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Virginia Baptists become first  
to fund Fellowship directly

By Greg Warner

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia Baptists voted Nov. 10 to include direct funding for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in their budget, the first state Baptist body to do so.

A new budget procedure adopted by the Baptist General Association of Virginia requires each of the state's 1,540 churches to choose one of three ways to spend the church's out-of-state missions money.

One option is the Fellowship, a two-year-old organization that allows Southern Baptists who are displeased with the current conservative direction of their national denomination to divert their missions money to selected Southern Baptist causes or the Fellowship's own mission efforts.

Another option is the Cooperative Program, the traditional method in which the Southern Baptist Executive Committee divides missions money among about 20 agencies, most of which are now under the control of fundamental-conservatives.

Under the third option, the out-of-state funds are divided equally between the Cooperative Program and a customized plan that supports both SBC causes and non-SBC causes, including many sponsored by the Fellowship.

The out-of-state portion of the Virginia budget represents 35 percent of the \$16.3 million total in 1993, or approximately \$5.7 million. While it is not known how many churches will choose the Fellowship-only option, 74 Virginia churches currently send some money to the Fellowship.

While other state conventions allow churches to designate all or some of their out-of-state missions money for the Fellowship, Virginia is the first state to incorporate Fellowship funding into its regular budget.

The action came during the annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia Nov. 10-11 in Virginia Beach. A total of 4,229 people registered as messengers for the meeting, making it the second largest in Virginia Baptist history.

Messengers also refused to follow the lead of their national convention to expel churches that affirm homosexuality. And they elected a slate of moderate-conservative officers to lead the state body.

The new budget plan was overwhelmingly adopted by messengers but not without some resistance.

"This is another step to move Virginia away from the Southern Baptist Convention and toward a new denomination," said Tommy Taylor of Virginia Beach. Taylor and others complained the Fellowship has all the markings of a new denomination, making it an inappropriate recipient of Virginia Baptist funds.

But Ray Allen, a Blacksburg pastor and member of the budget committee, said the budget plan "is not an endorsement" of the Fellowship but simply a way to give Virginia churches a variety of funding choices.

Messengers defeated several attempts to alter the plan, one of which would have deleted the Fellowship-only option entirely. The other would have applied the SBC-only option to churches that decline to pick one of the three.

Also defeated was a motion to encourage the Fellowship to become a separate, autonomous convention and to force each Virginia church to decide which organization held its allegiance. The proposal lost by a margin of at least four to one.

The new budget plan replaces a previous one which allowed churches two options -- the Cooperative Program and the half-and-half approach of funding SBC and Fellowship causes.

Messengers were told 81 percent of Virginia Baptist churches already are using the half-and-half budget plan, while 11 percent are following the SBC-only budget path.

Under both the old and new budgets, churches can choose to ignore all the options and customize their own distribution plan, allowing them to send their missions money to any of the agencies on an approved list. This year, in a gesture to fundamental-conservatives in the state, two more agencies were added to the list -- Luther Rice Seminary in Atlanta and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn.

A church is considered a "cooperating" congregation, and therefore eligible for participation in the statewide association and representation at the annual meeting, regardless of what distribution plan it chooses.

Reginald McDonough, executive director of the BGAV, told messengers he wanted to "push out the parameters of cooperation by giving churches choices." His other objectives, he said, are to be inclusive of all Virginia Baptist churches, put the local church ahead of the state association, focus on missions, and honor the autonomy of the churches.

Another historic proposal adopted by the state association will allow the BGAV to nominate one or more trustees for the independent agencies it supports financially, such as the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

The "shared ministry" proposal, presented by the denominational relations committee, is designed to broaden BGAV participation in non-BGAV ministries while providing some financial accountability.

Messengers approved a shared-ministry relationship previously negotiated with the Richmond seminary and voted to open negotiations with two other agencies that receive funds from Virginia, the Baptist Joint Committee and Associated Baptist Press.

The new relationship with the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, which required a constitutional amendment, was approved overwhelmingly despite objections from some conservative messengers.

