

[Home Page](#)[World](#)[U.S.](#)[Weather](#)[Business](#)[Sports](#)[Analysis](#)[Politics](#)[Law](#)[Technology](#)[Science & Space](#)[Health](#)[Entertainment](#)[Offbeat](#)[Travel](#)[Education](#)[Special Reports](#)[Video](#)[Autos](#)[I-Reports](#)**SERVICES**[E-mails](#)[RSS](#)[Podcasts](#)[Mobile](#)[CNN Pipeline](#)

TRANSCRIPTS

[Transcript Providers](#)
Shows By Category:[Return to Transcripts main page](#)**PAULA ZAHN NOW****Barriers Broken in Congress; Muslims in America**

Aired January 4, 2007 - 20:00 ET

THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT. THIS COPY MAY NOT BE IN ITS FINAL FORM AND MAY BE UPDATED.

PAULA ZAHN, CNN ANCHOR: And thank you all for joining us tonight.

Across America, racism and intolerance lurk just below the surface. Every night, we're finding and talking about these hidden secrets, bringing them out in the open.

Tonight: barriers broken -- the first woman speaker of the House, the first Muslim congressman, and the first Koran at a swearing-in.

Also: not in my neighborhood -- in Texas and Florida, people are going to great extremes to keep Muslims from building mosques.

And how is this for the title of a brand-new sitcom, "Little Mosque on the Prairie"? Is that going too far, or will anyone watch?

We are bringing you all of these stories out into the open tonight.

We start with today's historic events on Capitol Hill. For the first time in U.S. history, a woman is the speaker of the House of Representatives. Even Republicans are applauding California Democrat Nancy Pelosi's achievement.

Just after receiving the gavel, Speaker Pelosi asked the newly elected members of Congress to raise their right hands and administered the oath of office. Later, she posed with them for individual swearing-in pictures. And that's where the country's first Muslim congressman got to use a Koran after all.

As Jill Dougherty reports, it is a picture that speaks volumes, because it has brought intolerance into the open.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JILL DOUGHERTY, CNN INTERNATIONAL U.S. AFFAIRS EDITOR (voice- over): It is a tradition that goes all the way back to George Washington, first president of the United States...

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Please raise your right hand.

DOUGHERTY: ... elected officials taking the oath of office with their hand on a holy book. It is not a legal requirement. It is just a symbol. They swear to protect and defend the U.S. Constitution, not religious principles.

Christians often use the Bible, Jews, the Old Testament. Some don't use anything. Keith Ellison, the very first Muslim elected to the U.S. Congress, chose the Koran, the sacred text of Islam, an 18th century copy from the Library of Congress that once belonged to Thomas Jefferson.

Ellison's choice of the Koran has some critics fuming, including one of his fellow congressmen.

REP. VIRGIL GOODE JR. (R), VIRGINIA: My personal belief is not to use the Koran.

DOUGHERTY: Congressman Virgil Goode says the U.S. should protect what he calls its traditional values.

GOODE: I fear that, in the next century, we will have many more Muslims in the United States, if we do not adopt strict immigration policies.

DOUGHERTY: Other colleagues of Ellison say, they're outraged by such comments.

On his first day in Congress, Ellison shook Virgil Goode's hand, saying he was trying to build bridges.

Keith Ellison isn't an immigrant.

REP. KEITH ELLISON (D), MINNESOTA: My name is Keith Ellison.

DOUGHERTY: He's a 43-year-old African-American lawyer, a Democrat, elected from Minnesota in a landslide vote. He converted to Islam from Catholicism as a teenager. During the campaign, he didn't make his religion an issue. But e-mails from proud Muslims around the world poured in.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Indonesia, Egypt, Mauritania, Brazil.

ELLISON: I don't think I fully apprehended that this was a -- an event that people around the globe might be interested in, until -- until well into the campaign.

DOUGHERTY: The new 110th Congress is more religiously diverse than ever, just like U.S. society. There are members from 32 different faiths and denominations, including, also for the first time, Buddhists.

But it is America's Muslims who are in the spotlight.

BOB DESTRO, PROFESSOR, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY: Americans don't know much about Islam. People like Congressman Ellison represent that community, you know, and he's going to be a teacher. He's going to be the way in which, you know, the -- the attitudes and beliefs of Muslims are going to be -- he's going to be their representative, whether he wants to be or not.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

DOUGHERTY: Congressman Ellison says, it is time to put the controversy over his choice of the Koran behind him and concentrate on the major problems that need fixing in this Congress -- Paula.

ZAHN: But, Jill, as you well know, the controversy is not over tonight.

Thank you so much for that report.

You all might remember, back in November, when Keith Ellison first said he wanted to use a Koran, he was blasted by radio host and columnist Dennis Prager, who wrote that a swearing-in using the Koran would undermine the fabric of American civilization and do more damage to the unity of America than the terrorists of 9/11. As a result, Prager was called things like rabid, un-American, intolerant, and a bigot.

And he joins us tonight.

Dennis, welcome back.

Let's talk a little bit about what happened today. We just saw in Jill's piece...

DENNIS PRAGER, RADIO TALK SHOW HOST: By the way, that's -- that's not all I was called.

(LAUGHTER)

ZAHN: Well, I know.

PRAGER: It's a much longer list.

ZAHN: But we can't repeat this in this...

PRAGER: That's right.

ZAHN: ... family viewing hour.

PRAGER: Yes. That's right.

ZAHN: But let's review what happened today.

The speaker of the House first swore in Mr. Ellison without any religious text at all. It was later on, in the photo-op, where he placed his hand on the Koran. This is a man who has been practicing his faith for some 20 years now.

