
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Europeans to move
Ruschlikon seminary

KISHINEV, Moldova (ABP) -- The council of the European Baptist Federation has approved a comprehensive plan for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, that will move the seminary from the campus it has occupied throughout its 44-year history.

The EBF council, which represents Baptist bodies throughout the continent, voted unanimously to move the seminary to an undetermined site outside Switzerland. Two of the locations under consideration are Berlin, Germany, and Prague, in the Czech Republic.

Meeting Sept. 20-24 in Kishinev, Moldova, the council adopted nearly all points of a plan recommended by a joint committee made up of EBF and seminary leaders.

The council's decision will anchor the seminary's academic program firmly within the European Baptist theological education system. The seminary to maintain its traditional character as a center for multicultural and international education emphasizing ministerial and missionary formation.

"We are very pleased with these decisions," said seminary president John David Hopper. "Although we remain emotionally attached to the Ruschlikon campus, we are happy to carry the excellent educational tradition of BTS into a bright, new future.

"We will maintain the international nature and the mission purpose which has characterized this seminary," Hopper added. "Our new location should relieve the financial and student visa problems of the past few years and establish a strategy for the coming decades."

The Ruschlikon seminary, now owned by the EBF, has been in financial distress since 1991, when the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, which founded the school, withdrew all funding because of alleged liberalism. The seminary property, on the shores of Lake Zurich, is valued in excess of \$17 million.

The agreement authorizes the sale or lease of the Ruschlikon property and the relocation of the seminary in a less expensive country. This action

should permit property assets to be applied to endowments for scholarships and property development.

The council discussed two major advantages of moving to a new site -- salaries and other expenditures should be lower than in Switzerland, and visas for student families should be easier to obtain. Swiss authorities have consistently refused residence visas for student families since 1990.

Mark Boscher, new seminary administrator, pointed out that the deficits of the past several years required borrowing money against the property.

"Income has risen in the past several months," said Boscher, "but it is essential that we take steps to end deficit financing."

The approved plan encourages partnerships with the emerging theological schools in Eastern Europe and with the existing Baptist schools of Western Europe. Seminary courses will be redesigned to link with those of other European Baptist schools.

After completing theological studies at national schools, students may enroll in the seminary and be able to advance their academic level to university status. They will then be prepared for doctoral studies at various European universities.

The new plan guarantees the continuation of Ruschlikon's satellite institutes: the Summer Institute for Theological Education, the International Baptist Lay Academy, the Institute for Mission and Evangelism, and the Institute for Baptist and Anabaptist Studies.

The council empowered its executive committee to choose the new location and to work out the details of implementing the new program. The relocation process could take three years.

Following a survey of the two sites, the EBF executive committee will make a choice, possibly as early as this November.

"Radical changes have swept Europe, bringing with them the need for changes in theological education," said President Hopper. "New seminaries are opening and church needs are changing. We welcome the opportunity to partner with these schools and are confident our experience can support them in developing their new programs."

"Advanced theological studies in an international environment enrich knowledge and global awareness of missionaries, pastors and church leaders. We applaud these decisions which reaffirm the strategic importance of BTS in the new Europe."

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Missionary says Bosnia
ripe for religious war

By Don McGregor

STARKVILLE, Miss. (ABP) -- The conflicts now wracking Bosnia-Herzegovina are fueled by religious interests as much as by political conditions, says a missionary who spent a decade in the region.

In fact, adds Paul Thibodeaux, the area is ripe for a holy war.

Thibodeaux and his wife, Margie, were Southern Baptist fraternal representatives to Eastern Europe for 10 years. They now serve as missionaries of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. They currently are on furlough and living in Starkville, Miss.

During the 1980s, the Thibodeauxs lived seven months in the former Yugoslavia. They intended to become permanent residents but were unable to obtain permanent visas. However, operating from their base in Vienna, Austria, they spent a great deal of time in what was Yugoslavia and learned

much about the area and its people.

Bosnia, the focal point of the turmoil on the Balkan Peninsula, is symptomatic of conditions that are found all over Eastern Europe, Thibodeaux said.

"Four centuries of atrocities by Turks, Croats, Serbs and Albanians has brought about ethnic and religious tensions," he explained. "This translates to other countries in Eastern Europe. It could happen all over the East."

Artificial national boundaries were drawn throughout the area after both World Wars I and II, leaving ethnic groups isolated as parts of different countries. The mix of peoples within those boundaries is the source of the current turmoil, Thibodeaux said.

