizations and

individuals, including the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).³⁸ The donated money included thousands of dollars raised by Nihad Awad, CAIR’s executive director (a man with a history of support for movements including Hamas).³⁹

Founded in 1994, CAIR is ostensibly an advocate for religious pluralism and civil liberties, especially as applied to America’s Muslim community. Its public image is that of a liberal, human rights-based group that seeks to bridge American Muslims and the secular democracy of the United States.⁴⁰ The council’s many critics have argued, however, that it is a front for the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas. CAIR had close links to the Holy Land Foundation,⁴¹ an Islamic charity that channeled millions of dollars to Hamas and which was found guilty in 2008 on charges including conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization, providing material support to a foreign terrorist, and conspiracy to commit money laundering. In 2008, the FBI cut off contacts with CAIR over concerns that the organization had its roots in a Hamas-support network.⁴² Ellison has continued to defend the group, but even before the FBI severed relations with CAIR, it had achieved such a level of notoriety that Ellison could not pretend to be unaware of problems with the organization.

CAIR’s two founders, Nihad Awad and Omar Ahmad, were formerly officers of the Islamic Association of Palestine, an organization intimately linked to the senior echelons of Hamas.⁴³ Awad

34 For Ellison’s views on these and other issues, see “Representative Keith M. Ellison (MN),” Project Vote Smart, accessed June 18, 2010; “Keith Ellison,” *On the Issues*, accessed June 18, 2010.

35 Reuters, Sept. 18, 2006.

36 *The New York Times*, Feb. 10, 2007.

37 “Rep. Keith Ellison, the Islamists’ Man on Capitol Hill,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Nov. 23, 2009.

38 Joe Kaufman, “Keith Ellison’s Dangerous Liaisons,” *FrontPage Magazine*, May 30, 2007; “Keith Ellison’s Muslim Brotherhood Support,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Apr. 22, 2010.

39 “Apologists or Extremists: Nihad Awad,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, accessed June 18, 2010; Joel Mowbray, “Democrats’ Dilemma,” *The Washington Times*, Sept. 24, 2006.

40 Daniel Pipes, “CAIR: ‘Moderate’ Friends of Terror,” *The New York Post*, Apr. 22, 2002.

41 “Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR): Links to Holy Land Foundation,” *Anti-Defamation League*, Mar. 2, 2010.

42 Mary Jacoby, “FBI Cuts off CAIR over Hamas Questions,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Jan. 29, 2009.

43 Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 149.

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Keith Ellison is pictured here on the website of the Islamic Society of North America, an organization that has been linked by several U.S. agencies to support for terrorism. In July 2008, federal prosecutors in Dallas filed documents showing a link between ISNA and Hamas.

has repeatedly shown support for Hamas and its military actions against Israel, has acted as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestine Committee, and has often defended Islamist organizations, including the Holy Land Foundation, against U.S. attempts to investigate and, where possible, indict them.⁴⁴ Ahmad is perhaps best known for a statement made before a crowd of Californian Muslims in 1998 and reported in the *San Ramon Valley Herald*: "Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Koran, the Muslim book of scripture, should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the only accepted religion on earth."⁴⁵ Although the statement has been denied by Ahmed and CAIR over the years, Daniel Pipes has provided much evidence as to its veracity.⁴⁶ Ahmad has also served as president of the Islamic Association of Palestine, a fund-raising organization for Hamas.⁴⁷ Another

donor and CAIR national board chairman, Parvez Ahmed, has also supported Hamas and Hezbollah.⁴⁸

Thus, any connections Ellison might have to CAIR are, at best, unwise for a politician seeking to improve the nation's understanding of Islam and at worst an indication of his true sentiments. On October 14, 2006, shortly before the national congressional elections, Ellison appeared as the keynote speaker at a closed-door meeting of CAIR in Pembroke Pines, Florida.⁴⁹ While attending CAIR-Tampa's sixth annual banquet in 2008, Ellison called on listeners to a local Tampa radio station to support Sami al-Arian. Arian, a former professor at University of South Florida, confessed two years earlier to conspiring to supply goods and services to Palestinian Islamic Jihad,⁵⁰ a terrorist organization responsible for numerous suicide attacks on Israel.