Why shouldn't he have the right to use the religious text that is the foundation of his faith?

PRAGER: Well, this may disappoint you, but I said he had the right within one day of my first column coming out on my radio show and in the next column I wrote in "The New York Times," in "The Washington Post," Associated Press.

ZAHN: But, then, you went on to say that it would have a negative impact...

PRAGER: That's a separate issue.

ZAHN: ... somehow threaten our democracy.

How so?

PRAGER: OK. That's a separate issue.

One is whether he has the right. He has the perfect right. I acknowledged that from the outset. OK. So, having put that aside, I am worried. And I don't know why all Americans, whatever they are, even Muslims, would not worry that, for the first time in America's history, the substitution of another religious text for the Bible might not be problematic.

ZAHN: OK. But what do you think will happen as a result of this?

PRAGER: We get...

(CROSSTALK)

PRAGER: OK.

ZAHN: I don't understand what -- what the domino effect...

PRAGER: All right. I will tell you.

ZAHN: ... would be.

PRAGER: The domino -- the domino is all -- it is all symbolic. I fully acknowledge that.

Here's the question I am wanting to raise. And I'm glad you give me and others -- obviously, giving me this opportunity to do so. Where does America get its values, such as liberty, from? Do we get it from the Constitution, or does the Constitution get it, like everything else in America, from that Bible?

According to Thomas Jefferson, we get it from the God of that Bible. According to the Liberty Bell, we get it from that Bible and the Old Testament. The Liberty Bell does not have a Koranic or an enlightenment phrase on it. It has a biblical phrase.

We have always assumed that we get our values from that Bible. I am worried about our civilization abandoning that source of values.

ZAHN: All right.

PRAGER: That is not an intolerant or bigoted, let alone racist, doctrine.

ZAHN: Let me read...

PRAGER: It's a worry.

ZAHN: ... to you what James Zogby had to say. He is the president of the Arab-American Institute.

He wrote in "The New York Daily News": "Our founders had a more profound respect for religious diversity than many of their latter-day disciples. In using Jefferson's Koran, Ellison smartly reminds us of our founders' convictions and the values they embraced that shaped our republic."

What is it that you think, in -- in this symbolic gesture used today, will, in some way, embolden terrorists?

PRAGER: Oh, I will tell you how exactly. And it is not odd at all.

It -- it -- it is not a bad gesture, but why would it embolden a terrorist? Someone who would like to bring down the West would like to Islamicize us. That -- that's -- I mean, that's -- that's element...

ZAHN: The simple gesture in -- in a photo opportunity...

PRAGER: Yes.

ZAHN: ... that lasted 30 seconds or so?

PRAGER: Oh, absolutely. That's why Keith Ellison himself announced it a month or so in advance. Everybody knows.

You just reported yourself letters came in from all over the Muslim world. This is a -- good Muslims will celebrate, and bad Muslims will celebrate. Those who wish to Islamicize America see this as a wonderful thing. That is not an odd thing for me to say. It's odd that anybody would differ with that. It makes perfect sense. They would like to see...

ZAHN: It may make...

PRAGER: ... that in Europe.

ZAHN: It may make sense to you. Let's see what the -- the panel we have assembled tonight has to -- has to say about that.

Dennis Prager, thank you for joining us tonight.

PRAGER: Thank you.

ZAHN: I always appreciate your dropping by.

We are going to deeper into this issue with my "Out in the Open" panel tonight.

Joining me now, Roland Martin, executive editor of "The Chicago Defender" newspaper, host of "The Roland S. Martin Show." Of course it would carry his name.

(LAUGHTER) ZAHN: Kamal Nawash, the founder and president the Free Muslims Coalition, and Cenk Uygur, host of "Young Turks" on the Air America Radio network.

Glad to have all three of you with us.

KAMAL NAWASH, PRESIDENT, FREE MUSLIMS COALITION: Thank you.

ZAHN: Mr. Prager just said he recognizes that this was symbolic today. But he said, at its core, that this simple gesture emboldens terrorists and encourages the Islamicization of America.

CENK UYGUR, RADIO TALK SHOW HOST: Dennis Prager is not only a bigot, but he's a clown and un-American. He doesn't understand the whole idea of America. The whole idea of America is religious diversity, a secular country.

ZAHN: That may be true, but he did make the point that -- that, traditionally -- this -- this is the first congressman that has been sworn in on -- on the Koran. I remember John Adams, of course, used a legal text.

UYGUR: Uh-huh.

ZAHN: But, since then, every single person sworn in to Congress has been sworn in on the Bible.

UYGUR: Well, first of all, when they get sworn in, they don't use anything. They -- they just use it in the photo-ops. John Quincy Adams used law -- law books.

And -- and Debbie Wasserman-Schultz used the Jewish Bible. People use different bibles for different photo-ops all the time and different religious texts. That's the whole point of the country, is that we're a secular country. Every other country, at the time that we were founded, had a -- a religion as their form of government.

They said, we're sponsoring Christianity, Islam, whatever it is. And America said, we're not going to do it that way. And Dennis Prager, after all these years...

NAWASH: Absolutely.

UYGUR: ... still doesn't get it.

NAWASH: Look, I don't think Prager is a racist. I don't think he's a bigot.

I think he's afraid. I think -- I...

ZAHN: Afraid of...

NAWASH: Afraid of the future.

ZAHN: ... of you guys?

NAWASH: Afraid of the future.

(LAUGHTER)

NAWASH: Afraid of the future. Afraid of the future.

I mean -- and he's not unique. America is changing. It is changing in the backgrounds of the people, in the religion of the people. And now we -- we're in a situation where there's a little. There's low-level anxiety between Muslims and non-Muslims...

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: OK. OK.

