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WORLDNETDAILY EXCLUSIVE

FAITH UNDER FIRE 'Government persecuting' jailed creation evangelist

Kent Hovind built celebrated anti-evolution ministry, now serving 10-year prison sentence on tax charges

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He was one of America's favorite biblical creation teachers and lecturers – known for debating pro-evolution science professors in the nation's most prestigious secular colleges and universities.

So successful was his ministry, he built a dinosaur theme park in Florida, his videos of his presentations were a delight to thousands, he hosted a radio program and was in demand as a speaker 52 weeks a year.

But now [Kent](#) Hovind, known affectionately as "Dr. Dino," resides in a small federal prison cell in South Carolina – serving a 10-year sentence for failing to collect and pay withholding taxes, obstructing [tax laws](#) and other related charges. His diminutive wife, Jo, the bookkeeper for the Hovinds' [Creation Science Evangelism](#) ministry in Pensacola, was convicted of evading bank-reporting requirements and began serving a one-year sentence in January at a minimum security prison camp in Florida.

Kent Hovind's followers, however, contend he was prosecuted because of his religious convictions – and because he was so effective in exposing what he calls "the big lie of evolution."



Kent Hovind

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This month, Hovind is appealing his case to the U.S. Supreme Court after a final rejection Feb. 25 by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta.

(Story continues below)

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The Hovinds' ministry was launched in 1989 with the aim of winning people to faith in Jesus Christ through debunking evolution and presenting evidence for divine creation. Kent Hovind has offered \$250,000 to anyone offering sufficient proof of Darwinian evolution. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, author of "The God Delusion," has refused to debate Hovind, insisting the biblical creationist's work is not science at all and that science is advanced through systematic inquiry rather than debate.

An evangelical organization with similar aims, Answers in Genesis, has distanced itself from some of Hovind's teachings. An exchange between AIG's Ken Ham and Hovind began in 2003 when AIG published a list of Arguments We Think Creationists Should Not Use. Hovind saw many of his arguments in the list and responded to Ham. Asked about the outcome, Eric Hovind told WND Answers in Genesis "has done a great job of reminding creationists to be accountable for what we teach, and for that I'm grateful."

"Our ministry has taken several strides over the last several years to perfect the arguments," he said. "There are countless ways to prove creation over evolution. It's not a difficult task, and there are plenty of arguments to go around."

In 2001, Hovind opened the biblical creation theme park, Dinosaur Adventure Land. The park and merchandise sales brought in more than \$5 million from 1999 to March 2004, according to records presented at his 2006 trial.



Jo Hovind with a grandson

Hovind argues he took a vow of poverty as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ and, therefore, owns nothing and receives no income. All of his needs are taken care of by the ministry, he explains.

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He says he understood that as a registered 508 non-profit organization, he was not required to withhold taxes, leaving IRS obligations with each worker.

In November 2006, however, Hovind was convicted of failing to collect and pay \$470,000 in withholding taxes, obstructing tax laws, structuring transactions totaling \$430,500 to avoid financial reporting laws, filing a frivolous lawsuit against the IRS, filing an injunction against an IRS agent and threatening investigators and others who cooperated with the investigation.

The "structuring" charges are based on application of laws designed to expose money-laundering by drug traffickers, which require banks to fill out a transaction report if any customer deposits or withdraws more than \$10,000 in one day.

Until 2003, CSE withdrew cash from the bank to compensate [employees](#).

The Hovinds were charged under a law that makes it illegal to evade reporting by dividing up the transactions into amounts less than \$10,000 and using several banks. Each count bears a fine of \$250,000 plus five years in prison.

Over the years, the amount of withdrawal every week or so grew from \$2,000 to about \$9,500. In 2002, the practice stopped, because the Hovinds thought it was too risky to transport so much cash.

Hovind contends he abandoned any practice he discovered was legally questionable. But in the early morning hours of July 13, 2006, about 20 armed government agents arrived on ministry property without notice to arrest the Hovinds. Kent Hovind was taken into custody as he prepared for staff



Entrance to Dinosaur Adventure Land in Pensacola

devotions, while four armed agents surrounded Jo Hovind as she slept. The five-foot tall, 100-pound Mrs. Hovind said she was taken from the house in her nightgown despite pleas to use the bathroom and get dressed.

The office of Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Heldmyer in Pensacola, which prosecuted the case, did not reply to WND's request for an interview.