In 2009, after the FBI cut off contact with CAIR, Ellison spoke at no fewer than three fundraising dinners for the organization and

44 "Apologists or Extremists: Nihad Awad," accessed June 18, 2010.

45 *San Ramon Valley Herald*, July 4, 1998; Nonie Darwish, *Now They Call Me Infidel: Why I Rejected the Jihad for America, Israel, and the War on Terror* (New York: Sentinel HC, 2006), p. 140.

46 Daniel Pipes, "CAIR and the *San Ramon Valley Herald*," DanielPipes.org, Oct. 20, 2003, updated Dec. 11, 2006.

47 Matthew Epstein, "Saudi Support for Islamic Extremism in the United States," testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security, Sept. 10, 2003.

48 Parvez Ahmed, ISNA 44th Annual Conference in Rosemont, Illinois, Aug. 31-Sept. 3, 2007, cited in "CAIR's True Colors," The Investigative Project on Terrorism, Jan. 30, 2009.

49 Joe Kaufman, "Keith Ellison's Mysterious CAIR Meeting," *FrontPage Magazine*, Oct. 16, 2006; "Protesting CAIR's Candidates," *Little Green Footballs*, Oct. 13, 2006.

50 *The Tampa Tribune*, Apr. 15, 2006; *The St. Petersburg Times*, Mar. 6, 2009.

gave videotaped statements at others and has also appeared with CAIR officials at meetings on healthcare reform and Eid festival celebrations.⁵¹ In October 2009, he rebuked four House of Representatives Republican members who called for an investigation of CAIR for infiltration of government committees.⁵² Although the congressmen were focused on the question of CAIR's role, Ellison cast the inquiry as a modern-day witch hunt, declaring: "The idea that we should investigate Muslim interns as spies is a blow to the very principle of religious freedom that our Founding Fathers cherished so dearly."⁵³ Soon afterwards, he attended a CAIR fundraising event in Washington and called for CAIR supporters to apply for jobs in the incoming Obama administration.⁵⁴

ASSOCIATIONS WITH OTHER ISLAMIST GROUPS

Muslim American Society: Ellison's connections to other groups such as the Muslim American Society (MAS) reinforce questions about where he stands. MAS was founded in 1993 following an arrangement reached between Muslim Brotherhood leaders in America and Egypt. MAS is, in fact, the Brotherhood's American chapter.⁵⁵ That the Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan

Ellison's worrisome affiliations have drawn little criticism from the mainstream media.

al-Muslimun) represents a significant threat to

Western civilization is made clear from this excerpt from a 1991 briefing captured by the FBI:

The process of settlement [of Islam in the United States] is a "Civilization-Jihadist" process with all the word means. The Ikhwan must understand that all their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and "sabotaging" their miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and Allah's religion is made victorious over all religions. ... It is a Muslim's destiny to perform Jihad and work wherever he is and wherever he lands until the final hour comes.⁵⁶

In December 2002, for example, MAS used its website to denigrate non-Muslims, speaking of "the degenerate moral condition of the Jews and Christians" and declaring: "If you gain a victory over the men of [the] Jews, kill them," and "May Allah destroy the Jews."⁵⁷ It also issued statements endorsing terrorism and praising Hamas.⁵⁸ According to an extensive dossier prepared by the Investigative Project on Terrorism, MAS has links to Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. Its websites have praised Muslim Brotherhood ideologue and godfather of modern Islamism, Sayyid Qutb, and provided links to several extremist and terrorist organizations. Mahdi Bray, executive director of the MAS Freedom Foundation and the public face of the society, has claimed that the United States is engaged in a war against Islam and has defended a long list of terrorism-linked organizations and individuals. The MAS magazine, *The American Muslim*, often contains references to suicide

51 "Rep. Keith Ellison, the Islamists' Man on Capitol Hill."

52 Keith Ellison, "Tri-Caucus Welcomes All Interns and Staff," U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., Congressional Record, 111th Congress (2009-10), 1st sess., Oct. 26, 2009; "Rep. Keith Ellison, the Islamists' Man on Capitol Hill."

