

It's Time to Stop Church Shootings and Burnings: Possible Presidential Contender

Former Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore, who led a widely heralded effort to stop the burnings of churches in the South in the late 1990s, has called for a national conversation to help bring an end to the rash of violence against churches like the the June 17 shootings of Christians at worship in Charleston. Nine people were killed three weeks ago by a gunman at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Police arrested Dylann Roof, a psychologically troubled 21-year-old motivated by racial animus. More than half-a-dozen church burnings have taken place since then, in five states. At least three arsons have been confirmed in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The most recent incidents include a fire late last Friday at Tabernacle Temple in Jersey City, New Jersey, and another Sunday evening at Woodville Pentecostal Holiness Church in Laurel Hill, North Carolina. Other suspicious fires remain under investigation. "We made a lot of progress when we resolutely faced this issue two decades ago," Gilmore said. "We can't go back to those days when places of faith and worship were targets. I am hopeful of helping generate a national conversation on church burnings and how to put an end to them." "We must do everything within our power to protect Americans – all Americans – and see they are not threatened by those who would harm them and attack their places of worship," Gilmore said. "Just like the church burnings of the past, this violence cannot be tolerated by civilized society." Gilmore said he hoped governors and attorneys general across the nation as well as political and religious leaders would join him in

beginning a dialogue about how to stop the church violence. A similar effort, which he headed when he was Attorney General of Virginia, resulted in a crackdown that brought a dramatic reduction in church burnings. Gilmore went on to serve one term as Governor of Virginia, 1998-2002. Gilmore, a former military intelligence officer who chaired the Congressional Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Capabilities for Terrorism, was governor when 9/11 hijackers targeted the Pentagon in Virginia. Gilmore says he is pro-choice during the first trimester of pregnancy. Nonetheless, national pro-life leaders had a good working relationship with him during his years as governor and several supported his later campaigns. After running for the Republican presidential nomination and losing a bid for U.S. Senate in 2008, Gilmore became president of the Free Congress Foundation, founded by Paul Weyrich. Under his leadership, the FCF has changed its focus from social issues to pursuing economic growth, Gilmore's driving passion. The former governor is considering entering the crowded 2016 Republican presidential primaries this year but told *Newsmax* that he has not yet finalized a date to enter the race.