

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Leonard A. Leo, Executive Vice President of the Federalist Society, was reelected Wednesday June 16 as Chairman of the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), for a second year-long term.

On June 15, Felice D. Gaer and William J. Shaw were appointed to the Commission by President Barack Obama. Rev. Shaw is past President of the National Baptist Convention, the largest African American religious organization in the United States, and pastor of White Rock Baptist Church, a position he has held since 1956. This is Rev. Shaw's first term on the Commission. Ms. Gaer, director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee, has served on the Commission since 2001, and was previously appointed on the recommendation of Democratic party leaders in the House of Representatives. This is her first Presidential appointment.

The Commission delves into the human rights "hot spots" of the world where freedom of religion is being obstructed and trampled, and to offer policy solutions to improve conditions in that small but critically important point of intersection of foreign policy, national security, and international religious freedom standards. The Commission issued its 2010 annual report on May 1, calling on the Obama administration to designate 13 nations as countries of particular concern as contemplated under the International Religious Freedom Act.

"It is a privilege to serve as chairman and to work alongside my fellow commissioners in the struggle to guarantee religious freedom for all," said Mr. Leo. "This Commission has accomplished much, but much is left to be done. We will continue to work with Congress and the Executive Branch to ensure that countries around the world treat freedom of religion as a universal human right, and that policies advancing its protection are essential and fully integrated components of U.S. foreign and national security policy."

Mr. Leo was appointed to USCIRF by President George W. Bush in 2007. He was reappointed on the recommendation of Sen. Mitch McConnell on June 10.

"President Obama has done a great service to USCIRF and the cause of international religious freedom by reappointing my friend and colleague Felice Gaer, who has already spent many years fighting for human rights and religious liberty around the world," said Don Argue, who was elected USCIRF Vice Chair. Dr. Argue is past president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and currently Chancellor of Northwest University in Kirkland Washington

Elizabeth H. Prodromou, who was also elected USCIRF Vice Chair said: "USCIRF Commissioners are extremely pleased that President Obama appointed Rev. William Shaw,

whose decades of leadership in the National Baptist Convention and more than 50 years guiding his church will be a welcome addition to the Commission.” Dr. Prodromou is professor of International Relations at Boston University, where she directs the Master’s Program in International Relations and Religion.

Imam Dr. Talal Y. Eid, founder and director of religious affairs at the Islamic Institute of Boston; Dr. Richard D. Land president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; and Ms. Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom of the Hudson Institute continue to serve as USCIRF Commissioners.

Rev. Shaw is replacing Michael Cromartie, who is Vice President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

“We’d also like to thank outgoing Vice Chair Michael Cromartie for his many years of service to the Commission. First appointed to the Commission by President Bush in 2004, Michael served two terms as USCIRF Chair. His wise counsel, leadership and experience will be missed,” said Mr. Leo.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at tcarter@uscirf.gov or (202) 523-3257