NAWASH: ... in this country and outside of the country.

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: But wait. When you're talking about fear, are you...

NAWASH: Yes.

ZAHN: ... saying, in -- in the wake of 9/11...

NAWASH: Sure.

ZAHN: ... that -- that many non-Muslims are willing to make the presumption that -- that -- that the Muslims sitting next to them is not a good Muslim, but a bad Muslim, and may blow up a building?

NAWASH: I think it goes beyond that. It is not just -- it's not just afraid of that. I think they're afraid of the -- of the future of America, what America is changing into.

It is -- it's no longer where 99 percent of the people look the same or have the same religion, and so on. The America of the future is going to be different. It's going to be a multi-religious society. It's going to be a multiracial society.

ROLAND MARTIN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR, "THE CHICAGO DEFENDER": But this isn't new.

NAWASH: And some people are scared of that.

MARTIN: OK, but this isn't new. There are 535 members of Congress, one Muslim. All of a sudden, let's freak out? I mean, that's nonsense.

The fact of the matter is, we have had change in America. We had a woman sworn in as speaker of the House. That is change. We have got African-Americans, more black members of Congress today than ever. That is change.

ZAHN: And what were they sworn in on?

MARTIN: Well -- well, first of all, they -- they chose a Bible. ZAHN: I know it's a photo-op. I understand that.

MARTIN: But, yes -- but -- again, what they chose -- chose to swear on is irrelevant. The Constitution is very clear when it comes to religious freedom.

And what amazes me is that Prager and these...

ZAHN: Once again, he says this is not about religious freedom.

MARTIN: No, it is.

ZAHN: He says that this guy...

MARTIN: Well, no...

ZAHN: ... had a choice to use any book he wanted to. He grants him that right.

MARTIN: Well, but -- but -- well, but yes. But, again, he chose to use the Koran, as opposed to the Bible. It's his faith.

As a Christian, I would be offended if someone told me, Roland, you cannot swear on anything but the Koran.

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: Would you have preferred for Keith Ellison to have been sworn in, in the photo-op portion of it, with a Bible...

MARTIN: No.

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: ... Koran?

MARTIN: No, because, again, if I was elected to Congress, I would swear on the Bible, and I would not allow anybody to tell me, you must swear on something else.

He has the right to choose what he wanted to get sworn in on.

UYGUR: Paula, let's...

ZAHN: What -- what about this broader idea Dennis Prager was making about Keith Ellison was sending a very powerful signal...

UYGUR: See, that -- that's...

ZAHN: ... to other Muslims outside of this country that -- that we're ripe for the Islamicization of America.

UYGUR: See, that's exactly, you know, the -- the second enormous problem with his line of thinking. He equates Islam with terrorists.

MARTIN: Precisely. UYGUR: So, if he says...

MARTIN: Precisely.

UYGUR: ... you know, if you swear on the Koran, and say you're a Muslim, that encourages terrorism. That's crazy talk.

ZAHN: But the truth is, a lot of Americans feel that...

(CROSSTALK)

UYGUR: And they're wrong.

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: ... whether you like it or not.

(CROSSTALK)

UYGUR: Can I make this point?

(CROSSTALK)

NAWASH: And they're nuts, too.

MARTIN: No.

UYGUR: Every single -- every single shooter, school shooter, in America was a Christian white boy. So, should we have a war against Christian white boys? No, that's crazy.

ZAHN: All right.

Do you think Muslims, moderate Muslims, deserve any blame for the kind of hardened attitudes among non-Muslims towards them?

UYGUR: Paula, let me ask you this.

NAWASH: Look...

UYGUR: Do -- do...

ZAHN: I...

UYGUR: Do moderate Christians -- I'm sorry...

(CROSSTALK)

UYGUR: Do moderate Christians deserve blame from Tim -- Timothy McVeigh? Should they be called on the mat?

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: We will come back. You have got 10 seconds.

NAWASH: Look, I think this is part of the overall tension between Muslims and non-Muslims in the world.

Yes, I mean, Americans look at TV. They see bombings, and they see Muslims doing a bunch of stuff. And, in their mind, they are thinking, why aren't moderate Muslims doing something about it? Yes, we have a role, as moderate

Muslims, to stand up and say, hey, these extremists are nuts and so on. And maybe we did fail a little bit. But that doesn't justify what Prager is doing.

And -- and I think this is the problem right now.

ZAHN: All right, Roland Martin, Kamal Nawash, Cenk Uygur, stay right there. We will be checking back with you in a little bit.

Another story we're bringing right into the open tonight is a Louisiana mystery involving politics and death. Did the newly elected black mayor of a mostly white town commit suicide just days before taking office?

Also "Out in the Open": an incredibly nasty fight over plans for a mosque in a Texas town.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: Among the stories of intolerance we're bringing out into the open tonight, people, even Christian preachers, going to shocking lengths to keep mosques out of their neighborhoods.

Tonight, state police in Louisiana are investigating the mysterious death of a man who has just been elected the first black mayor of a small, mostly white town. We're bringing the story "Out in the Open" tonight, because, while the local coroner ruled it a suicide, not everyone is satisfied with that explanation.

Sean Callebs is covering the story, and he joins me now with some of the late details -- Sean.

SEAN CALLEBS, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, Paula, you used the word mystery before going to break. And that is the word people in this area are using.

Behind me, you can just see a handful of people who are out for a candlelight vigil. I want to set to scene here. It was pouring rain this evening, and they had about 220 people out here. It speaks volumes about the way people feel about Gerald Washington. And the way he died is raising a lot of questions in this small town.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

GERALD WASHINGTON, MAYOR OF WESTLAKE, LOUISIANA: Great feeling to be mayor of the town where you live.

