

Church-state group wants IRS investigation of Cruz Liberty University speech

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WASHINGTON (BNG)—The head of a watchdog group advocating separation of church and state insists the IRS should investigate whether [Liberty University](#) broke the law when [U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz](#) announced on campus he is running for president.

Barry Lynn of [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#) wrote IRS Commissioner John Koskinen, urging the agency to crack down on laws that forbid tax-exempt nonprofit groups from partisan politics before the 2016 presidential race hits full steam.

Invitation to defy the law

✘ Barry LynnLynn, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, also mentioned [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), a conservative group that openly defies the ban by inviting preachers to endorse candidates from the pulpit. ADF hopes if churches are sued, the rule added to the tax code in 1954 would be declared unconstitutional.

The electioneering prohibition applies to houses of worship and 501(c)(3) charities like Liberty University, a church-related school founded by the late Jerry Falwell.

It is difficult to see the invitation to Cruz, widely interpreted as an attempt to court evangelical voters, “as anything less than an endorsement of his candidacy, notwithstanding the university president’s perfunctory disclaimer to the contrary,” Lynn said.

Cruz a member of FBC Houston

Cruz, a member of [First Baptist Church in Houston](#), became the first major presidential contender officially announced as a candidate. He kicked off his campaign at the school in Lynchburg, Va., March 23.

“Sen. Cruz wanted potential donors and conservative voters to believe that he has the support of thousands of young people at the largest Christian university in the world,” Lynn wrote.

Liberty University has a long history of mingling politics and faith, he added. Americans United previously reported the school to the IRS three times, most recently in 2010.

A reluctant IRS

Liberty University’s decision “to hold what amounted to a campaign rally” for Cruz is “precisely the sort of activity” that should warrant investigation of its tax status, Lynn said. Unwillingness by the IRS in recent years to launch such investigations, he said, “has had the apparent effect of leading Liberty and other tax-exempt entities to believe they can ignore federal law.”

Many Americans don’t want to see nonprofit groups turned into partisan outposts, Lynn asserted.

“Many Americans are concerned over the abuse of tax-exempt status by organizations with partisan political intent,” he wrote. “With our nation approaching a presidential election, the problem of pulpit politicking will only become more acute.”