Although many people never heard of Bosnia until the present conflict engulfed it, the region has been a powder keg for centuries.

Even as early as the year 1200, Bosnia was caught up in a religious dispute because Bosnian Christians embraced the Bogomiles doctrine that God had two sons, the rebellious Satan and the supportive Jesus. The Catholic Church of Austria-Hungary tried to wrest Bosnia from this heresy but was unsuccessful.

It made no difference. By 1463 the Turks completely overran Bosnia and Hercegovina, establishing Islam as the dominant religion. It remains so today.

The two provinces were left isolated in a world of their own, cut off from both Europe and the Turkish Empire. They were not Catholic, like Croatia to the north, and not Eastern Orthodox, like Serbia and Montenegro to the east and south.

Although the Turkish Empire spread across Hungary as well, Austria and Hungary in 1699 pushed the Turks back as far as the Save River, which remains today as the northern boundary of Bosnia.

Bosnia became an important outpost for Turkey in its conflict with Austria and Hungary. But in the 19th Century, Bosnia and Hercegovina also began to revolt against Turkey.

In 1875 an insurrection that began in Hercegovina spread throughout the two provinces. Austria tried to be a mediator between the Turks and the Bosnians. Eventually Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia-Hercegovina and annexed the two provinces in 1908.

This led to the outbreak of World War I when a Serbian student going to college in Bosnia assassinated the Austrian archduke, Francis Ferdinand, and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia, and World War I was underway.

At the conclusion of the war, Bosnia aligned itself with what became Yugoslavia, or South Slavia. Problems continued, as the state seized land owned by Muslims without making promised payments.

When World War II began, Marshal Tito became Yugoslavia's strong man. Yugoslavs fought on both sides of the war. Tito later established the country as a Communist state, though somewhat independent from the Soviet Union.

During communism's 74 years of domination in Yugoslavia, Thibodeaux said, it effectively suppressed two things -- nationalism and religion. But Tito died, the Berlin Wall fell, communism lost its grip on Eastern Europe, and the ethnic and religious fervor of the Yugoslav people suddenly was set free.

"The lid is off of the feelings suppressed for so long, and the kettle is boiling," Thibodeaux said.

"Serbia first began to contend with Croatia but later concentrated on Bosnia. ... It was an expansionist vision that released long-standing feelings and began to include thoughts of ethnic cleansing. It was a reversion back to the past four centuries."

"Those actions and thoughts stirred up the Bosnian Serbs -- Catholics who are a minority in Bosnia but who had the backing of Serbia."

"The groups lived side-by-side for years. Now that the lid is off, the tension and anger have spilled out. There are guerrilla groups and antagonists keeping things stirred up. There are no innocent parties now. There are antagonists in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia."

"Nationalism and religion are synonymous in Eastern Europe," Thibodeaux explained. "To be Russian is to be Russian Orthodox. To be Romanian is to be Romanian Orthodox. To be Uzbek is to be Shiite Muslim. To be Serbian is to be Serbian Orthodox. To be Croat is to be Roman Catholic. And to be Bosnian, in most cases, is to be Muslim."

"When one digs down into the situation," Thibodeaux said, "he realizes that Eastern Europe is on the verge of a holy war."

The Thibodeauxs were appointed as missionaries to Eastern Europe by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1982. Although they were not the first Baptist missionaries there, for a short time they were the only ones serving in Eastern Europe, an area that accounts for one sixth of the world's land mass and 500 million people.

For seven months in 1984 they lived in Zagreb in Croatia, where Paul studied in the University of Zagreb. They worshiped at Zagreb Baptist Church and participated in a coffeehouse ministry during the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. Paul also served as a guest professor at the Baptist seminary in Novi Sad.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia has had some positive effects on Christianity in the region, Thibodeaux suggested.

"This war has strengthened the church in the former Yugoslavia. It may even have prodded it into some amount of growth. In desperate times, people do desperate things."

"As the early church grew from persecution," he added, "so also has the church on the Balkan Peninsula."

The Foreign Mission Board had hoped to establish an outreach in Sarajevo, which is home to only about 15 Christian believers, Thibodeaux said. The FMB purchased a ministry center in Sarajevo, which has been damaged by the war but not destroyed.