CALLEBS (voice-over): Gerald Washington seemed to be top of the world, with everything to live for. He had just been sworn in as the first black mayor of Westlake, Louisiana -- then a shocking call from the sheriff that his family members still don't believe.

The 6'6", 58-year-old Washington had committed suicide by shooting himself in the chest.

GERMAINE BROUSSARD, DAUGHTER OF MAYOR GERALD WASHINGTON: I was in shock. I was upset. I was angry. I was -- just said, there's no way that this was a self-inflicted wound.

CALLEBS: Their father's body was found in a remote area of Westlake. Germaine Broussard and her brother, Jeraski (ph), don't believe the coroner's report that Washington put a revolver to his chest and pulled the trigger. They say the sheriff's investigation was sloppy, and wonder why it apparently took just over four hours to pore over the crime scene, then clean and return his truck to the family, instead of impounding it as evidence.

Coroner Terry Welke says it is difficult for families to accept suicide, but that is where all the evidence points.

TERRY WELKE, CALCASIEU PARISH, LOUISIANA, CORONER: If it was a homicide, there would be more injuries. In other words, he would have fought off. Someone would have tied his hands behind his back, hit him on the back of the head, something of that sort. And the autopsy showed absolutely none of that.

CALLEBS: The sheriff's office isn't talking about the case. After twice meeting with the family, the sheriff handed over all evidence to the Louisiana State Police, which has taken over the investigation.

BROUSSARD: They have shown the -- the sense of urgency that the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office should have shown.

CALLEBS: The state is now performing a second autopsy, something the coroner says is almost unheard of.

And there is something else that is difficult for the family to address. As the first black mayor in an overwhelmingly white community, Washington's children believe he could have been targeted by someone out to get him.

BROUSSARD: And -- and I'm sure that race did have a -- a good deal to do with it. But...

CALLEBS: The state NAACP has asked the U.S. Justice Department to look into Washington's death, but says it was told that the federal agency will wait until the state police investigation has wrapped up, before deciding whether to weigh in.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: So, Sean, we just heard the mayor's family talking about his being targeted. What seems to be missing, though, is any official mention of a motive. What would have been the motive?

CALLEBS: You're exactly right.

The only thing talking, in with the family, and the limited information we could get from investigators, since the investigation just changed hands, people asking about Washington's gambling. His family said he was a lifelong gambler. There are a number of casinos in this area. He said he frequented one, said he gambled for more than 40 years.

But they also point out, he was a supervisor of a large refinery here. He retired early, had paid off his house, had paid off a Harley motorcycle, paid off his cars, had no real expenses. And they say his 401(k) and savings accounts are very strong.

They say that doesn't show the signs of someone who has difficulty gambling or who had run up gambling debts. If that was the case, why didn't he just liquidate what he had and pay those debts off?

ZAHN: And what else does...

CALLEBS: At this point, we have no motive.

ZAHN: Yes. And what else is the autopsy revealing tonight?

CALLEBS: Well, it is called a contact wound.

And the way the coroner explains it, he says, Washington put the gun right here, on his chest, and pulled the trigger. He said, it didn't cause instantaneous death, and he could have lived as long as 10, 15 minutes, had time to walk around, wondered what he did, and then, apparently, sat down and slumped down. And that's the reason there were no other injuries on the body.

The family says, look, he was a mountain of a man, 6'6.5", 240 pounds. They believe he would have fallen, had some kind of injury to his head. And they simply don't believe that he put that gun right there. They're convinced somebody walked up and did it.

ZAHN: Well, when it all becomes clear, bring it back to us.

Sean Callebs, thanks.

The spread of Islam in the United States is also spreading fear and intolerance that needs to be brought into the open - coming up next, a Texas town where's a nasty fight over plans to build a mosque. Opponents are holding pig races on the Muslim day of prayer.

And, in Florida, a Christian preacher is waging his own battle against another mosque.

We will be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: We have two reports tonight on the shocking acts of intolerance against Muslim Americans when they try to build mosques in Christian neighborhoods.

The first one we're bringing "Out in the Open" takes us to a Houston suburb. But what is not clear is whether it's the result of bigotry or just a nasty neighborhood feud.

Ed Lavandera is covering this story for us tonight. Let's watch.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It's like a nice, quiet, lovely neighborhood -- cattle, pigs, donkeys.

ED LAVANDERA, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Suburban sprawl meets country-time flavor in Katy, Texas. That's the city's charm.

But a new and unfamiliar sound can be heard along Baker Road. About 500 Muslim families in the Katy Islamic Association plan to build a mosque on this 11-acre patch of land. Some in Katy are saying, not in my backyard.

LAURA HUGHES, RESIDENT OF KATY, TEXAS: We want to keep our little piece of Americana, our rural suburban area, just the way it is. That's what we want. We don't want commercial development.

LAVANDERA: That's Laura Hughes. She has joined a neighborhood organization trying to stop the development of the mosque behind her home.

HUGHES: So, this is kind of what we're used to back here.

LAVANDERA: Craig Baker lives and runs a granite business on the land right next to where the mosque would be built. His family moved here nearly 200 years ago. He says, the first meeting with his new Muslim neighbors ended badly.

CRAIG BAKER, RESIDENT OF KATY, TEXAS: They told me that -- that I should probably consider packing up and moving out, packing up my business and my family and moving out. And that was a first -- first shot across the bow, I guess you would say.

LAVANDERA: The new landowners deny this, but, then, Baker says, members of the Katy Islamic Association called him a liar. That's when the gloves came off.

(on camera): When did this idea hit you?

BAKER: When they pissed me off.

LAVANDERA (voice-over): Baker decided to retaliate...