53 Ellison, "Tri-Caucus Welcomes All Interns and Staff"; "Rep. Keith Ellison, the Islamists' Man on Capitol Hill."

54 "Rep. Keith Ellison, the Islamists' Man on Capitol Hill."

55 "Muslim American Society: The Investigative Project on Terrorism Dossier," The Investigative Project on Terrorism, accessed June 18, 2010.

56 Mohamed Akram, "An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Brotherhood in North America," May 19, 1991, The Investigative Project on Terrorism, accessed June 18, 2010.

57 Joe Kaufman, "Keith Ellison's MAS Hate Affair," *FrontPage Magazine*, May 30, 2008; "Violent and Hateful Statements Published by the Muslim American Society," screenshots from the MAS website, Americans against Hate, accessed June 18, 2010.

58 Kaufman, "Keith Ellison's MAS Hate Affair"; "Mehdi Bray's Photos," of Ahmed Yassin, the founder of and ex-spiritual leader of Hamas, screenshots from the MAS website, Americans against Hate, Mar. 17, 2009.

bombings as “martyrdom operations” and to terrorists as “freedom fighters” while condemning U.S. antiterrorism actions. At MAS conferences, extremist speakers address their audiences while Islamist and jihadi literature is on sale.⁵⁹

It is, then, disturbing to see that one year after his first election to Congress, Ellison was the keynote speaker at MAS-Minnesota’s fourth annual convention in May 2007.⁶⁰ The following spring, Ellison was again the keynote speaker at the MAS-Minnesota convention, appearing alongside Siraj Wahhaj, an unindicted coconspirator of the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing.⁶¹

Islamic Society of North America: Ellison also enjoys a relationship with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), an organization that has been linked by several agencies to support for terrorism. In December 2003, U.S. senators Charles Grassley and Max Baucus of the Senate Committee on Finance formally identified ISNA as one of twenty-five American Muslim organizations in a probe into groups that might “finance terrorism and perpetuate violence.”⁶² More recently, in July 2008, Federal prosecutors in Dallas filed documents showing a link between ISNA and Hamas.⁶³ In an account of the 2008 conference, Dave Gaubatz, coauthor of *Muslim Mafia*, writes:

In 2008, ISNA had several booths with anti-American slogans on shirts, along with pro-Hamas, pro-Palestinian, and anti-Israel garments ... It was easy to find DVDs, books, manuals, and pamphlets calling America a terrorist organization and for the destruction of our country and Israel. It was very easy to find material calling for killing innocent men, women, and children in American [*sic*] who did not believe in an Islamic Ummah (Nation)

59 “Muslim American Society: The Investigative Project on Terrorism Dossier.”

60 *Fox News*, Jan. 8, 2009.

61 Kaufman, “Keith Ellison’s MAS Hate Affair”; *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 24, 2003.

62 “Senators Request Tax Information on Muslim Charities for Probe,” *Militant Islam Monitor*, Feb. 23, 2005.

63 *Fox News*, Jan. 17, 2009.

worldwide and under Sharia law. ... If you wanted Muslim Brotherhood material, this was the location to obtain the intelligence you desired.⁶⁴

Despite these troubling connections, Ellison has spoken at ISNA’s 2007, 2008, and 2009 conventions, events estimated to be the largest annual Muslim gatherings in the Western hemisphere.⁶⁵ In 2008, Ellison spoke on “mobilizing the Muslim political machine.”⁶⁶

Muslim Public Affairs Council: Ellison also spoke in December 2006 to the sixth annual convention of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC),⁶⁷ a seemingly moderate body that seeks to conceal its strong anti-Semitic,⁶⁸ pro-Hamas, and pro-Hezbollah views.⁶⁹ Again, he addressed a town hall forum during MPAC’s “Activate ’08 Election Campaign,” at one of the Council’s “Rock the Muslim Vote” events.⁷⁰

North American Imams Federation: He also addressed the North American Imams Federation (NAIF) at their November 19, 2006 conference in Minneapolis.⁷¹ Many of NAIF’s imams, in charge of mosques across the United States, are trained through an institution called the

Ellison returns again and again to address and support Islamist organizations.

