

Land criticizes Obama's reference to political 'enemies'

by [Bob Allen](#)

November 1, 2010

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention's top spokesman for moral concerns added his voice to a chorus of conservative bloggers and commentators criticizing President Obama for telling Hispanic voters to "punish your enemies" by getting out to vote.

Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said on his weekly radio program that he was traveling overseas in Spain when he first heard about comments made by Obama Oct. 23 in an interview on the Spanish television network Univision.

"If Latinos sit out the election instead of saying, 'We're going to punish our enemies, and we're going to reward our friends who stand with us on issues that are important to us' -- if they don't see that kind of upsurge in voting in this election -- then I think it's going to be harder," Obama told the Spanish-language radio station. "And that's why I think it's so important that people focus on voting on November 2nd."

Conservative pundits and politicians accused Obama of race-baiting. Broadcaster [Laura Ingraham](#) [called](#) the remark un-presidential and House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) [planned](#) to use the line in a campaign rally.

Land led off the Oct. 30 broadcast of "[Richard Land Live](#)" by describing the president's comment as "dangerous" and "beyond the pale."

"I don't know that President Obama has done anything during the course of his presidency that is as possibly dangerous as what he did in this speech," Land said.

"I don't think that I can remember a single time in my entire lifetime ... when a president of the United States in talking to his fellow Americans has called other Americans enemies and said they need to be punished," he said. "That's raising the stakes to a new level or bringing the discourse to new low. Wow. That's dangerous."

Land said the president's statement gives voters "a window into his mind" that is "not a pretty picture."

"I must tell you I am frankly disturbed that a president of the United States -- in talking to his fellow Americans and in encouraging them to get out and vote, he said you need to get out and punish your enemies," Land said. "It's first of all disturbing on that level. Secondly it's disturbing on the level of this is blatant racial politics. This is the

president who was supposed to bring us a post-racial president, but this is clearly racial politics. He is clearly trying to inflame Hispanic passions against those of other ethnic groups."

Land praised Obama for talking about race in a campaign speech in March 2008, calling it a "very good" and "brave" speech. "But now he's talking about asking Americans to come out and vote and punish other Americans -- not defeat them, not beat them [but] punish their enemies. That's way beyond the pale for an American president, and I'm stunned by it and I'm disappointed by it and my guard is up even more on this president than it was."

Land took a call from one listener who said she had heard of other recent comments by Obama to the effect of it was time to send Republicans "to the back of the bus."

Land said he had heard that comment as well. "It's offensive," he said. "I don't think it's quite as inflammatory as calling on Americans to punish their enemies who are fellow Americans, but can you imagine if a white candidate or white president said Democrats need to go to the back of the bus?"

"It's an unacceptable comment, and the president should know better," Land said. "As a person of color himself he should know better."

The comment Land referenced was an analogy that Obama used in recent fund raisers to say the Republicans were the ones who had driven the car into the ditch.

"And they're saying, 'Excuse me, we want the keys back,'" Obama [said](#) at an Oct. 25 reception in Providence, R.I. "You can't have the keys back. You don't know how to drive!"

Obama went on to say "we can't have special interests sitting shotgun" and that "we've got to have middle-class families up in front."

"We don't mind the Republicans joining us," Obama said to laughter. "They can come for the ride, but they got to sit in back."

Conservatives [including](#)

Fox News commentator Glenn Beck said they interpreted the remark as a veiled reference to days of the segregated South when African-Americans using public transportation could be ordered to move to the "back of the bus" so that the front seats would be reserved for whites.

Obama [repeated](#) the car-keys analogy at a rally Oct. 31 in Chicago, but he dropped the "back seat" line.

Land said leaders in Congress should "call him on the carpet and say, 'Mr. President, you need to apologize for talking to your fellow Americans and telling them that other Americans are their enemies and need to be punished and for telling some Americans they need to go to the back of the bus.'"