

SBC activist pastor wants God to zap Americans United officials

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By Hannah Elliott

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BUENA PARK, Calif. (ABP)—An early candidate for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention has called on Baptists to pray for misfortune to befall employees of a church-state watchdog group.

Wiley Drake, a pastor and radio crusader who spearheaded the SBC boycott of Disney several years ago, issued an Aug. 14 statement calling for “imprecatory prayer” from his supporters against two communications staffers for [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#).

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PHOTO/Greg
Warner)

One day earlier, Drake—who served as [the SBC’s second vice president](#) in 2006-2007—also became the first person publicly announced as a nominee for the SBC presidency. Robert Bosworth, a member of Drake’s church, announced his intention to nominate his pastor for the SBC presidency at the denomination’s next annual meeting, in June in Indianapolis.

Americans United, based in Washington, advocates for a strict interpretation of the Constitution’s ban on government support for religion. The organization asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the tax-exempt status of Drake’s congregation, First Southern Baptist Church of Buena Park, Calif., after Drake used church letterhead and a church-supported radio show to endorse Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Republican presidential candidate.

The federal revenue code prevents churches and other nonprofits organized under certain sections of the law from endorsing political candidates or parties. However, they are allowed to speak out on ballot issues.

“Federal tax law is clear,” Americans United Executive Director Barry Lynn said. “Churches and other nonprofits may not endorse candidates, if they want to keep their tax exemption. I am confident that the vast majority of Americans do not want to see their houses of worship politicized.”

In Drake’s written endorsement, he said that of all the candidates running for president, “Mike Huckabee will listen to God.” Before serving as governor, Huckabee was pastor of several prominent Arkansas Baptist churches and served as president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

“After very serious prayer and consideration, I announce today that I am going to personally endorse Mike Huckabee,” Drake wrote.

“I ask all of my Southern Baptist brothers and sisters to consider getting behind Mike and helping him all you can. First of all, pray and then ask God, ‘What should I do to put feet to my prayers?’ Do what God tells you to do.”

Lynn wrote that Drake may express personal views on political candidates but said federal tax law prohibits such endorsements by religious leaders acting as officials of nonprofit religious groups.

“Use of church letterhead to endorse a candidate for public office appears to violate the provisions of federal tax law that prohibit nonprofit intervention in political campaigns,” Lynn said. “Drake’s endorsement of a candidate on a church-based radio show raises the same concerns.”

In the past, churches that faced similar charges have lost their tax-exempt status, although often the IRS simply warns tax-exempt organizations

against further violations.

The letterhead Drake used for the Huckabee endorsement also lists his SBC vice-presidential office. The fact that he formerly served as an SBC officer also is noted on the press release calling for God's wrath on Americans United.

In the statement, Drake asks supporters to "specifically target" the group's communications director, Joe Conn, and his associate, Jeremy Leaming. Their names usually appear as the return address or contact line on press releases.

Drake's call to arms said Conn and Leaming "are those who lead the attack" on him.

The statement justifies its call to arms by citing statements from Jesus, the Apostle Paul, John Calvin, Martin Luther and the book of Psalms. It quotes extensively from Psalm 109, in which the Psalmist asks God that his enemy's "children be fatherless, and his wife a widow."

With additional reporting by Robert Marus

Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.