Chip Robertson of Chesapeake said the moderate seminary was established in "rebellion" against the SBC and that staff members deny biblical inerrancy

and condone homosexuality.

Seminary President Thomas Graves said charges that staff members condone homosexuality are "untrue" and "do not belong in this debate."

A separate motion to delete funding for the Richmond seminary from the half-and-half budget option failed.

The issue of homosexuality, which dominated the June meeting of the national Southern Baptist Convention, surfaced several times in the Virginia meeting as well.

Messengers defeated a constitutional amendment that would have excluded from the state association all churches that "act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

Messengers complained the amendment singled out one sin and ignored others, and one messenger suggested the amendment exclude all churches that "encourage their members to sin."

The SBC approved a similar anti-homosexual policy in June after one North Carolina church licensed a homosexual minister and another performed a marriage-like ceremony for a gay couple.

The General Board of the BGAV earlier adopted a resolution which described homosexual behavior as "sinful and unacceptable for Christians" and which discouraged "elevating those who practice it to positions of leadership."

Messengers adopted their own resolution which stopped short of calling homosexual behavior a sin but encouraged churches "to minister redemptively to all persons, including homosexuals and their families."

Some messengers tried to amend the resolution to declare homosexuality to be sinful, bringing the resolution in line with the earlier General Board statement. The amendment failed by a wide margin.

Walter Harrow, a retired school administrator from Deltaville, was elected president with 77 percent of the vote (2,888), defeating retired Air Force general T.C. Pinckney of Alexandria (877), who is the leader of fundamental-conservatives in the state.

Also elected were Edward Freeman of Charlottesville, first vice president, and Margaret Wayland of Danville, second vice president. All three of the elected officers were endorsed by moderate-conservatives.

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Keith Parks says trust made SBC  
vulnerable to 'hostile takeover'

By Tim Tune

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (ABP) -- What has happened in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979 is tantamount to a "hostile takeover," said Keith Parks, who recently left his post as leader of the SBC's foreign missions program.

Parks became president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board in 1979, the same year SBC fundamental-conservatives won control of the denominational structure. He retired Oct. 31 -- three years earlier than planned -- because he said that controversy is now disrupting the SBC's foreign missions efforts.

"Intimidation, reward and punishment are the order of the day," he charged in his first speech since leaving the presidency. "... I can document that."

Parks spoke Nov. 10 to an overflow crowd of more than 1,100 people gathered for a meeting of Texas Baptists Committed, held in conjunction with

the annual session of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in Corpus Christi.

He said trust among Southern Baptists, which has since become a victim in the controversy, was what made the denomination vulnerable. "We didn't build in (constitutional) safeguards to avoid takeover," he said, because it would "violate our trust."

"We have changed from being the people we have been," the 65-year-old Parks said.

When he described those changes in a recent letter to missionaries, Parks was criticized by trustees and others. But his critics didn't deny that there had been a change, Parks said, they only said he shouldn't have spoken out publicly.

"When you reach the point where the truth can't be revealed, I want no part of it," said Parks, who served as a missionary in Indonesia for 13 years.

Southern Baptists have lost spiritual authority, he said, and have become "the laughing stock of the world" because they have not followed through on their commitments.

One commitment that was abandoned by the FMB, say its critics, was the promise of funding for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland. When FMB trustees cut funds for the school last year, they ignited protests from Baptists in Europe, prompted the resignations of several top FMB administrators, and apparently contributed to Parks' decision to retire early.

Since leaving the FMB, he said, he has given much thought, prayer and study of the scriptures to "searching for the bedrock of who I am."

"I have been gratified to find out that my call and commitment...to missions predated my involvement with the Foreign Mission Board, and it continues," he said.

Parks said he hasn't decided whether or not to take the job he has been offered as missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of Southern Baptist moderate-conservatives.

"I have not felt free...to give time and attention to what the Lord wants us to do," Parks said.

Earlier this year, the Fellowship started its own global missions program because, leaders said, the FMB's fundamental-conservative trustees were trying to impose their theology on Baptists overseas -- the same reason cited by Parks for ending his 37-year missions career.

