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Pastors Stand Off with the IRS

On Pulpit Freedom Sunday September 26, about a hundred pastors intentionally broke the law that prohibits churches as non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing a candidate running for public office. By doing so, the pastors actually hope the IRS would sue them in court.

According to David Barton, founder and chairman of WallBuilders, this drastic action on the part of the pastors was necessary in order to prove that the IRS was violating their First Amendment rights and that the prohibitive law is unconstitutional. Pulpit Freedom Sunday is an annual event that takes place on the last Sunday of September and has been going on for the past 3 years. So far, the IRS has taken no pastor to court. The agency's inaction has been taken by some pastors as proof that their stand on this issue is right.

Barton points out that the church used to be the place of dissemination of public information during the time of the Founding Fathers but this is no longer the case due to the laws of the IRS.

Pulpit Freedom Sunday is a movement that has grown from a handful of pastors 3 years ago and is gaining momentum each year.

Meanwhile a state-church watchdog group, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State has called for the IRS to investigate if a New York church broke the IRS law of prohibition by openly encouraging its congregation members to vote for a Democratic candidate running for governor.

At the Brown Memorial Church in Brooklyn, gubernatorial candidate Andrew Cuomo was allowed to address the congregation on a Sunday. After a few opening spiritual remarks, Cuomo made a 10-minute election pitch. Then the pastor of the church took over and endorsed Cuomo's bid for governor. This incident was reported in the New York Times in a story entitled, "Election Season Puts Politicians in the Pew".

Barry Lynn, Executive Director of American Unite, said the church's actions "would seem to be a clear violation of federal tax law" and pushed for an IRS investigation.

Americans Unite also supported a recent call to ban a national day of prayer, calling it unconstitutional. They joined with the American Civil Liberties Union and Inter-faith Alliance Foundation in calling on the federal court of appeals to uphold the ruling of a lower court to strike out a 1988 statute that calls on the President to declare the first Thursday of May a National Day of Prayer.