(CHEERING)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Go, Timmy (ph)!

LAVANDERA: ... with Friday night pig races, families joining the festivities in support of Baker. Since Muslims don't eat pork, and Friday is the holy day, the pig races are sending an unwelcome message to the mosque.

(on camera): Were you trying to be offensive? BAKER: Probably.

LAVANDERA (voice-over): Baker says he's not bigoted, just angry.

But the Islamic Association is offended.

RAUF DIAB, KATY ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION: My kids go to the same schools, play in the same baseball leagues. And to be subject to this kind of hatred and intimidation that they have tried to put down on us, that's disappointing.

LAVANDERA (on camera): What started off as a squabble between neighbors has tapped into an undercurrent of fear. Some neighbors worry that, when the mosque is built and Muslims move in, that a terrorist could sneak in, too.

BARBARA SIMPSON, RESIDENT OF KATY, TEXAS: Am I saying that this particular group is a terrorist group? No, of course not. I'm not saying that at all. Is there a possibility that that faction will enter? Yes.

LAVANDERA (voice-over): The distrust has apparently spread online, with an anti-mosque Web site, urging Katy residents who oppose its construction to sign a petition and call the FBI to report any suspicious activity.

JUDY SULTAN, RESIDENT OF KATY, TEXAS: People have been talking about this being a breeding ground for al Qaeda, this being a breeding ground for terrorist organizations. I am going to be perfectly honest with you. That is utterly ridiculous.

LAVANDERA: But opponents of the mosque insist, this isn't about religion; it is about protecting property values and controlling traffic.

(on camera): People start talking about, "Oh, we don't want commercial development."

You sure that's not something people are hiding behind?

HUGHES: I think there is some fear of the unknown. And -- and -- and, in saying that, I mean we haven't been able to really get any kind of real, hard factual information from them about what they're going to do.

LAVANDERA (voice-over): Until then, Craig Baker says the pig races will continue on Friday nights, a fitting metaphor, since many here feel the fight is dragging this neighborhood through the mud.

Ed Lavandera, CNN, Katy, Texas.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: And fear of Muslims isn't just out in the open in Texas. Our next stop is in Florida, where a Christian preacher is leading another battle against a proposed mosque. Later, a controversial new sitcom -- can there be anything funny about a TV show called "Little Mosque on the Prairie"?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: Coming up in this half-hour, a sitcom producer who thinks laughter is the best medicine for intolerance. Are you ready for this? Her new show is called "Little Mosque on the Prairie".

Coming up at the top of the hour, a "LARRY KING LIVE" exclusive. James Brown's daughter joins Larry for her first interview since her father's sudden death.

Right now, we're bringing you another story out in the open tonight, about fear and intolerance when American Muslims try to build a mosque in a Christian neighborhood. You might be surprised that a respected Baptist preacher, a man with a law degree who was once an NFL player, launched a campaign against a Mosque in Florida.

Here's Susan Candiotti with more.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

SUSAN CANDIOTTI, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): On a recent Saturday morning...

REV. O'NEAL DOZIER, OPPOSES MOSQUE: Is everybody ready? All righty. OK. Come on, let's go praise the Lord.

CANDIOTTI: Wearing a t-shirt and straw hat, Reverend O'Neal Dozier went casual to canvass his neighborhood with some volunteers.

DOZIER: Do you know a mosque is about to be built in your neighborhood?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Yes, I know that.

DOZIER: Do you think that's a good thing or do you think that's a bad thing?

CANDIOTTI: No opinion at this house, but Reverend Dozier leaves a calling card, pamphlets in comic strip foreign claiming Islam preaches terrorism. The cartoon depicts the World Trade Center in flames.

(on camera): How do you characterize the Islamic faith?

DOZIER: I characterize the Islamic faith as an evil, cruel, dangerous faith.

CANDIOTTI: You have said that Islam is a cult.

DOZIER: Yes, I said that.

CANDIOTTI (voice-over): The preacher is riled up over city-approved plans to build a new mosque in the minister's neighborhood, and he says should be used for low income housing.

DOZIER: And I object to any poor, black neighborhood where people are vulnerable already and are already angry and are already looking for a way or two to strike out, or strike back at America.

CANDIOTTI (on camera): So are you saying that specifically that mosque wants to build in this neighborhood because they're targeting?

DOZIER: Yes, they're targeting the poor -- the poor young blacks.

CANDIOTTI: With an eye toward?

DOZIER: With an eye toward converting them and hopefully making them terrorists.

CANDIOTTI (voice-over): South Florida's Islamic leaders call the minister's comments not only wrong but bigoted.

ATAF ALI, COUNCIL ON AMER. ISLAMIC RELATIONS: Ridiculous. It's ridiculous. You know, you just can't take the actions of a few individuals and use it as a broad brush against millions and millions of people.

CANDIOTTI (on camera): Is it true that you are so worried about your personal safety that you've purchased a nine millimeter handgun?

DOZIER: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I have two.

CANDIOTTI (on camera): He agreed to show us one he kept outside.

The preacher says the enemy is Islamic extremists, not peace loving Muslims. But he still doesn't want a mosque in his neighborhood.

(on camera): Reverend Dozier, are you preaching hate?

DOZIER: No, ma'am, because I'm not a bigot. I love all people. I just don't care about the religion of Islam.

CANDIOTTI (voice-over): Comments like that have cost him dearly. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush kicked him off a panel that screens potential judges.

Recently, the minister called a news conference. With an Islamic spokesman in the audience, Reverend Dozier says he

now wants to work with Muslims, if they'll get rid of, quote, "evil verses in the Koran."

Islamic leaders are perplexed.

