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## Frist gathers allies for filibuster fight

*WIRE REPORTS*

WASHINGTON - Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee is gearing up to end judicial filibusters, joining forces with professional Republican image-makers and prominent Christian organizations comparing Democrats to racial segregationists of the 1960s.

Top Democrats on Friday urged Frist to withdraw from an upcoming telecast organized by Christian conservatives that portrays Democrats as "against people of faith" for blocking President Bush's judicial nominees.

Democrats complained that Frist, a Republican and potential 2008 presidential contender, was improperly injecting religion into a high-stakes political fight.

"God does not take part in partisan politics," said Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada. "I would hope Sen. Frist ... would not participate in this."

Under pressure from within the GOP's conservative political base to counter Democratic PR successes in the fight over the filibuster, Frist is bringing on former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie to help refine the GOP's message.

In addition - and in spite of misgivings from some prominent Republicans about picking a fight over the filibuster - Frist has agreed to appear with prominent Christian conservatives in an April 24 telecast organized by an influential religious conservative organization, the Family Research Council.

The organization's fliers advertising the "Justice Sunday" telecast compare the plight by Christians on behalf of President Bush's judicial nominees to the struggle of minorities against racial bias in the 1960s.

"The filibuster was once abused to protect racial bias, and now it is being used against people of faith," the flier states. It depicts a young man holding a Bible in one hand and a gavel in the other,

with the headline: "He should not have to choose."

People for the American Way, a liberal organization that has long tried to counter the political activism of religious conservatives, issued a statement Friday calling the event "religious McCarthyism." And its president, Ralph Neas, sent a letter to Frist, urging him to withdraw from the event.

"Men and women of deep faith can and do differ politically," Neas said. "But this event is clearly an attempt to manipulate religious faith for political purposes, and that is an outrage."

There was no response from Frist's office.

But People for the American Way has been at the forefront of the campaign to prevent the Republican majority in the Senate from changing the rules to strip the Democratic minority of its power to filibuster judicial nominees.

It has run TV ads featuring the famous scene of Jimmy Stewart filibustering in the movie "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" and comments from "common-sense Republicans" opposing any change in the filibuster rule.

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