

### Muslims Protest Candidate OK with Spies in Mosques

by Stephanie Zimmermann - The Chicago Sun-Times

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The Republican challenger to **U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky** (D-Ill.) drew heavy criticism Friday from a group of Muslim and interfaith activists for saying that he wouldn't object to the government placing spies inside U.S. mosques.

But Kurt Eckhardt, a former trader at the Chicago Board of Trade and the Republican committeeman in Chicago's 48th Ward, made no apologies for the statement or for saying he is distrustful of the global designs of fundamentalist Muslims.

"I acknowledge that the vast majority of the Islamic population in the world is peace-loving," Eckhardt said. "I'm talking about global ambitions of fundamentalist Islam. I'm very suspicious."

Eckhardt said he made the comments about monitoring U.S. mosques in response to a journalist's question during an editorial board meeting at the suburban Daily Herald newspaper. "I'm not anti-Islam," he said.

But Muslim leaders in Chicago said such comments only fuel anti-Muslim feelings -- sentiment that is often directed at moderate, mainstream people.

Yaser Tabbara, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said he's sickened by terrorist acts -- and upset when mainstream people are blamed.

"Whenever I see something like that [terrorist violence], I get so many feelings as an American. I feel depressed. I feel that these acts are directed against me as a Muslim," Tabbara said.

The Rev. Paul Rutgers, executive director of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan

Chicago and a Presbyterian minister, said Eckhardt's statements "immediately, on their face, cause deep concern."

Rutgers said that while he understood the need for homeland security, he is troubled by the thought of government intrusion into houses of worship. He added that Eckhardt was "arrogant" to tell people of another religion that they need to get their house in order.

**Schakowsky**, who has represented the 9th District since 1999, said the comments were "not only offensive but completely unacceptable."

"I believe he owes them an apology," **Schakowsky** said.