

# American Hindu Coalition Lays Out Its Agenda

By ELA DUTT

**O**n May 18, the Virginia Republican Party hosted a high profile event at the Trump National Golf Club in Virginia. One of the sponsors of the event was the American Hindu Coalition. It was held to honor White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, and revealed the reach of this relatively new organization.

At the event, AHC members hobnobbed with top GOP movers and shakers and even had a special one-on-one with Spicer. At the reception, Spicer spoke in detail about the domestic policy agenda of President Trump, which according to Sue Ghosh Stricklett, general counsel for American Hindu Coalition, is intended to grow the small business sector. Ghosh, as well as Shekhar Tiwari, a Washington, D.C. area businessman, and other members of AHC, were also present. Spicer spoke about passing a bill to replace Obamacare, which according to Stricklett, is "failing" in Virginia. The Press Secretary also dwelt on the tax reform legislation and specific provisions relating to middle class families.

"The leadership of the American Hindu Coalition, many of whom are small business owners, were very appreciative of the remarks," Stricklett told News India Times. After the speech, the AHC leadership attended a private meeting and a special photo opportunity. "Mr. Spicer was warm, down-to-earth, and offered help to one AHC-team member's inquiry about obtaining a White House press pass to attend Mr. Spicer's famous press briefings," Stricklett recalled.

The AHC has nominated News India Times publisher and Padma Shri recipient Dr. Sudhir Parikh, as an advisor to the organization.

Following are the responses Stricklett gave to questions News India Times put to her regarding the AHC and its goals.

**When did you establish the American Hindu Coalition?**

The American Hindu Coalition (AHC) was officially organized in February 2017.



White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer with Washington, D.C. businessman Shekar Tiwari.

However, the AHC-team came together during the 2016 election. The AHC-team facilitated visits by Lara Trump, President Trump's daughter-in-law, to a Hindu temple in Northern Virginia and Eric Trump, President Trump's son, to a Hindu temple in Orlando, Florida. These events were widely covered by the local and national media and have been credited by the Trump campaign for having turned out large numbers of American Hindu voters for Trump in key swing States such as Virginia and Florida.

**What is the thinking behind this organization and who does it represent? Is it a political organization? How is it different from the existing organizations like Hindu American Foundation and the Republican Hindu Coalition? Does it have links to other organizations, like for example, the American Jewish Coalition?**

The American Hindu Coalition (AHC) is a not-for-profit (IRS 501(c)(4) pending) and nonpartisan organization, which politically advocates for American Hindus with the White House and the US

Congress. AHC represents "Americans" who are "Hindus" and Hindu coalition-sects such as Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. From time-to-time and on an issue-specific basis, AHC will work with like-minded groups such as the Hindu America Foundation and also a number of American Jewish groups.

**What are its links to the Republican Party and ideology? Or to any faction of the Republicans? In a phone conversation with Shekhar Tiwari, he mentioned that President Trump is neither a Democrat nor a Republican, but rather a 'nationalist.' Is that how you see the AHC and why? Does it include any Democrats and Independents?**

The AHC political advocacy platform -- limited government and strong national defense -- were the governing principles of President Ronald Reagan. Campaigning on these same principles, Donald Trump received extraordinary levels of support from Hindu American voters who are Republicans, Democrats and Independents. In fact, our 2016 outreach

to Hindu Americans who are registered Democrats and Independents shows that they voted for Trump because they believed that he shared their priority concerns: a private sector driven economic growth, support for traditional family values, greater public safety and law enforcement, eradicating Islamist terror, and stronger security and trade relations between America and India.

**Do you believe President Trump understands and is familiar with American Hindus and how has that manifested itself?**

We know that the Trump campaign reached out to American Hindus for voter outreach, an unprecedented effort no other Presidential candidate, Republican or Democrat, has ever done. We know that businessman Donald Trump has close friends in the American Hindu community for many years and long before he ran for the Presidency. So, his outreach to American Hindus is not just for political purposes. We know that Donald Trump has a deep understanding and admiration of Hindu enlightenment principles. We were impressed by the fluency of Eric Trump in the Aarti puja at the Hindu temple he visited and Lara Trump's devotion during the temple service. They confirmed to onlookers that these wonderful young people were not there for a political speech, but to participate in a prayer service.

**What issues does American Hindu Coalition plan to take up? What are its priorities?**

In the planning stages are a series of conferences, interactive work-shops, political and media events to engage the American public at large. We will undertake issue-advocacy as well as public discourse with a unique voice and innovative solutions, guided by Hindu enlightenment principles, which not only inspired America's Founding Fathers, but also serve as the underpinning of the Constitution of the United States and American governance.



White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer and his wife Rebecca Miller Spicer in a private meeting with members of the American Hindu Coalition May 18, on the sidelines of a Virginia GOP reception to honor Spicer at the Trump National Golf Course in Virginia.



White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer with Harsh Sethi, president of American Hindu Coalition.