

FLORIDA: Kent Hovind: Baptist evangelist arrested on federal charges

Written by Michael Stewart, Pensacola News Journal
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A Pensacola Baptist pastor and evangelist who owns the defunct Dinosaur Adventure Land in Pensacola was arrested Thursday on 58 federal charges, including failing to pay \$473,818 in employee-related taxes and making threats against investigators.

Of the 58 charges, 44 were filed against Kent Hovind and his wife, Jo, for evading bank reporting requirements as they withdrew \$430,500 from AmSouth Bank between July 20, 2001, and Aug. 9, 2002.

At the couple's first court appearance Thursday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Miles Davis, Kent Hovind professed not to understand why he is being prosecuted. Some 20 supporters were in the courtroom.

"I still don't understand what I'm being charged for and who is charging me," he said.

Kent Hovind, who often calls himself "Dr. Dino," has been sparring with the IRS for at least 17 years on his claims that he is employed by God, receives no income, has no expenses and owns no property.

"The debtor apparently maintains that as a minister of God, everything he owns belongs to God and he is not subject to paying taxes to the United States on money he receives for doing God's work," U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Lewis Killian Jr. wrote when he dismissed a claim from Hovind in 1996.

Hovind, an avowed creationist, has widely publicized his "standing offer" to pay \$250,000 to anyone who can provide scientific evidence of evolution.

"No one has ever observed a dog produce a non-dog," Hovind once wrote in reply to a New York Times article.

In the indictment unsealed Thursday, a grand jury alleges that Kent Hovind failed to pay \$473,818 in federal income, Social Security and Medicare taxes on employees at his Creation

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Science Evangelism/Ministry between March 31, 2001, and Jan. 31, 2004.

As part of the ministry, Hovind operated the Dinosaur Adventure Land at 5800 N. Palafox St., which included rides, a museum and a science center. He also sold literature, videos, CDs and other materials and provided lecture services and live debates for a fee.

The indictment alleges Kent Hovind paid his employees in cash and labeled them “missionaries” to avoid payroll tax and FICA requirements.

On Thursday, a message on the Dinosaur Adventure Land telephone welcomed visitors to the place “where dinosaurs and the Bible meet” and stated that the museum and science center were closed temporarily.

The indictment also says the Hovinds’ made cash withdrawals from AmSouth Bank in a manner that evaded federal requirements for reporting cash transactions.

The withdrawals were for \$9,500 or \$9,600, just below the \$10,000 starting point for reporting cash transactions.

Most of the withdrawals were days apart. For example, the indictment shows three withdrawals of \$9,500 each on July 20, July 23 and July 26 in 2001.

The indictment also charges Kent Hovind with impeding an IRS investigation.

Among the ways he is accused of doing:

- Filing a frivolous lawsuit against the agency demanding damages for criminal trespass.
- Filing an injunction against an IRS special agent.
- Filing false complaints against the IRS for false arrest, excessive use of force and theft.
- Making threats against investigators and those cooperating with the investigation.

Judge Davis released the Hovinds from custody pending their trial, which will be scheduled during their arraignment at 2 p.m. Monday.

Over Kent Hovind’s protests, the judge took away his passport and guns Hovind claimed belonged to his church.

Hovind argued that he needs his passport to continue his evangelism work. He said “thousands and thousands” are waiting to hear him preach in South Africa next month.

But Davis agreed with Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Heldmyer, who argued that “like-minded people” might secret Hovind away if he left the country.

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As for the guns, Davis said “ownership was not the issue.”

Kent Hovind also has had run-ins with state authorities.

In April, Circuit Judge Michael Allen ordered the buildings at Dinosaur Adventure Land closed because Hovind failed to obtain a building permit during the 2002 construction. The outdoor theme park was allowed to stay open.

Members of Creation Science Evangelism said at the time that building permits violated their “deeply held” religious beliefs.

While the building permit case was tied up in a four-year court battle, ownership of the theme park was turned over to Glen Stoll, who works with Hovind on legal issues and is based in Washington.

Last year, the U.S. attorney in Seattle filed a lawsuit against Stoll, charging him with encouraging people to avoid tax payments by claiming to be religious entities, according to news reports.

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