

local Article

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Muslims in America: united by shared ideals

BY ARSALAN BUKHARI
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9/11 started a national conversation about Islam's place in America. Ten years later, that conversation, at times difficult, has reinforced our nation's pluralism. The great lesson is that attempts to undermine America's character through terror and fear are failing. The theme that emerged has been one of resilience.

After our nation was attacked, we came together as a nation — one nation. Locally, members of churches in and near the Northgate neighborhood kept vigil for days outside the Idriss Mosque after an intoxicated man attempted to start a fire in its parking lot. "Together We Build," an interfaith project launched after 9/11, builds homes for the needy to this day.

9/11 happened to us all. First responder Rudi Odeh-Ramadan, and New York City firefighters Kevin James and Hisham Tawfiq were just a few of the many Muslims who responded to the call on that tragic day. Among the nearly 3,000 Americans who died in the attacks were more than 60 Muslims.

American Muslims contribute to our nation's progress as patent-holders on the cutting edge of innovation, as small-business owners creating jobs, as medical doctors saving lives, as information-technology professionals driving our economy, and as school-teachers preparing the next generation. Two Muslims have been elected to the U.S. Congress in the past 10 years. Just this year, three

Muslims ran for city council positions in three separate cities in the Puget Sound region.

About 4,000 Muslims serve in the U.S. armed forces. Cpl. Kareem Sultan of Manahawkin, N.J., made the ultimate sacrifice when he was killed in Iraq Aug. 6, 2007. His remains were buried in Arlington National Cemetery. According to Kareem's father, "He looked at it that he's American and he has a job to do."

Research studies show that American Muslims are part and parcel of the American fabric. An August Pew Research Center study was titled "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism." University of Washington and Harvard researchers released a study in March showing a positive correlation between American Muslims' religiosity and their participation in American politics.

Despite all the evidence that Muslims are productive U.S. citizens and the condemnations of terrorism issued by Muslims worldwide, false associations continue to be made between Islam and violence. This promotion of fear may have contributed to the 10 anti-Muslim hate crimes committed in the Northwest within the past year.

Misguided national-security policies have led to numerous allegations of profiling. Hundreds of Muslim organizations have been monitored without evidence of wrongdoing. In California, an undercover FBI informant recently went public, charging his "han-

dlers" trained him to entrap Muslims as he infiltrated their mosques, homes and businesses. Episodes such as these have left communities feeling betrayed. Relationships between communities and law enforcement must be based on respect and honesty. Positive efforts are being made. The local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) will soon be connecting about 40 mosques across the state with local police departments and facilitating beneficial relationships.

The past 10 years have been a test of our ability to stay united as one nation. Each of us has an important role to play. Teachers can develop compassionate, understanding and well-informed citizens. Elected officials can speak out against divisive rhetoric. Law-enforcement officials should know that Muslim communities stand ready to build partnerships based on respect and trust.

All Americans can work to promote understanding in their communities, write to media to encourage accurate coverage of Muslims and to elected officials to encourage them to stand with their Muslim constituents.

Security, prosperity and freedom are our shared ideals. Unity takes intentional effort, so let us remember not only the horror of Sept. 11, 2001, but how we came together as a nation. Let us continue to help our nation move forward with confidence and resolve. Let us redouble our efforts to unite as one nation.



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