



505 5th Ave - Suite 901, Des Moines, IA 50309

www.aclu-ia.org

Iowa ACLU Releases Statement on Pulpit Partisanship and Satellite Voting at Church Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 20, 2010

Contact: 515/243-3988 x 11
Ben Stone, Ex. Dir.

The following can be attributed to Ben Stone, Executive Director:

The ACLU of Iowa is alarmed by two simultaneous developments in our state this political season. While two churches in Ames have permitted the operation of satellite voting centers in their church buildings [during Sunday worship services](#), ministers in other churches around the state have deliberately defied the law which forbids preaching endorsements or condemnations of particular office holders from the pulpit. In particular, these professional clergy have admonished their followers to vote against the Iowa Supreme Court justices on this year's ballot.

Since the 1950s American tax law has restricted organizations that receive tax-deductible charitable donations from using those funds to engage directly in political advocacy. The law is designed to prevent churches and other charitable organizations from using taxpayer-subsidized contributions for partisan political purposes.

These aggressive moves to politicize Iowa churches are deeply troubling. We feel it blurs the line between separation of church and state, especially if it is allowed to continue and expand. Even if the ministers in the two Ames churches do not this year engage in explicit political endorsements, what will happen if church service voting proliferates in the next election? Combining polling places with religious services is an invitation to the abuse of both religion and the civic act of voting.

Meanwhile, the apparent failure of the IRS to provide credible enforcement of our tax laws is creating an unacceptable imbalance in the political marketplace. If religious organizations who deliberately violate the law are to be allowed to redirect their tax-exempt resources into election battles without consequence, then the legal restrictions on non-profits should be explicitly removed, so that those defying the current law are not the only voices being heard in the political marketplace. (NOTE: *Such a change would have no effect on the ACLU, because it has internal rules which strictly forbid the organization from endorsing or opposing candidates, regardless of the tax consequences.*)

###