"There were two pastors there, but one left. He got out early and went to Germany. The other stayed to protect the property and was caught in the conflict. ... He finally managed to get himself and his family into Croatia, where he is working with Bosnian refugees."

Both pastors had been Thibodeaux's students in the Novi Sad seminary. The wife of the one who stayed was a Muslim from the autonomous province of Kosova.

Out of the total population of 22 million in all of what was Yugoslavia, there are 3,500 Baptists, Thibodeaux noted. Less than 1 percent of the population is Protestant. Reports from the region indicate more people have been baptized and more churches started since the beginning of the war, he said.

"In times of persecution, people turn to other things -- some to drink, some to the black market, and some to the church."

Thibodeaux said the current movement in Russia to control the influence of Western religious groups and give preference to the former state church likely will be felt in all of Eastern Europe.

"In the first place, the politicians need the support of the (state) church, and the church wants the power that could be gained by such an alliance.

"Then there is the reaction to new converts being won or being led over to anything other than the former state church. It is a reaction to what they

perceive as an invasion by the West -- of hyperevangelists who roll into the country and buy converts. ...

"There is a reaction to this type of church growth. It comes from the government and the smaller free churches, as well as the former state churches. They feel they are being overrun. They are saying, 'Enough is enough. This is not us.' The restrictions are a reaction to what they consider is an alien gospel."

"During the communist years, the free churches existed, evangelized, and disciplined without the West," Thibodeaux said. "It may not have been as we would have done it. But it is the epitome of arrogance to say it needs to be remolded into the American way. This negates the work of the Spirit. It negates the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer."

Paul and Margie Thibodeaux resigned as missionaries of the Foreign Mission Board in January 1993 because of what Paul describes as the FMB's "imperialistic approach" to missions overseas.

"I left because narrow-minded, uneducated trustees of the Foreign Mission Board are dictating alien policy to missionaries overseas and to other believers overseas," he charged. "I left because the trust that had been placed for so many years with the missionary overseas had been replaced by suspicion."

Those charges of imperialism, repeated by other resigning missionaries in recent years, have been vehemently denied by FMB administrators and trustees.

Thibodeaux said he became a target for harassment from FMB trustees, who became increasingly interested in Europe after voting to cut FMB funding of the European Baptist seminary at Ruschlikon, which trustees considered liberal.

"I found that if you support the 'conservative resurgence,' you are in. If you don't support it, you are out."

"There comes a time when you have to go back to who you are and what you are," said Thibodeaux, who describes himself as "a middle-of-the-road conservative Southern Baptist."

"I came to realize that I could not give 25 more years to the Foreign Mission Board, and I was willing to risk trusting my ministry to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

When Thibodeaux joined the Fellowship's new missions force, he was named a special assistant to the general secretary of the European Baptist Fellowship. He worked on plans to relocate the Ruschlikon seminary before leaving on furlough in May.

The Thibodeauxs will return to the field in May 1994. He hopes to continue where he left off.

"My role was building bridges of relationship and trust in Eastern Europe. I hope to go back there."

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Expert says Mideast pact
not completely sudden

By Amy Greene

GREENVILLE, S.C. (ABP) -- Although the sudden emergence of a Mideast peace agreement was a shock to many observers, the foundation for such a pact has been under construction for many years, said Mideast expert Charles Kimball.

"The desire for peace and a negotiated settlement has been present, but

finding the political will and the right kind of configuration in the various communities has been a challenge," said Kimball, a Southern Baptist minister and associate professor of religion at Furman University. "Now we're seeing those factors converge in a new way."

The longevity of the Mideast conflict explains the surprise and skepticism that greeted the peace agreement, said Kimball, who has written three books on the Middle East and made 35 trips to the region.

Kimball cited four main factors that contributed to the peace process. First, the demise of the Soviet Union altered the balance of power in the region. Second, the 1991 Persian Gulf War forged alliances previously unheard of, such as between the United States and Syria.

Such shifting alliances indicated "there were some new possibilities," said Kimball, who directed the National Council of Churches' office on the Middle East from 1983-1990.

Third, he said, much credit should go to former U.S. President George Bush and his secretary of state, James Baker, who had laid much of the groundwork for peace talks after the Gulf War. Kimball pointed out that Baker made eight trips to the region, culminating in the 1991 peace conference in Madrid.

He cited the growing strength of extremists as a fourth major factor.

