



A church steeple rises proudly above the treetops and is screened against the hills in this serene photograph made in Brentwood, Tenn.

Congressmen accuse cults of brainwashing

Newhouse News Service

WASHINGTON — Two congressmen have met with justice department officials to persuade them to examine charges that some religious cults brainwash their members.

Reps. Robert Giaimo, D-Conn., and Leo J. Ryan, D-Calif., met with their counterparts in the legal, psychological and ethical implications of the brainwashing charges that have been made by parents and former cult members.

Robert L. Keuch, deputy assistant attorney general for the criminal division, and several aides represented the justice department at the two-hour meeting last month.

"The meeting was requested because many parents of young adult cult members are convinced that their children have been brought into and kept in these cults against their will," said Giaimo. He described the meeting as informal and informational. The justice department had no comment on the meeting.

Among other participants were Prof. Richard Delgado, University of Washington Law School; Dr. Colin Williams, dean of Yale Divinity School; and Dr. Margaret Simola, a San Francisco psychologist.

Earlier this year, more than 40 lawmakers wrote attorney general Griffin Bell requesting such a meeting. Neither that letter nor Giaimo's statement mentioned any cult by name, but the statement said

charges of brainwashing have been raised "against several seemingly religious cults with which we are all familiar."

Giaimo acknowledged that the issue was a delicate one — that one person's cult is another's religion and what may seem to be brainwashing may be sincere religious conviction.

"Nobody can tell me that this is a complicated and sensitive issue," he continued. "Any parents will think that nothing was accomplished at this meeting, and many civil libertarians will condemn it occurring in the first place."

"I requested this meeting because I am convinced that our federal law enforcement officials must consider this problem in greater detail than they seem to have been doing in the past."

Two cults, deprogrammed last year told Giaimo that it had received letters from parents who claimed their adult children had been brainwashed by religious groups.

According to court cases and newspaper accounts, most of the charges have been lodged against the Unification Church of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, a self-styled prophet who maintains an international brainwashing cult, and to public attention during the Korean War. Generally, it is defined as forcible indoctrination to induce someone to give up basic political, social or religious beliefs and attitudes and to ac-

cept contrasting, regimented ideas. Chinese and North Korean Communists used brainwashing techniques on American prisoners of war.

Giaimo said many parents and friends of cult members are frustrated by what they consider governmental indifference.

"Their frustration has led to such activities as kidnaping and deprogramming," he noted. "While I do not condone these actions, I am concerned about the entire situation, and I hope that justice will not assume there is nothing it can do in response to allegations being raised against the cults."

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