ALI: I think he needs help from his community. And I'm hoping that Christians of good will recognizes that this -- this is a lone individual.

CANDIOTTI: Susan Candiotti, CNN, Pompano Beach, Florida. (END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: And let's bring back out tonight's "Out in the Open" panel.

Roland Martin, Kamal Nawash, Cenk Uygur, again, good to have you back with us.

ZAHN: There are some other people in America who feel the way this preacher does. Do you really believe America is at a point where they don't make a distinction between good Muslims and bad Muslims?

UYGUR: I'm afraid they don't. They have -- a new poll came out fairly recently, saying 39 percent of Americans want Muslims to carry I.D. with them so they can -- I mean, that scares me. That reminds me of Germany. And this kind of thinking is ridiculous. It's like saying, "well, OK, let's look at Christianity, and see if it's violent."

You know, we've got World War I. We've got World War II. We've got the Crusade. We've got the Grand -- the Inquisition in Spain. We've got the Holocaust. You want to talk about a violent religion?

And I can bring you out violent verses -- parts of the Bible that will make your head blow up. It's -- and so he's talking about how Muslims are violent? It's ridiculous for a Christian to say that.

ZAHN: But he had a more specific issue about his community. He is very concerned that, if this mosque gets built there, that these young, desperate black men are going to be preyed upon and given a way to thrash back at the community. And you got to -- listen -- a lot of people feel -- and we even heard it in the piece from Texas -- that it will open the doors, potentially, for Islamic extremists to come to town.

NAWASH: Look, at some point we need to be honest with ourselves. This is not about building a mosque. This is the same exact issue as Congressman Ellison, people not wanting him to take the oath on the Koran.

There i's international tension right now between Americans and Muslims. If you go to Muslim world they'll say, "Oh, America's are out to get us. America's trying to destroy us."

If you come to America, a lot of Americans believe that the Muslims are out to get them. I mean, this is a genuine fear. It needs to be discussed. We need to have an honest discussion, but -- to pinpoint situations. "Well, this guy is opposed to a mosque" -- this is not what it's about.

(CROSSTALK)

MARTIN: And what is with his particular pastor? I'm sure he watching. Let me say this. He is probably a sorry example of what a Christian pastor is. Maybe he should call Ralph Douglas (ph), Wesley Houston (ph) or James Meets (ph) in Chicago and learn what a pastor is. because if he is afraid that a mosque is going to attract young black men, that means that his ministry is sorry. That means he's not doing his job in his community. And so what he is doing is fostering hate, sort of hide behind the Bible.

ZAHN: He says the Islam is an evil, cruel, dangerous faith.

MARTIN: And I wonder if he spoke against Eric Rudolph, who set the bomb off in Atlanta at the 1996 Olympics. I wonder who also killed abortion doctors. You have Christians who are extremists. You have Muslims who are extremists. You have Jews who are extremist. And so, you must deal with those people who operate in the extreme. But for him to stand here and talk about this mosque having a negative impact in the community, well, let's talk about the black Muslims, who have taken over public housing complexes and made them much safer. I haven't seen many Christians stand out there and fight for that. So maybe he should focus on his weak ministry, as opposed to Muslim mosques.

ZAHN: How do you decrease this distrust between Muslims and Christians?

UYGUR: Well, I'll tell you...

ZAHN: All over the world.

UYGUR: Paula, you unite them, and you unite them by getting the moderate Christians, the moderate Jews, the moderate Muslims all together and saying, our real enemy isn't Islam. Because if it is, we're in a lot of trouble. That's a billion people we've got to right, right? Our real enemy are the fundamentalists, the extremists. In fact, Reverend Dozier is part of an enemy, because he's a fundamentalist.

MARTIN: Yes, he is. Yes, he is.

UYGUR: He's an extremist. And unfortunately, this administration is part of the enemy, because they're fundamentalist.

They're extremists, and they went and attacked a country that didn't have anything to do with 9/11, and they still haven't gotten Osama bin Laden.

NAWASH: Here is a problem with what they're both saying, is that these attitudes are no longer being held by extremists, neither on the Muslim side nor on the American side. The unfortunate thing is, there are a lot of mainstream people in America who genuinely have these feelings...

MARTIN: Why?

NAWASH: And so to just attack...

MARTIN: Why?

NAWASH: Just to say it's extremism is not enough. We need to address these issues. We need to discuss them.

ZAHN: Had a lot to do with 9/11 out here...

(CROSSTALK)

NAWASH: 9/11 had something to do with it.

MARTIN: They do that because they haven't read, they don't talk to anybody. They're operating on ignorance.

NAWASH: We need to talk, and that's what I'm saying. We need to have a discussion.

ZAHN: Time out. The discussion will continue on the other side. Roland Martin, Kamal Nawash, Cenk Uygur, stay there, because we will move on.

Before that, let's find out what is coming up on "LARRY KING LIVE." Hi, Larry. A really docile hour this evening, huh?

LARRY KING, HOST: Yeah. Hi, Paula. We have got a great show coming up. We've got an exclusive with James Brown's daughter. Her first interview since her legendary dad's death Christmas morning.

Plus, the latest on the race against time to rescue an American sailor adrift in stormy seas hundreds of miles off the South African coast. And we'll get the latest with his daughters and his girlfriend. And then a major discussion on the new leadership in the Congress. All straight ahead at the top of the hour, Paula.

ZAHN: How about that new leadership position for women?

KING: And grandkids.

ZAHN: Yes, a lot of cheering going on on both sides of the aisle about that one. All right, Larry, see you about 14 minutes from now.

KING: You got it.

