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Controversy in New Jersey over McGreevey Appointee

New Jersey Governor Jim McGreevey, who was elected to his first term last fall, has stirred a controversy among state lawmakers over his appointment of a non-citizen to head an as-yet-undefined state office of counter-terrorism.

McGreevey appointed Golan Cipel, a former adviser on the governor's 2001 campaign, as his special counsel on homeland security on February 21. However, no official announcement was made of the appointment, and the governor has not made Cipel undergo the routine background check performed by New Jersey state police on candidates for government positions.

Mr. Cipel, according to a prepared statement released by the governor's office, is an Israeli citizen who served as a sailor in the Israeli Defense Forces before becoming a reservist. He remains a lieutenant in the Israeli military reserves. Cipel also previously worked as a television news reporter and as a spokesman for the Israeli Consulate in New York before joining McGreevey's gubernatorial campaign.

However, state lawmakers have criticized the governor for his hiring of Mr. Cipel. According to statements in the Trentonian newspaper, the Republican leader of the state assembly, Paul DiGaetano, questioned Mr. Cipel's qualifications: "When you look at who Pennsylvania and New York have appointed to head their homeland-security efforts, both states chose former FBI agents." Several state senators are asking for Mr. Cipel to come before the State Assembly Homeland Security and State Preparedness Committee to discuss his background and qualifications. They have not yet received a response to the request.

Feingold Corrects Statements on Muslims

Senator Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) today corrected statements attributed to him regarding "Muslim fanatics" in Africa. An article from the February 27 edition of The Hill newspaper titled "U.S. can't ignore terrorism in Africa," begins by suggesting that Feingold is alarmed by "Muslim fanatics" operating on the African continent.

In a letter to the editor sent to the newspaper, Senator Feingold corrects this statement as false, stressing that his concern is combating terrorism and not Islam. "The article begins by suggesting that I am raising an alarm about the threats posed by 'Muslim fanatics' in Africa," said Feingold. "I would never use those words, and I was offended by their use in the article. The Hill's decision to use that terminology is both misguided and dangerous to our struggle against the terrorist threat that confronts us today."

Feingold continues that, "Too often journalists and policy makers alike make the mistake of labeling all terrorists as "Muslim fanatics," implying that our struggle against terrorism represents a struggle against the Islamic faith itself. Just as alarming, such offensive terms suggest that Islam is more likely than other religions to give rise to violence or terrorism. These views undermine our nation's ability to respond effectively to terrorism."