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Bush like Hitler, says first Muslim in Congress

By Toby Harnden in Washington
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America's first Muslim congressman has provoked outrage by apparently comparing President George W Bush to Adolf Hitler and hinting that he might have been responsible for the September 11 attacks.

Addressing a gathering of atheists in his home state of Minnesota, Keith Ellison, a Democrat, compared the 9/11 atrocities to the destruction of the Reichstag, the German parliament, in 1933. This was probably burned down by the Nazis in order to justify Hitler's later seizure of emergency powers.

"It's almost like the Reichstag fire, kind of reminds me of that," Mr Ellison said. "After the Reichstag was burned, they blamed the Communists for it, and it put the leader [Hitler] of that country in a position where he could basically have authority to do whatever he wanted."

To applause from his audience of 300 members of Atheists for Human Rights, Mr Ellison said he would not accuse the Bush administration of planning 9/11 because "you know, that's how they put you in the nut-ball box - dismiss you".

Vice-President Dick Cheney's stance of refusing to answer some questions from Congress was "the very definition of totalitarianism, authoritarianism and dictatorship", he added.

Mr Ellison also raised eyebrows by telling his audience: "You'll always find this Muslim standing up for your right to be atheists all you want."

A convert to Islam who was previously linked to the extremist Nation of Islam, Mr Ellison, 42, has cultivated a moderate image since being elected last November, concentrating on issues such as health and education.

He is an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq. But he angered his own anti-war supporters by voting for a budget bill that aims to end the war over the next 18 months. His followers want an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

After his speech was reported, Mr Ellison said he accepted that Osama bin Laden was responsible for 9/11. But his demagogic comments threaten to plunge him in controversy.

Mark Drake, of the Republican party in Minnesota, said: "To compare the democratically elected leader of the United States of America to Hitler is an absolute moral outrage which trivialises the horrors of Nazi Germany."



Keith Ellison, a convert to Islam, has cultivated a moderate image since being elected last November

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