

### Muslims Denounce Candidate's Remarks

by John Harris - The Daily Herald

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Congressional candidate Kurt Eckhardt's comments about not trusting Islam drew renewed criticism Friday from Chicago-area Muslims who called a news conference to say such statements have no place in political campaigns.

Ahmed Rehab, communications director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations' Chicago chapter, also invited the Chicago Republican to visit mosques and Muslim schools, "so that he may come to know the true peaceful and compassionate nature of Islam."

Eckhardt, who attended the group's press conference at the Downtown Islamic Center, 231 S. State St., said he would accept that invitation.

But he defended comments he made Monday to the Daily Herald editorial board about what he says is a threat to secular, non-Muslim democracies from fundamentalist Islamic radicals.

"I stand by any comments I made," he said.

He called the publication of his statements, made in response to questions during an on-the-record endorsement interview, "disingenuous reporting."

Eckhardt, who serves as the 48th Ward Republican committeeman, is challenging Democratic **Rep. Jan Schakowsky**

in the Nov. 2 general election in the 9th Congressional District, which extends from Chicago and Evanston to most of Des Plaines.

Rehab read from a prepared statement which said Council on American-Islamic Relations-Chicago believes Eckhardt's comments "were made out of ignorance and not malice."

"Equating Islam with terrorism is not only unacceptable, it is dangerous," Rehab said. "We call

on him to retract his inflammatory comments and to issue an apology."

In a prepared statement of his own, Eckhardt acknowledged most of the world's 1.25 billion Muslims want to live in peace. But he added they must do more to "self regulate their faith by rooting out those who engage, fund and propagate terrorism in the name of Islam."

The Rev. Paul Rutgers, a Presbyterian minister and executive director of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, said Eckhardt's implications about Islam "simply have no basis in reality."

Eckhardt met Monday with the Daily Herald's editorial board. In response to a question about what is the most important thing he wants to do if elected, he said: "I think three things that stand out to me. Most immediately, that of fundamentalist Islamic expansionism."

Later he added, "For years I've been distrustful of Islam," and he said he had no problem with the government placing human monitors in mosques.

On Friday, Eckhardt said that was simply a reply to a reporter's question, and he does not know if the federal government has such plans.

But, he added, "If they need to, why not?"

Asked whether the government should also place monitors in churches, Eckhardt said he would support such a move if Christianity had the same struggle between moderates and radical fundamentalists as Islam does.

**Schakowsky**, an Evanston Democrat, said Eckhardt's comments were "completely out of step with the district he says he wants to represent."

Casting doubts on the Muslim community and saying spying on them in their houses of worship is acceptable behavior "is really shocking and completely unacceptable," she added.