64 Dave Gaubatz, “The ISNA Conference,” *The American Thinker*, July 2, 2009; “Conspiracy Theories, Terror Support Found In ISNA Convention Literature,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Aug. 27, 2009.

65 “Congressman Keith Ellison at ISNA 2007,” *Mujahideen Ryder*, Sept. 22, 2007; “Ramadan—A Time for Change,” 45th Annual ISNA Convention program, Columbus, Oh., Aug. 29–Sept. 1, 2008, p. 11; Liali Albana, “Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness—ISNA 2009,” *Elan*, July 9, 2009.

66 “Ramadan—A Time for Change,” p. 11.

67 “Keith Ellison addresses MPAC and the Muslim American public,” *YouTube*, posted Feb. 9, 2007.

68 “Hate Speech Long an MPAC Specialty,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Feb. 10, 2010.

69 “MPAC Terrorism Report Misses the Point,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Mar. 25, 2010.

70 *2008 MPAC Annual Report*, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Washington, D.C., 2008.

71 M. Zuhdi Jasser, “Congressman Ellison Carries the Islamists’ Water,” *Pundicity*, July 19, 2007.

American Open University (AOU), a distance-learning medium for Muslims wishing to train as clergy. The AOU is a radical school that emphasizes the paramount role of Shari‘a law in an American context. Its chairman Jaafar Sheikh Idris regards democracy as “the antithesis of Islam,” arguing that human beings have no right to make their own laws. “No one,” he claims, “can be a Muslim who makes or freely accepts or believes that anyone has the right to make or accept legislation that is contrary to the divine law.”⁷² He also declared that no Muslim elected to Congress can swear to uphold the U.S. Constitution and remain a Muslim “for in order to pledge loyalty to the constitution, a Muslim would have to abandon part of his belief and embrace the belief of secularism—which is practically another religion.”⁷³ That Keith Ellison supports an institution linked to someone who holds views in such deep conflict with normative American values is deeply troubling.

CONCLUSION

Once, in an interview with CNN’s Glenn Beck, Ellison said, “There’s no one who is more patriotic than I am. And so, you know, I don’t need to prove my patriotic stripes.”⁷⁴ Judged by his legislative record, he is well within the mainstream of American life. But he has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution despite the fact that he fundraises for groups whose leadership would replace that Constitution with the laws of Islam.

72 Dr. Ja’far Sheikh Idris, “Shoora and Democracy: A Conceptual Analysis,” *Islaam.com*, accessed June 23, 2010.

73 Dr. Jaafar [sic] Sheikh Idris, “Separation of Church and State,” *Jaafaridris.com*, accessed June 23, 2010.

74 CNN, Nov. 14, 2006.

Does Ellison simply display poor choice in his associates as he did when younger? Or should his motives be questioned at a higher level? Are there no moderate Muslim groups he can speak to or support? Why does he return again and again to address and support Islamist organizations, some with ties to terrorism?

What politician, careful of the press and the generality of his constituents, does not trouble himself or his staff to check out the bona fides of a group he may be speaking to, all the more so if that group already has a less than savory reputation? Ellison’s constituents, the American public, and his fellow congressmen, deserve answers to the many questions his curious bipolarity raises. The mixed messages he gives may be an expression of deep-seated contradictions. Few politicians hold self-contradictory views for long and often abandon those they recognize to be potential irritants to voters. Ellison’s worrisome affiliations have drawn little criticism from the mainstream media. It is possible that this reluctance to expose comes from a combination of a dislike to criticize Muslims and an ignorance of what links to CAIR, MAS, and other bodies and individuals really imply.

It is also not at all improbable that Ellison is aware of and makes use of the Islamic doctrine of *taqiyya*, the principle that it is permissible for a Muslim to lie in order to protect Islam and its reputation from harm, or to do so as part of waging jihad with nonbelievers. From CAIR to ISNA to MPAC, Muslim groups in the United States claim to be victims of discrimination or outright persecution at the hands of state agencies or individuals. They have mastered the art of being, in a British phrase, “economical with the truth.” Keith Ellison may well be among them.