During his 13 years as president, Parks said, trustees of the board and leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention got away from the historic missions focus and philosophy of the denomination.

When he became FMB president, Parks said, "I tried to keep the kind of missions program that Southern Baptists had entrusted to me."

He said that there has been a lack of commitment from recent Southern Baptist presidents to carry on missions as Southern Baptists have traditionally and historically approached it. Parks said that lack of commitment has filtered down to the messengers at Southern Baptist annual meetings.

Only about a third of the messengers who registered for the annual SBC meeting last June attended the foreign missions session.

"When messengers aren't committed to our historical reason for being," he said, "we can't continue as we were. It will take a commitment of leadership to demonstrate that missions is our basic reason for being."

In contrast, Parks said, recent SBC leaders consider theology to be "the center of our cohesiveness."

To get back to historic missions, Parks said, Southern Baptists must

refocus on Jesus, recommit to sharing Christ and re-establish "trust, respect and authentic integrity."

"We must rediscover the joy and excitement of reaching this world for Christ," Parks said. He said that there is more opportunity to do that today than ever.

To reach the world for Christ, he said, Southern Baptists need to return to "the excitement that once characterized us as a people."

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Arkansas Baptists call  
Clinton's views immoral

By Greg Warner

PINE BLUFF, Ark. (ABP) -- Bill Clinton's Baptist brethren in Arkansas want it known that the president-elect "does not represent our views" on the issues of abortion, homosexual rights and distribution of contraceptives in schools.

Arkansas Baptists attending their annual meeting in Pine Bluff adopted a resolution Nov. 11 criticizing Clinton's stance on those issues, which they said "contradicts the moral and spiritual position" of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and its national body, the 15-million-member Southern Baptist Convention.

Clinton is a Southern Baptist and member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark. But his positions on those and other social issues were criticized by Southern Baptist leaders during his campaign for president.

The resolution, which was adopted overwhelmingly in a voice vote, denounces what it describes as Clinton's support for "continued legalization of abortion on demand, (the) homosexual rights movement, (and) distribution of contraceptives in public schools."

Clinton officials in Little Rock and Washington were not available for a reaction to the resolution. However, previous statements from Clinton indicate he supports the right to abortion with some restrictions but not abortion on demand. He reportedly has called for legal protection for homosexuals and has supported local school choice for distributing contraceptives.

Arkansas was not the only state in which Baptists registered opposition to Clinton's social views.

Florida Baptists voted to ask Clinton to renounce his "stated intentions to promote abortion on demand and minority status for homosexuals." Baptists in Louisiana voted to send a letter to Clinton asking him to "prayerfully reconsider his views" on abortion and family values.

During their traditional fall meetings, Baptists in Oklahoma, North Carolina, Virginia and other states vowed to pray for Clinton.

Meanwhile, the head of Southern Baptists' ethics agency called on Clinton to reconsider his positions on abortion and homosexual rights.

In a Nov. 13 letter to Clinton, Richard Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission, said most Southern Baptists are opposed to abortion and consider homosexuality to be sexual immorality. Concerning homosexual rights, Land warned, "We fear the wrath of God on our nation if our government pursues this path."

The Arkansas resolution encouraged Baptists in the state to pray for Clinton and to encourage him to "endorse the biblical principles of the sanctity of human life, the biblical plea for purity, the biblical precepts of sacred morality."

The resolution, as well as others against abortion, homosexual rights and "the humanistic 'safe sex' message," were to be sent to Clinton and Arkansas' elected officials in Washington and Little Rock.

Although presented by Arkansas Baptists' resolutions committee, the statement was submitted by an individual and not changed substantially before being sent to convention messengers for approval.

The characterization of Clinton's views contained in the resolution mirrors the language used in a voter's guide distributed by the Christian Coalition, a conservative organization founded by televangelist and former Republican presidential candidate Pat Robertson. However, no direct connection between the voter's guide and the resolution could be immediately established.

Rex Horne, Clinton's Little Rock pastor, spoke against the value of the resolution during debate. "If resolutions could change the world, Southern Baptists would have changed the world long ago," he said. "We need to give ourselves to intercession rather than resolution."

