

Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore faces investigation for anti-Trump comments

by [Bob Smietana](#) in the [March 25, 2020](#) issue



(RNS/Butch Dill)

The Southern Baptist Convention’s Executive Committee will launch a task force to examine the activities of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the convention’s public policy organization headed by theologian and author Russell Moore.

Southern Baptist leaders fear controversy over Moore could lead to a drop in donations.

Moore, 48, who has been president of the ERLC since 2013, has been an outspoken critic of Donald Trump since the president began campaigning for the White House. In 2016, Moore called Trump “an arrogant huckster” and wrote an essay for the *National Review* citing “Trump’s vitriolic—and often racist and sexist—language

about immigrants, women, the disabled and others.”

The request for an inquiry came from the Cooperative Program Committee, an SBC body that deals with financial giving from churches to the convention’s national ministries.

Mike Stone, chair of the Executive Committee, said in a news conference on February 18 that committee members have heard anecdotal accounts of churches withholding money or reducing giving because of concerns about the ERLC. He said that local church leaders and state Baptist leaders have expressed concerns in private but not on the record. The task force will give them a place to officially lodge their concerns.

Stone added that the Executive Committee does not know if concerns about the ERLC have indeed caused giving to drop. He also said that there is a lot of “fake news” about the convention and about the ERLC and that the task force will try to find the truth.

In early February, Baptist Press, the official news service of the SBC, reported that giving to the Cooperative Program was up about 3 percent from last year. Last year Baptists had given \$64.5 million by the end of January. This year, giving totaled just under \$66.5 million by the same point in the year.

Similar complaints were raised against ERLC in 2017 over Moore’s anti-Trump comments. At that time, Moore met with Frank Page, the former president of the Executive Committee, and the two agreed to work together for the good of the convention.

Stone said the task force is not an attempt to remove Moore from office.

“I am fully aware that we may find, as we did in 2017, that what we’re hearing is not as significant in fact as it is in perception,” Stone said. “And what we want to find is just where the facts would lead us.” —Religion News Service