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Several TN county GOPs call for sanctions on Gov. Haslam

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Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam / Kenneth Cummings / File / Gannett Tennessee

Written by Chas Sisk The Tennessean

Rank-and-file Republicans, including some in the party's suburban Nashville stronghold, have condemned Gov. Bill Haslam for policies that include the hiring of gay individuals, Democrats and a Muslim-American lawyer.

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At least two western Tennessee chapters of the Tennessee Republican Party — and possibly as many as eight statewide —

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have passed resolutions saying Haslam has shown “a consistent lack of conservative values” and calling on state party leaders to sanction the governor.

Meanwhile, the Williamson County Republican Party has passed a more narrow resolution that criticizes the governor for hiring a Tennessee-born Muslim to a trade position.

The effort highlights the continued concern about Sharia, or Islamic law, among grass-roots Republicans throughout Tennessee. The resolutions also come as Haslam has been elevated to the state’s top spokesman for Republican candidates, including GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney.

The resolutions were initiated by tea party activists and passed by members at recent county party meetings, county GOP leaders confirmed.

Republicans in Stewart and Carroll counties, rural counties in western Tennessee, passed nearly identical resolutions that say Haslam’s actions “have forced this GOP organization to lose the confidence in our Governor during an election year.”

A Haslam spokesman downplayed the resolutions Monday.

“The governor continues to focus on attracting and growing Tennessee jobs, improving education and making Tennessee the best managed state in the country,” spokesman David Smith said in a statement. “As he visits with people in districts across Tennessee to discuss these issues, he appreciates the broad support he’s receiving from Tennesseans, and a recent poll shows that 79 percent of conservative Republicans approve of the job he’s doing.”

Republicans in Stewart and Carroll counties listed eight grievances. Those include Haslam’s decisions to retain personnel hired by his Democratic predecessor, Gov. Phil Bredesen; to allow openly gay individuals to make policy decisions in the Department of Children’s Services; and to hire Samar Ali, a Muslim lawyer from Tennessee, to serve as the Department of Economic and Community Development’s international director.

The county chapters also criticized the governor for not supporting gun legislation and for refusing to sign a legislative resolution that condemns Agenda 21, a 20-year-old United Nations policy document that some believe is a secret communist plot.

Call for action

They say Haslam’s “policies are worse than the actions of Kent Williams,” the Elizabethton lawmaker who broke from the

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Republican Caucus in 2009 to elect himself speaker in an evenly divided legislature. And they call on the Tennessee Republican Executive Committee, the board that oversees the state party, to take action against the governor.

The chapters do not specify what that action might be, but the executive committee stripped Williams of his Republican Party credentials after his election to the speakership.

The Williamson County Republican Party passed a separate resolution last week that criticizes the governor for hiring a “Sharia complaint finance specialist” at ECD, a reference to Ali and her prior work as a financial adviser to Muslim-owned companies.

Although Ali is not involved in finance in her current role, the Williamson County GOP says Haslam has “elevated and/or afford(ed) preferential political status to Sharia adherents in Tennessee, thereby aiding and abetting the advancement of an ideology and doctrine which is wholly incompatible with the Constitution of the United States and the Tennessee Constitution.”

The Williamson County GOP does not call for any sanction against Haslam.

Group lauds hiring

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition said it supports Haslam’s decision to hire Ali, describing her as the most qualified person for the trade position.

Ali was named one of 13 White House fellows in 2010. Previously, she had been an associate with Hogan Lovells, a prestigious law firm in Washington, D.C., and also clerked for Judge Gilbert S. Merritt of the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals and Edwin Cameron, a high court judge in South Africa.

“It’s a shame that a handful of extremist local politicians don’t respect the freedom of people in America to worship as they choose,” TIRRC spokesman Eben Cathey said.

The Tennessee Equality Project, a gay rights organization, similarly backed Haslam’s hiring policies.

“These attacks are based on fear, ignorance and hatred,” said Chris Sanders, the group’s chairman and president.

The Tennessee Republican Party urged members to remain united in an election year.

“All Republicans should stand together on the core Republican principles that unite us,” Chairman Chris Devaney said. “Anything else is just a distraction.”

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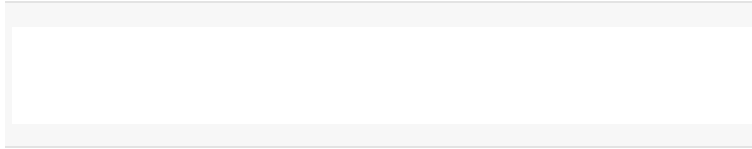
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