Arkansas Baptists did pass another resolution urging prayer for Clinton and other elected leaders. But participants said the statement directed at Clinton was necessary. "We need to stand for life and against homosexuality and let the world know we stand for the Lord," said Ron Brown of Cotter.

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Falwell threatens to "declare war"  
with Clinton over abortion, gays

By Lindsay Bergstrom

FORT MYERS, Fla. (ABP) -- Jerry Falwell says he will give President-elect Bill Clinton 100 days to change his views on abortion and homosexuality before "declaring war" on his administration and perhaps reviving the Moral Majority.

In a politically charged speech to Florida Baptist pastors Nov. 9, Falwell said America is on the verge of moral collapse. As evidence he cited Clinton's stance on a woman's right to choose abortion and his views on equal rights for homosexuals -- both of which Southern Baptists have been vocal in opposing.

"I shudder to think that Mr. Clinton's first order of business is, as he said, to allow homosexuals in the military," said Falwell. "It's bad enough to fight that crowd in front of you without looking around wondering where they are."

Falwell later told reporters he will reserve judgment on Clinton's presidency until after he takes office. He added he expects Clinton to "self-destruct" and be a one-term president.

The Moral Majority, founded by Falwell in 1979, promoted his conservative social views as part of the Religious Right movement of the 1980s. Falwell disbanded the group in 1989.

Although an independent Baptist, Falwell is a frequent speaker at Southern Baptist meetings and follows events in the denomination closely.

He told the Florida pastors that violating God's principles "brings a nation to shame. And I would predict that we are on the threshold of national and international shame."

It took only one generation to realize moral decline in America, Falwell said, but the trend also could be reversed in one generation.

He cited statistics on divorce, drug use, pregnancy, abortion and single parenting to support his view that America is in moral decline. Contributing

to the problem, he said, are Planned Parenthood, network television, the movie industry, higher education and the National Organization of Women, or as he dubbed the organization, "the National Organization of Witches."

He also spoke against homosexuals, population control, government-run day cares and school textbooks that denounce religion.

"Now the lines are drawn," he said. "We have the believers of the Judeo-Christian ethic on one side, and the unbelievers on the other."

Falwell said the believers are those who are committed to family values, lifelong marriage, sexual fidelity in marriage, that homosexuality is a moral perversion, and that abortion is the murder of unborn children.

The unbelievers, he said, are those whom "the president and vice president refer to as cultural elites." These include, he said, the television networks, the movie industry, many public universities and private colleges who are promoting a philosophy of "doing what is right in their own eyes."

He urged the pastors not to try to control society, but to influence society through their preaching. "We can rebuild it from the bottom up," Falwell said.

"Our job is to raise up a remnant of society that knows right from wrong," Falwell contended.

He cited the change in the Southern Baptist Convention in the past 15 years as an example of how God could change America. Getting the job done, he said, will require men and women who have "an authoritative Bible, a set of principles to live by, and an order of business by which we can recover our nation."

He suggested government should help families by offering a large tax deduction for each child so mothers can stay home, offering vouchers for school choice, and allowing schools to teach family values.

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HIV-positive children challenge  
churches' compassion, wisdom

By Ken Camp

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- When AIDS comes to church through nursery doors, how does a congregation respond?

When the question first arose in the mid-1980s, it caught most churches off-guard. But increasingly, some Baptist churches are adopting responsible and compassionate policies regarding ministry to HIV-positive infants and children.

The issue captured national attention recently when Scott Allen, formerly a consultant with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, revealed his family's story.

Allen, son of former Southern Baptist Convention president Jimmy Allen, learned in 1985 that his wife, Lydia, had contracted the AIDS virus from a blood transfusion during her first pregnancy and had passed it along to their two young sons, Bryan and Matt.

When he learned about the tainted transfusion, Allen told the pastor of the Disciples of Christ church in Colorado where he served on staff. Allen said he promptly was asked to leave his job. The family then returned home to Fort Worth, Texas, where seven-month-old Bryan died.