Supreme Court appeal

Attorney Shawn Perez of Las Vegas, who worked on Hovind's Supreme Court filing, told WND the writ of certiorari, or petition, makes two arguments. One is that the structuring law does not apply, because the Hovinds never deposited or withdrew more than \$10,000 on any one day. The 45 single bank transactions should be charged as one count, not as 45 separate violations of the law, the brief argues. Each transaction was charged as a criminal count, yet none of them, by themselves, constituted a violation of the law, it explains.

The other argument in the Supreme Court filing is that under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the IRS must explain on a 1040 form what it plans to do with the answers it receives and indicate whether the response is voluntary or mandatory.

The chance of the Supreme Court accepting any case is slim, but Perez said he hopes the structuring argument will get the court's attention, because the justices took a hard look at money laundering in the past year.

"His case is really tough because he didn't present a defense (at trial)," Perez said. "You don't leave much room for argument on appeal."

Perez said it's possible Hovind will find out this month if his case has been accepted. But, regardless of the outcome, Hovind's situation won't change anytime soon, because the earliest the appeal could be heard would be 2010.

'We are not tax protesters'

Hovind's son, Eric, asserts his parents and the ministry he now heads are not scofflaws.

"My father says very clearly, if you owe a tax, by law, you should pay it," he told WND. "We are not tax protesters."

But Eric Hovind acknowledges his father has espoused principles and beliefs shared by leading tax resisters.

In 1996, Kent Hovind tried to file for bankruptcy to avoid paying [federal income taxes](#). He told a judge at a hearing he did not believe the United States, the Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Attorney's Office "have jurisdiction in this matter."



Eric Hovind

"I sincerely believe that I am not a person required to file a Federal [Income Tax Return](#)," he said. "This belief is a result of extensive research that I have done."

Asked by the judge where he lived, Hovind replied, "I live in the church of Jesus Christ, which is located all over the world. I have no residence."

Kent Hovind has stated he believes the Bible "teaches us to obey the authority over us."

But he contends the "IRS is not the authority over me any more than the government of Japan is."

Lindsey Springer, the founder of an IRS watchdog group who has advised Hovind, argues Hovind merely insists that the federal government adhere to the Constitution and its own laws, which protect religion and religious entities.

"You're supposed to have a right to exercise your religion in such a way that taxation can't come in and be utilized to destroy it. That's the First Amendment. That's what it means," said Springer, the head of Tulsa-based Bondage Breakers Ministries, which aims to "expose the violations of the written law committed by the Internal Revenue Service."

Eric Hovind told WND his father sent numerous letters to the IRS, asking

exactly which laws apply to a 508 (c) (1) (a) church ministry, but he received no response.

"Now the government would look at that, just to be honest, as probably a tax protester-type stance," he said.

But he argued his father's view is "very simple."

"Do you really have the authority to do what you're doing? You know, if the Mexican government were to come here to Pensacola, a Mexican police officer, and say, I'm going to arrest you. I would say by what authority?"

Kent Hovind's position on taxes was reported to the IRS in the mid-1990s by an official at neighboring Pensacola Christian College, which barred students from any connection to the ministry.

The college's senior vice president, Rebekah Horton, testified in the Hovinds' 2006 trial, "We know the Scriptures do not promote (tax evasion). It's against Scripture teaching."

Horton said it was the college's duty to report Hovind, because she "didn't want to see innocent people get led astray."

Eric Hovind said he can see how "the majority of people would look at my dad and say, 'Hey you're refusing to pay a tax that you owe.' The question is do you owe that tax?"

As an ordained minister, he said, his father "paid no taxes, because he didn't make any money."

"The ministry was set up in a way that it provided for his needs," he said. "Not all his wants and desires, but his needs. He didn't live a lavish lifestyle. And he had zero income."

When Hovind was arrested, he referred questions about his practices to Glen Stoll, director of an Edmonds, Wash.-based firm called Remedies at Law.

Hovind based his approach to taxes on Stoll's formulation of "[corporation soles](#)" and "ministerial trusts," which treated entities such as the Hovinds' as churches, thus eliminating obligations to file federal tax returns and pay federal tax.

Eric Hovind insisted "some people have twisted what [Stoll] does to try to promote tax avoidance schemes, but Glenn Stoll does things right."

Nevertheless, [a federal court in Seattle in 2005 barred Stoll](#) "from promoting a tax-fraud scheme using sham trusts and a corporation to help customers evade federal taxes."

