

Democrats name pastor to lead faith outreach

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [November 15, 2011](#) issue

As President Obama gears up his reelection campaign, the Democratic National Committee has tapped a well-connected Washington pastor to lead the party's religious outreach. He is Derrick Harkins, senior pastor of Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, one of Washington's oldest historically black churches. Obama and his family worshiped there shortly before his inauguration.

Harkins is also a board member of the National Association of Evangelicals, a nationwide umbrella group, and Faith in Public Life, a liberal strategy center.

"I have every expectation that people of faith will be a key part of a successful election for Democrats in 2012," Harkins said on October 20. The pastor added that he will attempt to engage religious Americans on immigration reform, Obama's new health-care law and the role of religion in public life.

Joshua DuBois, who currently directs the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, ran religious outreach for Obama's 2008 campaign and helped him gain a larger percentage of supporters among Catholics, Jews, mainline Protestants and evangelicals than did Senator John Kerry's 2004 campaign.

As a federally commissioned officer, DuBois now is barred from some campaign activities, including fund-raising.

Harkins is stepping into a role the DNC left empty during the 2010 midterm

campaign, an absence that some party insiders blamed for large swaths of religious voters turning to the GOP.

Burns Strider, one of those critical voices, immediately praised Harkins's appointment. "We fail in our politics and causes when we fail to dialogue with and build relationships in our faith communities," said Strider, who led faith outreach for Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign. —RNS