

BJC's Walker urges broader scope for hearing on radical Islam

by [Bob Allen](#)

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WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Baptist advocate for religious liberty and the separation of church and state said March 8 that House committee hearings scheduled later this week on radical Islam should be broadened to other faiths.

"The implied suggestion that terrorist threats to the American people result from one religious group is an insult to the millions of peaceful Muslim American citizens," Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, said in a telephone press conference.

Walker joined experts in law enforcement, civil rights and Muslim advocacy to criticize Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, for a hearing scheduled March 10 titled "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response."

Walker, an attorney who is also an ordained Baptist minister, said he knows a little about how it feels to be lumped with religious extremists. After the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a small independent Baptist congregation's right to hold virulently anti-gay pickets near military funerals, Walker said he had to remind the media and friends that Baptists like Martin Luther King, Peter Gomes and Jimmy Carter were more representative of the denomination than Pastor Fred Phelps and mostly family members that comprise the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kan.

Walker said the hearing's narrow focus "will send a further message that Muslims

present a greater threat of terrorism than other religions."

"It would imply that the potential for terrorism from outside of Islam is not significant enough to merit a hearing," he said. "Highlighting only one potential so-called breeding ground for terrorism ignores the reality that other sources of terrorism exist."

"We recognize that religion is sometimes the impetus for acts of terrorism," Walker said. "History is replete with examples of the atrocities that human beings have perpetrated in the name of their particular faith, be it Islam, Christianity or a host of others."

But Walker said a general equating of terrorism with Islam is "both dangerous and disingenuous."

"It is a ploy that plays on widespread misunderstanding of Islam, and it encourages the American people to view extremist outliers in Islam as representative of the entire faith," he said.

He said the hearing would "set a troubling precedent that could lead to a diminution of everyone's religious liberty."