

# Top Southern Baptist official breaks pledge, endorses Romney

by [David Gibson](#)

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Breaking a longstanding personal pledge, Southern Baptist leader Richard Land has endorsed GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney, saying next week's election is the most important since Abraham Lincoln's win in 1860 and he can no longer stay silent.

"America is at a fork in the road and must choose between a President Barack Obama who wants to remake America in the model of a European welfare state and a Governor Mitt Romney who wants to restore a more economically vibrant and traditionally moral America," Land wrote in an Oct. 26 column in the Christian Post.

Land, who is executive editor of the independent Christian Post and the top public policy spokesman for the SBC, said the "stark and revealing" differences between the Republicans and Democrats on abortion rights and same-sex marriage guided his decision.

"For Christians of traditional religious faith, there cannot be more fundamental issues than the protection of the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death and the defense of marriage as a divinely-ordained institution between one man and one woman," he wrote.

Land's endorsement comes just as Romney's campaign has been trying to cast the candidate in a moderate light by downplaying the Republican's views on abortion and gay rights and saying voters should not expect him to take significant action on those social issues if he is elected.

While Land has been deeply involved in Republican politics for years, he has always vowed never to endorse a particular candidate. In July 2011, when it was reported that he was actively backing Texas Gov. Rick Perry's primary bid for the GOP nomination, Land issued a statement declaring "I do not endorse candidates, and I

have not and will not endorse Gov. Perry or any other candidate for that matter."

Later in 2011, as Land was increasingly linked to Romney's candidacy, the Southern Baptist leader reiterated that "As a matter of policy, I have not endorsed, do not endorse and will not endorse candidates."

Land's reversal comes as conservative Christians are making a strong last-minute push on Romney's behalf. In an unexpected return to the political fray, evangelist Billy Graham has thrown his support behind Romney, and Ralph Reed and his Faith and Freedom Coalition are trying to rally evangelicals in Ohio.

But Land's endorsement – which he said he was making as a private citizen – also comes with significant baggage.

This summer Land announced that he would retire in 2013 as head of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission – an influential public policy post he has held for 25 years – following a series of controversies and ethical missteps.

They included racially-charged comments that Land made on his radio show about the Trayvon Martin shooting case, as well as evidence that he was lifting some of his program scripts from other sources without attribution. The controversies resulted in an official reprimand, the loss of his radio talk show and led to the announcement of his retirement.

But Land also pledged that he would not retire from the culture war, which he called "a titanic spiritual struggle for our nation's soul." —RNS