

Land issues back-to-back apologies for Trayvon Martin comments

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Richard Land

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP)—After initially defending comments accusing black leaders of politicizing the death of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin, the head of Southern Baptists' Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission issued back-to-back apologies regarding statements he made on his radio program.

Richard Land apologized both for offense caused by the remarks and for lifting some of the comments word-for-word from published materials without attributing their source.

"I obviously overestimated the extent of progress that has been made in slaying the racial dragon of our past," Richard Land said in an open letter released through Baptist Press.

"I should have remembered that whenever we have a discussion about

race, the ghosts of our ancestors are in the room with us. And I underestimated the need to be extremely careful in how you address any controversial issue that involves race as a factor.”

The Southern Baptist Convention news service said Land issued an apology after conversations with SBC President Bryant Wright about how many African-Americans and other Christians were taking offense at his remarks.

On his March 31 radio program, he labeled black activists Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton “race hustlers” and accused President Obama of using the tragedy to “gin up the black vote” for his re-election.

“I am grieved that anyone would feel my comments have retarded in any way the Southern Baptists' march toward racial reconciliation, which I have been committed to for the entirety of my ministry, since 1962,” Land said. “I certainly apologize to anyone who was hurt or offended by my remarks.”

Furthermore, Aaron Weaver, a doctoral candidate at Baylor who blogs as The Big Daddy Weave, reported that many of Land’s comments were quoted verbatim from a *Washington Times* column penned by conservative commentator Jeffrey Kuhner.

While a link to Kuhner’s March 29 commentary headlined “Obama foments racial division” appeared as a “story note” on Land’s website, Weaver said Land failed to cite the article during his radio show, leading listeners to mistakenly assume that the words were his own.

Weaver said Land also lifted comments from an *Investor’s Business Daily* editorial without attribution, linking to the editorial without comment in a program note.

“Richard Land’s rant is not his,” Weaver said. “It’s a plagiarized rant.”

Land released a statement apologizing for failure to “provide appropriate

verbal attributions" during the March 31 broadcast. He called it an oversight and said it was not intended to deceive or mislead listeners.

Land was defending his comments as recently as his April 14 radio broadcast, when he called one news story about the backlash slanted and accused a black MSNBC correspondent of racial profiling for implying he would have sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War.

An Associated Press story quoted Land as saying he had no regrets about his remarks and justifying the idea that some people see young black males as threatening because an African-American man is "statistically more likely to do you harm than a white man."

On the same day Baptist Press released his apology, Land told a radio station in Missouri that there's a double standard about mixing politics and religion for the religious left and right, in part because the media doesn't want to criticize blacks.

"If whites criticize blacks - it's OK for Bill Cosby to say things to the black community that if a white person said them, that's racist," Land said on KSGF radio in Springfield, Mo. "It's unfair, but that's the reality."

Land also said in the interview that at first he was troubled by President George W. Bush's faith-based initiatives because Baptists believe in the separation of church and state and are suspicious of government regulation.

He said he changed his mind while attending a summit put together by Sen. Rick Santorum and Rep. J.C. Watts where African-American and Hispanic pastors described the program as "an opportunity to get off the liberal plantation, to get out of the liberal barrio."

"In other words, as one pastor put it, to have people who live in the ZIP code where the problem is get resources to deal with the problem instead

of having to go over to a ZIP code on the other side of town and get approval from some liberal who doesn't understand where we live," Land said.

"These folks are facing a lifeboat situation," Land said. "They looked upon this as sort of their 40 acres and a mule and empowering them as opposed to the liberal establishment, which is one reason the liberal establishment opposed the faith-based initiative."

Land said at the start of his March 31 broadcast segment titled "Trayvon Martin scandal" that what he was about to say would create controversy.

"I've thought about this a lot, and I've decided it's time to talk about this issue," Land said. "I realize it's going to be controversial, but so be it."