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Town tries to 'snob-zone' God by banning prayer meetings in home

Connecticut town's zoning board is attacking religion, say Libertarians

WASHINGTON, DC — A town in Connecticut that has refused to allow a family to hold prayer meetings in its home is improperly using zoning laws to squash fundamental religious liberty, the Libertarian Party charged today.

"No American town should be able to snob-zone God out of existence," said the party's national director, Steve Dasbach. "If zoning laws can be used as an excuse to ban organized prayer in a private home, then the First Amendment's protection of religious liberty doesn't, well, have a prayer."

A few weeks ago, the New Milford, Connecticut Zoning Commission ordered Robert and Mary Murphy to immediately stop holding weekly prayer meetings and Bible studies in their single-family home.

The Murphys had been holding the meetings — which were attended by two dozen or fewer people — since 1995. But the Zoning Commission said it had determined that such gatherings were prohibited under the town's zoning laws, and threatened to take legal action against the Murphys if the meetings did not stop.

This month, the American Center for Law and Justice filed a lawsuit against the Milford town government, charging that the action violated the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments — and infringed on the Murphy's constitutional rights of free speech, religious expression, and freedom of assembly.

However, American families shouldn't need a lawsuit to protect their right to pray in their own homes, said Dasbach.

"In America, you should have the absolute right to pray in your own home, and to invite your neighbors over to share in your prayers, without having to get permission from the local zoning board," he said. "In fact, the local zoning board should have no more control over when and where you pray than they should over which God you pray to and what you believe."

What's the solution? The New Milford Zoning Commission — and similar zoning boards around the country — should be stripped of their power to violate people's religious liberty, said Dasbach.

"No zoning board should have authority to prohibit Americans from practicing their religion in their homes," he said. "The power of local bureaucrats should never be stronger than the power of the U.S. Constitution — or the power of prayer in people's hearts."