

Florida's Harris: Church-state separation is 'lie' Remarks termed "contemptible, arrogant, and wicked"

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Representative Katherine Harris (R., Fla.) has caused a major stir with comments, published in a Southern Baptist state newspaper, suggesting that the separation of church and state is a lie and that failing to elect Christians to public office will cause governments "to legislate sin."

Harris, who rose to national prominence in 2000 when, as Florida secretary of state, she was widely criticized for her role in the Bush-versus-Gore election debacle, has served since 2002 in the U.S. House representing a west-central Florida district.

On August 24, the *Florida Baptist Witness* published articles and interviews with candidates for governor and the U.S. Senate in the state's primary elections September 5. Harris was the front-runner in a three-candidate field for the Republican nomination to challenge incumbent Democratic senator Bill Nelson.

Harris's campaign has been plagued by several major gaffes, hints of scandal and repeated loss of key campaign staffers. For several months, polls suggested that she will lose badly to Nelson in the November general election. Her campaign's problems intensified when secular media outlets around the state reprinted her remarks to the *Witness*.

To a question about why Florida Baptists should care about the primary election, Harris said Christians should try to elect fellow believers to office. "If you are not electing Christians, tried and true, under public scrutiny and pressure, if you're not electing Christians, then in essence you are going to legislate sin," she said.

Referring to the legal principle of church-state separation as "that lie we have been told," Harris said that if Christians are not active in electing godly men and women, "then we are going to have a nation of secular laws."

Two of Harris's primary opponents condemned her remarks, according to the *Orlando Sentinel*. "I'm a Christian, and I'm a Republican, and I don't share her views," said Republican candidate Will McBride, an attorney who is a pastor's son. "There are people of other faiths and backgrounds of outstanding integrity who know how to tell the truth."

Another of her Republican opponents, developer Bill Monroe, called on Harris to quit the race. Singling out her suggestion that non-Christian voters are ignorant of morality when voting, Monroe termed it "contemptible, arrogant and wicked." - *Associated Baptist Press*