

Christmas used as political tool, or not: Holiday wishes from the White House

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Conservative Christian activists on the political scene have hoped to capitalize on the success of Manuel Zamorano. The U.S. holiday tree on Capitol Hill was renamed the U.S. Christmas tree this month, though the White House may not have gotten the message in time.

The White House 2005 holiday card, which says, “With best wishes for a holiday season of hope and happiness 2005,” has no religious symbolism other than a quote from the book of Psalms. When First Lady Laura Bush unveiled the Christmas tree November 29 at the White House, she concluded brief remarks with “Happy Holidays.”

Americans United for Separation of Church and State director Barry Lynn asked mockingly about the White House omissions, “Where is Jerry Falwell?” Lynn noted in a news release that Falwell had announced before Halloween that he would sue public schools and government entities that failed to acknowledge the Christian holiday.

Lynn also labeled as “pandering” two pre-Christmas advertisements by conservative backers of Judge Samuel Alito’s nomination to the Supreme Court. The ads present Alito as a defender of religious Christmas displays.

The twin ads, by the Committee for Justice and a Catholic group, Fidelis, point to Alito’s ruling as a federal appeals judge that allowed a nativity and menorah display at City Hall in Jersey City, New Jersey. “Judge Alito ruled against the ACLU’s attempt to scrub away our religious heritage,” says the Fidelis Internet ad, which includes background music featuring “The First Noel.”

The Committee for Justice radio ad, airing in Colorado, West Virginia and Wisconsin, says, “Freedom of religious expression is everyone’s right —and not just during this special season, but all year long.”

Finally, Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative law firm founded by broadcaster Pat Robertson, told the *New York Times* that his office was e-mailing 850,000 supporters a Christmas-themed push for Alito.