In the months that followed, Allen approached several churches to ask if Matt and the rest of the family could attend Sunday school and worship services, but they were rebuffed.

Lydia died last February at age 38. Matt is 10 years old, attends school in Dallas and is responding to AZT treatments. Allen works as consultant on an AIDS-related project at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. He has left the ministry and the institutional church.

Among the congregations the Allens approached in the mid-1980s was Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The church's inadequate response to the family deeply troubled Jan Hill, Broadway's minister of childhood education, and led to the adoption in August of a new infectious-disease policy for the preschool and children's divisions.

"The new policy really was more than three years in the making," Hill said. "It grew in part out of personal struggles with the Allen situation. It led us to relook at how we were approaching the whole issue."

After nearly two years of on-again, off-again discussions, an ad hoc committee consisting of six church members -- all parents -- began meeting last February.

The committee included persons with expertise in legal matters, health care and community ministry. They conducted seven months of research followed by intensive discussions before drafting the document.

Although the committee originally was assigned to develop policies and procedures specifically for AIDS-related cases, members chose to broaden the focus to include other issues concerning hygiene and infectious disease control.

The finished document -- approved by Broadway's children's ministries committee Aug. 19 -- included detailed policy statements on infectious diseases, hygiene and diaper changing, as well as specific procedures regarding room cleaning, blood spills and diaper changing.

"Under the new policy, we will accept all children," Hill said, adding that parents are asked to disclose whether any child is HIV-positive.

"We will deal with each situation on a case-by-case basis, permitting access to confidential information only on a need-to-know basis."

The new policy provides for the creation of a committee to review individual cases of infectious disease in a highly confidential manner, to make recommendations to the minister of childhood education concerning additional precautions or staff requirements, and to conduct periodic reviews of the child's status and of involved classrooms.

The policy also stipulates that workers be instructed in universal precautions and procedures for general hygiene and that they are expected to follow them.

Under universal precautions -- common in hospitals and other health-care facilities -- all blood is assumed to be potentially infected, and protective barriers such as latex gloves are used. Blood spills are expected to be cleaned up immediately with a solution of one part bleach to 10 parts water.

The document recently adopted at Broadway is similar in both language and intent to policy statements approved at other churches in recent years, although some churches have approached the issue in other ways.

Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, took a slightly different approach in adopting its health-care policy. The statement, approved by the church's education committee Oct. 25, is a churchwide policy rather than exclusively the province of the children's ministry.

The policy establishes a standing health-care committee charged with establishing guidelines for ministering to persons with infectious diseases, as well as consulting staff on individual cases as needed.

"No one will be turned away," said Reby Lawler, minister of childhood education at Trinity Baptist Church. "We want to minister to all involved, including dealing with the family."

She noted the creation of the committee grew out of practical concerns,

since the church already had ministered to three persons known to be HIV-positive -- two single adults and one child.

At First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, the infectious disease policy takes a two-pronged approach: protection of both an infected child and other children, and ministry to an infected child.

In addition to sections detailing the treatment of blood spills, use of disposable gloves and general hygiene, the policy also deals with issues of confidentiality and the risks faced by a child with lowered resistance to disease.

"We want to respond in a logical and compassionate way -- to face this issue with as much caring and with as much firmness as any situation," said Gay Lyn Cagle, preschool minister at First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls. "We want to do all we can to protect all concerned."

The policy allows the director of preschool ministries to consult the parents of an infected child and an attending physician concerning the removal of that child from other children.

"We want to provide, if possible, on-site facilities for ministry to the child and family," Cagle said. "If that is not possible, we will work at doing it on an in-home basis."

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AIDS-related resources  
available to churches

By Ken Camp

(ABP) -- Churches desiring information on AIDS-related health concerns or needing help developing health policies for their children's ministries can turn to several sources.

-- Numerous publications are available from the National AIDS Information Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 6003, Rockville, MD 20850, and from the Centers for Disease Control, National AIDS Clearinghouse at (800) 458-5231.

