

Muslims not laughing at businessman's attempt at humor

by [Anne Ruisi](#)

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (RNS) It was all a joke, says Chuck Biddinger, a small business owner in Roebuck, Ala., whose outdoor sign last week sported the phrase "BBQ Pork Restaurant Is Safest No Muslims Inside."

Muslims, however, didn't find it funny.

"I still can't get over it," said Biddinger, who owns Electronic Repair Co., said of the resulting furor, or the idea that anyone would find the sign offensive. "It still blows my mind."

A local television station last week did a story on the sign and posted it online. Once that happened, "it went viral" and was picked up by several newspapers around the world and on websites such as Wonkette.com, Biddinger said.

The phrase was one of hundreds Biddinger has put on his company marquee since 2005, changing it every week to help stir up business, he said.

He gets most of the phrases from joke-oriented websites, but this one came from an e-mail he received -- he said he doesn't remember who sent it.

"It's just a freaking joke," he said, noting that the Muslim reference was on one side of the sign. "I don't want to offend people, but they need to lighten up."

The president of the Birmingham Islamic Society said Muslims don't think it is funny.

"This is just a part of the Islamophobia that's going around the country," Ashfaq Taufique said. "It's very offensive ... Good people in this country wouldn't say it's a joke."

Biddinger said he's gotten just a couple of letters and e-mails criticizing him, but said the controversy hasn't hurt his business. "The few calls I've had have been positive," he said.

Taufique said visitors, including Biddinger, are welcome to visit local mosques to learn more about Muslims and their faith. "We want to reach out to him and others, to use the opportunity to tell what Islam is all about," Taufique said.

For his part, Biddinger said, "I'd be glad to talk to them."