

Stimulus 'Discriminatory'

Provision

Conservative groups say a provision in Obama's economic stimulus plan could shut down Christian clubs that meet on secular university campuses.

✖ **Feb. 6, 2009** – Conservatives say a provision in President Obama's economic stimulus plan could block Christian college students from using campus facilities.

According to the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), "a discriminatory provision" exists in Obama's plan that prohibits federal funds from going to religiously affiliated schools post-secondary schools, such as divinity schools.

ACLJ Chief Counsel Jay Sekulow said the provision also denies student-led Bible study groups from accessing facilities on secular campuses if the university renovated or repaired the facility using stimulus money.

"The ramifications for this are really, really broad and very troubling," Sekulow told *Charisma*. "This targets, specifically, religious worship; which is incredible."

Sekulow said he would challenge the provision in court if necessary. He had hoped an amendment proposed by Republican Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina to remove the controversial provision would have passed this week. But the effort failed on Thursday.

DeMint said in a statement on Thursday that Senate Democrats should be "ashamed of themselves" for siding with "the ACLU over millions of students of faith."

"I'm outraged Democrats are using an economic stimulus bill to promote discrimination," he said.

Obama has said he wants his \$900 billion-plus stimulus plan pushed through Congress by Feb. 16, telling lawmakers the nation's economic problems warrant quick action.

The plan was approved in the House last week and is still being debated in the Senate this week. Former presidential candidate Sen. John McCain told CBS News on Wednesday that Obama's stimulus plan, in its current form, would harm the economy and not help it.

Curtis Cole, administrative director for Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, an Assemblies of God-sponsored group located on secular campuses worldwide, said that denying students access to publicly funded campus buildings is a message Obama and Congress should "rethink immediately."

"To restrict any student or student organization from gaining access to a campus building for spiritual or religious expression is an outrageous violation of an individual's First Amendment Rights," Cole told *Charisma*. "Numerous Supreme Court cases have affirmed equal access, and even funding, for all students and student organizations on the college and university campus, regardless of religious or political viewpoint."

The only way universities are eligible to receive Obama's stimulus funds is if Bible clubs and weekend religious meetings are expelled, according to Mathew D. Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and dean of Liberty University School of Law.

"People who want to speak about their faith will be unwelcome in public places," Staver said. "Apparently, President Obama's idea of faith-based initiatives is to remove faith from all initiatives."

Lou Sheldon, founder of the Traditional Values Coalition, said the ultimate impact of the provision would be to drive religious activities completely out of public education. "If

higher education institutions worry about not getting part of this federal grab bag, they'll simply eject religious activities from their campuses so they can easily get the money," he said. **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**