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# NEWS RELEASE

## For Immediate Release

**CONTACT:**  
Sandra M. Poulsen  
(804) 239-1663  
[spoulsen@firstfreedom.org](mailto:spoulsen@firstfreedom.org)

## Is America a “Christian Nation?”

Sunday, April 3, 2011, 3:00-4:30 p.m.

VCU Commons Theater, 907 Floyd Avenue, Richmond, VA

This controversial question will be addressed by a panel of highly accomplished faith leaders, politicians, and educators in a public forum with audience participation. The panelists will also explore the larger issue of American religious identity, its history, and its place in government and public policy. Panelists include:

- [John S. Edwards](#), Virginia State Senator (D-Roanoke)
- [Michael P. Farris](#), Chancellor of Patrick Henry College, and Chairman and General Counsel of the Home School Legal Defense Association
- Jalal Malik, Major, U.S. Army\*, International Affairs Officer and endorsed Islamic Faith Leader (Lay Leader) for the Military, National Capital Region (\*Views expressed are personal and not those of the U.S. Government or the Army)
- [John C. Rankin](#), President, Theological Education Institute (TEI) and the Mars Hill Society of West Simsbury, CT

The audience will be invited to ask questions.

In 2007, during the last presidential campaign, Senator John McCain drew both praise and scorn for suggesting that the United States Constitution established this country as a Christian nation. Two years later at a press conference in Turkey, President Barack Obama casually noted that America was *not* a Christian nation. Other politicians and Christian faith leaders side-step the controversy, but they claim that Christianity has been “unfairly cleansed” from the public schools and the public square. On March 13, 2011, Rick Santorum, an aspiring presidential candidate, said that some Catholic politicians have “divorced faith not just from the public square, but from their own decision-making process.”

These hot-button issues will be examined in a public forum on Sunday, April 3, 2011, 3:00-4:30 p.m. in the Virginia Commonwealth University Student Commons Theater at 907 Floyd Avenue. The event is free and open to the public.

This debate is the fourth in a series of public presentations *Exploring Issues Vital to Religion, Public Policy and the Law*, hosted by a partnership of the First Freedom Center, the Religious Studies Program and L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs of Virginia Commonwealth University, and the University of Richmond School of Law. The purpose of the series is to inform and engage the public in important religion and public-policy issues that are in the headlines nearly every day.

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### **About the First Freedom Center**

The mission of the First Freedom Center is to advance the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. The Center is a politically and religiously neutral 501(c)(3) organization. For more information, visit: [www.firstfreedom.org](http://www.firstfreedom.org).

### **About the VCU Religious Studies Program**

The Religious Studies Program in the School of World Studies is guided by the idea that becoming knowledgeable about humanity's Religious traditions is vital to promoting global understanding, cooperation, compassion, and community. Through academic teaching, scholarship, study abroad programs, and public engagement, Religious Studies faculty and students are building bridges to a socially just and sustainable world. For more information, visit: <http://www.has.vcu.edu/wld/academics/majors/relstudies>.

### **About the VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs**

The Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, one of the largest schools of its kind in the Southeast, provides students with the knowledge, skills and experience necessary for success, whether in public service careers or in advanced study. For more information, visit: <http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/gov>.

### **About the University of Richmond School of Law**

The University of Richmond School of Law educates students to become outstanding lawyers and leaders in their communities. The mission of the School of Law is to serve society and the legal profession by educating law students in the highest traditions of the profession, by contributing to the marketplace of ideas, and by service to the community and nation. For more information, visit: <http://www.law.richmond.edu>.