

Perry's Prayer Event Leaders Respond to Critics



AP Images/LM Otero

Texas Gov. Rick Perry isn't the only one getting slammed for his Day of Prayer and Fasting. Some Christian leaders participating in The Response are also getting hammered—or at least questioned—about their participation.

Now, they are answering back.

The Houston Clergy Council, an interfaith coalition of religious leaders, is among the detractors. The group opposes The Response because it believes the prayer meeting violates separation of church and state. The group is also calling the event “non-inclusive” and protests the AFA's involvement.

The Houston Clergy Council wrote on its website: “We ask that Rick Perry leave the ministry to us and refocus his energy on the work of governing our state.”

American Family Association sponsors the Response, a national prayer event planned for Reliant Stadium in Houston on Aug. 6. Donald E. Wildmon, founder and Chairman Emeritus of AFA, said those who oppose the event are wrong.

“The Response is an open event. Anyone who wants to pray to Jesus for a nation in crisis is welcome to attend. Next, The Response is a prayer event, not a political event,” Wildmon says. “No political candidates will be speaking. Finally our critics say The Response violates the separation of church and state. The event will be held at a public stadium which has no connection to a religious body.”

Doug Stringer, founder of Somebody Cares America and president of Turning Point Ministries International, is serving as the

National Church and Ministry Mobilization Coordinator for The Response. When he was asked to serve, he admits he was initially reluctant to join forces with Perry. But after discussing the event with other leaders was satisfied that there was no political agenda.

“I didn’t want to officially be a part of The Response if there was any inkling that this would be anything political or that preaching pontificators would use this as an agenda for their individual denominations or political aspirations,” Stringer says. “But the governor said it’s going to stay pure. You can’t buy your way or influence your way to the platform.”