Springer, who has had tax-related legal troubles of his own, said he doesn't agree with all of Stoll's methods, but he called the connection to Hovind a "red herring," because many people were applying Stoll's program."

"Hovind's not the only one," Springer said, "and Glenn Stoll was sued by the Department of Justice and just surrendered to the injunction, just agreed to it. And that, of course, wasn't good in Hovind's favor."

Springer emphasized that Hovind never stated that withholding from workers' pay is unconstitutional.

"He never said to anybody, 'I'm not going to help you do a [currency transaction report] in a bank, I'm not going to sign that, I'm not going to agree to that because I think that's illegal.' Those are not things you're going to find in the record that Kent Hovind did."

Springer conceded that on a radio broadcast, Hovind did pray that God would "smite" the IRS, which was interpreted as a threat.

Springer also said Hovind made a mistake when he didn't acquire a permit to erect a building, based on the argument it was church property.

"The thing he didn't consider was, it's OK to build the building, but the public can't come in," Springer said. "And he got to learn that after the fact. He hadn't thought about it from that perspective."

Little support

Hovind has received virtually no public support from prominent evangelical leaders.

Springer contends the reason, at least in part, is because "they all don't want to be where Hovind is."

"The church will stand up when the coast is clear," he said. "But the church today could never understand how to begin to attain a right under the First Amendment."

Matt Staver, chief counsel of the Florida-based evangelical legal advocacy group Liberty Counsel, told WND he hasn't closely examined the charges but thinks Hovind was led astray by people with wrong ideas.

He said Hovind is somebody who is "honest and wants to do the right thing."

"I hate to see him in this situation, because he had done a tremendous amount of good through his creation [seminars](#) that he did around the country," Staver said. "I think a real strong voice has now been somewhat silenced because of this tax situation that has taken him out of circulation and ultimately hurt his ministry, when in fact I think it could have been avoided if there had been some additional guidance given to him about how to do his tax matters."

Eric Hovind said while disappointing, the lack of support is to be expected.

"If I were in their shoes, I would totally understand," he said. "Here you've got this guy that the media has kind of given this little drive-by snippet of what he looks like, and, OK, what are you going to do?"

But he said the ministry continually receives messages of encouragement from congregations and their pastors, who say they are praying.

"We get letters all the time," he said, "from pastors that say, 'Our entire congregation is praying for you. The Lord be with you.' Amazing support has come from Russian Christians who lived under communism, saying 'We are begging God to let you out to teach people more.'"

Eric Hovind has been asked frequently how supporters can respond. While he sees no possibilities for direct action that would result in his father being freed, he says concerned citizens can urge members of Congress to address the cash-structuring laws, which were originally meant to prosecute drug dealers.

The bigger issue, critics of the government's handling of the Hovind case say, is the tax code, which is so complex it can be used to go after virtually anyone.

Picture 'never corrected'

Eric Hovind contends the government completely misrepresented his parents in the 2006 trial, portraying them as anti-government radicals.

"Because that picture was never corrected, I can understand why the jury came back with a guilty verdict," he said.

"My mom is a simple housewife, a piano teacher who has loved her family," he continued. "But she was definitely painted as this tax-protester woman who would take up arms against the IRS if they came. They were painted as this Waco-type mentality people. And they never got a true perspective of who they were."

He believes Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Heldmyer sought to make them an example.

"As I read back over the transcript of the trial, I look over and over at the way Heldmyer would word things and say things, and I'm going, 'Wow, she just twisted that to make them look like this.' It just makes me frustrated to read that, because of how much manipulating was done to the facts in order to make them look the way they looked to the jury."

In her closing argument, Heldmyer declared, "Nobody likes to pay taxes, but we do because it's the law, and he is not above the law."

Eric Hovind said his mother is "a duck out of water" in prison, even among the Christians there, as a woman who has remained faithful to her husband and "never gone out and partied."

"She wouldn't obviously desire this, but she understands God works everything for good," he said. "We understand that God's hand is sovereign and perfect. And while we don't understand, we will trust his hand. And we will walk by faith, 'OK, God, how do you want to get glory out of me today? I don't get this, I don't understand this, but, OK, you get glory somehow."

Eric Hovind said his father is "very, very anxious to get out" but has remained "amazingly strong" and is doing a lot of writing.

"We were really hoping that the court of appeals would do something," he said. "I guess when you're in prison you hang on to anything. You always have to have something to hang on to."



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