ZAHN: Right now, we're going to take a quick biz break. The Dow Industrials gained 6 points today. A revival in tech stocks helped boost the Nasdaq by 30 points. The S&P gained almost 2 points.

Oil traders sent prices lower for a second day as gas stockpiles increased, and above-normal temperatures in the Northeast reduced the demand for heating oil. The price of a barrel of crude fell below \$56.

And some retailers are blaming warm weather for lackluster holiday sales, especially when it came to winter clothing. Some big chains are cutting their profit forecasts. One analyst says even Wal-Mart had its worst season ever. I don't think I wore my winter coat yet this year. You guys know, it's been...

(CROSSTALK)

ZAHN: Yes, you have. The realtors say the housing market seems to be stabilizing now, with home sales climbing and mortgage rates steady. Still, some economists say it's too soon to tell if this latest trend will continue.

Little bit earlier on, we showed you how the spread -- how the spread of Islam brings a lot of fear out into the open. Coming up, a sitcom producer who is also finding some humor in all of this. We're going to visit her little mosque in the prairie, coming up next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: A little bit earlier on, we showed you how angry passions come out in the open when some people feel threatened by their Muslim neighbors. But can intolerance like that ever be funny? Well, one Muslim filmmaker says yes, it can, and she actually says she wants to put the fun back into fundamentalism, with a TV sitcom that debuts next Tuesday on Canadian TV. It takes aim at bias against Muslims, but the big question is, will it make people laugh or take offense at a show called "Little Mosque on the Prairie"? Let's see what you think. Here's entertainment correspondent Brooke Anderson.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

BROOKE ANDERSON, CNN ENTERTAINMENT CORRESPONDENT: For North Americans, who have come to view Muslims with suspicion, this sitcom provides a glimpse into a world that will feel both very familiar and very strange.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I've been planning this for months. It's not like I've dropped a bomb on him. If dad thinks it's suicide, so be it. This is Allah's plan for me.

I'm not throwing my life away, I'm moving to the prairies. To run a mosque.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Step away from the bag. You're not going to paradise today.

ANDERSON: It turns out the passenger isn't a terrorist, but an imam on his way to a remote Muslim community. The show finds humor in the all-too-common misunderstandings that come when you take Islam at a rural Canadian location, and mix in universal themes.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What's the charge, flying while Muslim?

ZARQA NAWAZ, CREATOR, "LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE": No one has ever done this before. This is the first time anyone combined comedy with the North American Muslim life experience.

ANDERSON: Zarqa Nawaz, a Canadian of Pakistani origin, created "Little Mosque on the Prairie," drawing from her own experience of being Muslim in a small town.

NAWAZ: It created a lot of fodder for comedy and I thought, wow, you know, why not use this material for a sitcom. ANDERSON: The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation picked up eight episodes, hoping that the series' comedic look at Muslim life will resonate with viewers in a post-9/11 era.

ANDREW WALLENSTEIN, THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER: And there is a lot of curiosity about the Muslim community and how it interacts with the world at large.

ANDERSON: Andrew Wallenstein with "The Hollywood Reporter" thinks it just might gain footing.

WALLENSTEIN: I think a great comedy is a kind of comedy that tips sacred cows. And there's probably no more sacred cow right now than stereotypes in the Muslim community. So it's got a great chance.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Are you part of a sleeper cell?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Don't answer that.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What is your connection to al Qaeda?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: What is your connection to journalism?

ANDERSON: But the show's creator emphasizes the themes in "Little Mosque" aren't specifically Muslim.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Please tell me, I'm a doctor.

NAWAZ: The show deals with relationships between people, between husbands and wives and their kids, between non-Muslims and Muslims. It does a lot of things on a lot of different levels.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: That's the privilege of living in a country with freedom.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Freedom? To do what, fan the flames of hatred?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Isn't it Muslim preachers like yourself who do that, eh? I got news for you, Johnny Jihad!

ANDERSON: Nawaz hopes her efforts will not only entertain, but educate.

NAWAZ: Laughter is the best medicine when it comes to bridging the gaps between people.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I was joking. Muslims around the world are known for their sense of humor.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I did not know that.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: That was another joke.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Oh, oh. What is that? Some kind of signal? ANDERSON: The show's creators have taken into account Islamic religious sensibilities, and believe they have struck enough of a balance to avoid offense.

Brooke Anderson, CNN, Hollywood.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: All right. So, do you find that funny or no laughing matter? And could a show like that ever make it on American TV?

Let's ask our "Out in the Open" panel now, Roland Martin, Kamal Nawash and Cenk Uygur.

What do you guys think?

NAWASH: I think it's hilarious, I think it is good because, you know, most people -- unfortunately, when Muslims come on the air and so on in the United States, usually they don't smile, they're very serious and so on. I think this is great. It shows we are really human beings. When we -- when Muslims get together, we do laugh. We do make fun of ourselves. We do make fun of others. And I think to show that is great.

ZAHN: How do you pierce through that sole stereotype that exists in this country, which is -- among some Americans -- Muslims are bad?

Mubarak: I mean, we do it all the time on our radio show. And I -- nobody makes more suicide bomber jokes than I do. And the reason is, once you make fun of something, people go, "Wait a minute, you're right. That's silly. You know, of course, now all Muslims are suicide bombers. And of course they're not all bad guys, I don't know why I thought that."

And you know, everybody has to break those things. And, you know, in TV, they said a show about Jews in New York will never work until "Seinfeld". They said a black woman can't ever be a talk show host until Oprah. So I mean, I'm going to sell "2.5 Muslims" and "Everybody Loves Muhammed".