-- "The AIDS Epidemic: Developing a Policy for Your Sunday School or Church" is a brochure produced by two Christian physicians, John Dietrich and Glenn Wood. Copies are available in packages of 12 for \$12 from Multnomah Press, 10209 SE Division St., Portland OR 97266. The physicians also will provide free consultation to churches. Contact Dietrich at (702) 329-0333 and Wood at (512) 443-3883.

-- The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission has a packet of materials, "AIDS: Facing Facts, Confronting Fears," available for \$3; a set of four brochures produced by the Southern Baptist CLC available for 25 cents each; and specialized information on file, available upon request. Contact the Christian Life Commission, 333 N. Washington, Dallas 75246-1798.

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Church-state specialists hope  
RFRA on track for early passage

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Church-state specialists said they hope the Religious Freedom Restoration Act would be included in President-elect Bill Clinton's priorities for his first 100 days in office.

RFRA, a bill designed to restore a high level of protection for

religious practice, died in the waning days of the 102nd Congress.

Supporters of the bill, backed by a 54-member coalition of religious and civil-liberties groups, simply ran out of time as Congress scurried to adjourn, a Baptist church-state attorney told a group of sociologists of religion Nov. 6.

Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said the momentum gained in the 102nd Congress and Clinton's support could place RFRA on a fast track for early passage in the next Congress.

Forest Montgomery, counsel for the National Association of Evangelicals, agreed. He quoted from a recent speech given by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and an RFRA co-sponsor, saying that the bill will be high on the agenda of the 103rd Congress.

According to Montgomery, Kennedy predicted that with the support from the president-elect, religious groups and political leaders, RFRA will become the law of the land.

Thomas and Montgomery participated on a panel that addressed religion and politics at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious Research Association in Washington, D.C. James Dunn, BJC executive director, moderated the panel discussion during a plenary session.

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-- By Pam Parry

Non-profit groups propose reform  
to keep preferred mail rates

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Reform aimed at retaining preferred postal rates for non-profit mailers -- including state Baptist newspapers -- has been proposed by two non-profit groups.

The Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers and the Nonprofit Mailers Federation have drafted a set of principles for reforming the way preferred postal rates are established. The existing system has left non-profit mailers vulnerable in recent years.

Since 1970, Congress has set aside an annual mail subsidy, known as revenue foregone, that reimburses the U.S. Postal Service for the non-profit mailers' share of overhead expenses. Non-profit rates reflect only the cost of handling that class of mail.

But in recent years, budget shortfalls and growing costs have made it more difficult for Congress to fully fund revenue foregone, which has led to increased postal rates for Baptist publications.

While most non-profit mailers will not receive a rate increase in fiscal year 1993, next year and beyond could be foreboding, said Neal Denton, executive director of the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers.

In fiscal year 1994, Congress will need to appropriate \$612 million -- \$400 million more than appropriated in the current year -- to maintain current rates.

Eventually Congress will stop funding revenue foregone, Denton predicted, and the goal of reform is to retain the preferred rate under a different system.

The proposal calls for reform in fiscal year 1994 based upon six principles:

-- Preferred rates should continue to reflect all attributable costs of handling non-profit mailings.

-- The allocation of overhead costs to preferred-rate mailers should be

expressly limited. Non-profit mailers should not have to pay as much overhead as commercial mailers, Denton said because they offer social and public benefits and because non-profit mail is more economical to handle.

-- If a cap is set, the share of overhead costs assigned to the preferred-rate mail should be determined by the Postal Rate Commission.

-- Congress should continue to appropriate funds to the postal service to cover the full cost of traditionally free mailings plus overhead costs assigned to preferred-rate mailers.

-- Eligibility for preferred rates should be restricted to mailing activities that contribute to the achievement of the mailer's mission, so that non-profit catalogs would not receive the preferred rate.

-- Preferred-rate mailers should assume a reasonable share of transitional costs related to the adoption of these reforms.

The reform principles have been forwarded to representatives of the commercial mailing industry and the U.S. Postal Service, but Denton said he could not predict the outcome.

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-- By Pam Parry

EDITOR'S NOTE: There was only one ABP issue this week.

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