

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **October 25, 1999**

Religion versus equality: Can landlords 'discriminate' against unwed couples?

Libertarians say religious freedom trumps anti-bias laws in federal court case

WASHINGTON, DC — A federal court should uphold the right of Americans to refuse to rent apartments to unmarried couples if such behavior violates a landlord's religious beliefs, the Libertarian Party said today.

"For many Americans, there is a *higher* power than government anti-discrimination laws — and it's the word of God," said Steve Dasbach, the party's national director. "Americans should never be put in the position of having to choose between the Bible and some government regulation."

Last week, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco overturned a previous ruling that said laws against housing discrimination violated the religious freedom of two landlords in Anchorage, Alaska. The landlords had declined to rent to unmarried couples because they did not want to "facilitate the sin" of unwed people living together.

A new 11-judge panel will now hear the case, and decide whether sincere religious beliefs can exempt landlords from housing discrimination laws. No date has yet been set for the hearing.

Attorneys general from Alaska, California, Hawaii, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington support the new hearing, arguing that the government's interest in preventing "discrimination" trumps any personal religious beliefs.

The Libertarian Party disagrees, said Dasbach.

"Politicians should not have the right to force religious people to commit a sin in the name of government-mandated equality," he said. "In effect, the politicians are telling religious people: Your belief in the Bible doesn't matter. Your belief in the Ten Commandments doesn't matter. And that's the *real* discrimination here: Politicians are trying to place themselves above people's belief in God."

Besides, noted Dasbach, the government is *also* guilty of the crime of racial bias — since it mandates discrimination via affirmative action programs, racially gerrymandered voting districts, quotas, minority business set-asides, and a host of other actions.

"Politicians think that a belief in government-enforced equality is a proper reason to discriminate, while a belief in God is not," said Dasbach. "Apparently, politicians pray to a higher power — the power to force people to behave in government-approved ways."