MARTIN: And that is the value of entertainment. And we have a history of that. When you look at what Gregory did with comedy, when you look at Richard Pryor, when you look at lots of television shows. But unfortunately, you have people are too -- where they're too P.C. ABC had a reality show where there was a white neighborhood in Austin, Texas, largely white. And they were going to have the neighbors. So it was a black family, a gay family, an Asian family. They say, "Don't air the show because you're going to upset people."

No. Those shows allow you to talk about comedy issues. And so you use entertainment for that effect. So entertainment can be crazy laughter that means nothing, but you can also teach.

ZAHN: Do you really teach through shows like this?

(CROSSTALK) MARTIN: "I think that. I sound like an idiot."

I mean, you do learn from those kind of shows. FX has a show, "Black. White". I think people learn by watching the reality that people went through being painted black, painted white.

ZAHN: It's a very raw experience for the viewer.

NAWASH: There's actually several comedians that are popping up now where Muslims making fun of themselves and talking about their different experiences. And I think this could do more good than all the think tanks in the country put together. I think humor works. It shows that we are just like everyone else. We are typical Americans. I happen to be a Muslim. I happen to be an Arab. I don't have any bombs on me. I like to laugh. I like to do everything...

(CROSSTALK)

NAWASH: ... I like to do everything else every American likes to do.

ZAHN: ... final thought -- final thought beyond laughter is how bad are things in America between Muslims and non-Muslims.

NAWASH: Very bad. Very bad.

UYGUR: I'll tell you what is driving it is the conservative talk show hosts on TV and one radio. And they keep going --- and Virgil Goode, the United States congressman from Virginia coming out saying he's afraid of more Muslims in the country.

But if we have the comedy shows and the talk shows...

(CROSSTALK)

NAWASH: Virgil Goode is a symptom. Virgil Goode is a symptom. We have a war, we have 9/11, we have the Iraq war. All of this is playing together. We have threats of bombings. We have suicide bombings. We have heads being cut off. All that put together is what creates that...

ZAHN: Roland, you final thought?

MARTIN: Very simple. It's harmful because you have Muslims who are American taxpayers, who are hard working. And they are afraid and they're angry and they're hurt because people are looking at them as terrorists when they're trying

to send their kids to college and trying to live the American life and the American dream. That is what is so shameful about this.

ZAHN: Roland Martin, Kamal Nawash, Cenk Uygur, thank you. Really appreciate your time.

In just a minute we're going to catch up with a man who got everyone saying, "You've got mail."

See how dotcom millionaire Steve Case found a new life after work.

We'll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: Welcome back.

You're about to meet an Internet pioneer you'll probably recognize. He saw the future of the web way back in the 1980s. But now, he's turning a new page in his career.

Here's Valerie Morris with tonight's "Life After Work"

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You've got mail.

STEVE CASE, CO-FOUNDER, AOL: I just love building businesses that can change the world.

VALERIE MORRIS, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Steve Case co-founded America Online and eventually spearheaded the megamerger of AOL with Time-Warner, CNN's parent company.

But no matter how large his companies become, it is the creative process which drives Steve Case.

CASE: AOL was 20 year journey and the first ten years, it started with dozens of people. When we merged with Time-Warner, suddenly it was tens of thousands. So it was a whole different scale. I just think I work better and are more effective in that earlier stage, kind of pioneering phase.

MORRIS: Amidst the bursting of the dotcom bubble, AOL-Time-Warner's share price plummeted. Under pressure, Case resigned as chairman of the company nearly four years ago, still defending the merger despite its disastrous consequences for stockholders and the bottom line.

CASE: There's no question strategically the merger was a good idea for both companies. I think the execution was difficult, particularly in the first few years.

MORRIS: Today Case is focusing his bets for innovation on a new challenge, hoping to revamp the health care industry.

CASE: It took 20 years for AOL and other companies to really make the Internet more of mainstream phenomenon. It's probably 20 years to revolutionize health care and make it more consumer-centric.

MORRIS: Case is the principal investor Redi-Climp (ph), a string of small health care facilities set up at high traffic areas like stores. They're staffed by nurse practitioners who provide preventive and treat common medical conditions in sessions averaging 15 minutes. There are no appointments and fees are moderate.

CASE: It's a way it provide a higher level of convenience and a higher level of affordability than presently exists.

MORRIS: And, as Case demonstrated, he is not ready to taste his own medicine.

CASE: It didn't hurt at all.

MORRIS: Valerie Morris, CNN, New York.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: Yes, that's how my children feel when they get their shots.

That wraps it up for all of us here tonight. Tomorrow night, we're bringing out in the open a new controversy over people who adopt babies from China. The Chinese say some of them aren't fit to be parents. But others accuse the Chinese of discriminating against people who are single or overweight or they don't think have thick enough bank accounts. We're going to take a look at all of that for you tomorrow.

In the meantime, that wraps it up for all of us here tonight. Thanks so much for being with us. We'll be back same time, same place tomorrow night. We hope you'll join us then. Have a good rest of the night and LARRY KING LIVE starts right now.

TO ORDER A VIDEO OF THIS TRANSCRIPT, PLEASE CALL 800-CNN-NEWS OR USE OUR SECURE ONLINE ORDER FORM LOCATED AT www.voxant.com

[International Edition](#)

Languages ▼

[CNN TV](#)

[CNN International](#)

[Headline News](#)

[Transcripts](#)

[Advertise with Us](#)

[About Us](#)

SEARCH

THE WEB

CNN.COM

Search


© 2007 Cable News Network.

A Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms](#) under which this service is provided to you.

Read our [privacy guidelines](#). [Contact us](#). [Site Map](#).

 External sites open in new window; not endorsed by CNN.com

 Pay service with live and archived video. [Learn more](#)

 [Download audio news](#) |  [Add RSS headlines](#)