Kimball said the peace agreement, under which Israel will relinquish the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, is the first step in a long process that will require patience and good will, not only from the two sides but from the world community as well.

He said in particular the United States, Japan and the European community will need to provide long-term diplomatic and economic support for the region.

Kimball is cautiously optimistic about the future. He said one of the greatest barriers to peaceful negotiations was and remains the "psychological" barrier; the two sides have been locked in bitter dispute for so long that they find it hard to imagine their enemies as people with whom they could actually sit down and talk.

"The humiliation of defeat of the Arab world at the hands of Israel and the deep resentment towards Israel that many Arabs have grown up with have made it very difficult for them to accept that Israel had a rightful place in the Middle East," said Kimball.

"On the other side, when Israelis perceive -- not incorrectly -- that many of their neighbors don't wish them to be there, it's very difficult to say, "Let's just sit down and talk."'

Kimball said he believes the problems can be resolved. Although the conflict is old, he said, it is more political and economic than religious. "What we are really seeing is a 20th-century political conflict, not a centuries-old religious conflict."

The new willingness to negotiate came largely out of a sense on both sides that their futures were bound up together and that the status quo was untenable, Kimball said.

Both sides, for instance, realized that middle- and long-term issues such as economic development, arms control and sharing water resources require peaceful coexistence.

"Most Israelis and Palestinians recognize that they are inextricably linked," Kimball said. "Despite competing claims to the same territory, their future is a shared future."

Kimball said the major obstacle for both Israel and the Palestinian people is their own respective internal dynamics. He explained that Israel has been a deeply divided country since the growth of the rightist government. And many Palestinians have been deeply frustrated with PLO leader

Yasser Arafat and the compromises he has made.

"The rise of extremism sent shock waves through both sides," said Kimball. "They each realized that if extremists were allowed to continue to capitalize on the frustrations of both sides, both sides would lose."

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Poll reveals American Jews approve of historic peace pact

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An overwhelming majority of American Jews believe mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization is a positive development in the Middle East, according to a survey released Sept. 27.

The survey of more than 1,000 American Jews, conducted for the American Jewish Committee, found that 90 percent of those surveyed view the historic Middle East peace pact as beneficial to Israel. And 57 percent favor a Palestinian state.

The survey asked a range of questions regarding the Sept. 13 agreement calling for interim Palestinian self-government in Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho. The interim agreements are intended to give way to a more permanent solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the region.

While most American Jews look favorably on Israel's recognition of the PLO, they do not believe the PLO can be trusted. Forty-two percent of the respondents said the PLO cannot "be relied upon to honor its agreements and refrain from terrorist activity."

Fifty-five percent of those surveyed said the autonomy agreement will produce violence among Jews in Israel who have differing political philosophies.

The survey also indicated:

-- Forty-seven percent of respondents oppose further establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, while 43 percent favor it.

-- Seventy-three percent of those surveyed think the autonomy plan increases the chance for peace with Arabs, while 17 percent fear it will increase the possibility of war.

-- Seventy-nine percent of American Jews surveyed said "caring about Israel" is vital to their identity as a Jew.

David Harris, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said the survey findings indicated "that American Jews are strongly supportive of the Israeli government's approach to the peace negotiations, including the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. At the same time, however, there remains a significant level of distrust of the PLO among American Jews."

These findings, he continued, mirror the results of another poll on these same topics with Israelis in early September.

The most recent survey was conducted Sept. 20-26 by telephone and included 1,009 adult American Jews from across the country. It has a margin of error of plus-or-minus 3 percent.

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-- By Pam Parry

Moderate group wants to stop
conservative push in states

By Lonnie Wilkey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Moderate Baptist leaders adopted a statement Sept. 23-24 calling for state conventions "to confess there have been far too many unethical actions in Southern Baptist political movements."

The five-point statement, adopted at a meeting at a Nashville hotel, also encourages each state convention "to resolve that such unethical actions will not be tolerated in its life and work."

The meeting, at least in part, was in response to moderate fears that conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention, after gaining control of the national denomination, have now set their sights on the states.

More than 80 people attended the meeting arranged by Houston layman John Baugh to focus on a "Call to State Conventions: For Preservation and Renewal of Historic Southern Baptist Work and Witness."

Houston pastor Dan Vestal of Tallowood Baptist Church presented the "call" for the body to consider the statement.

Vestal said the meeting was held not to establish "another centralized, political organization" for state conventions, nor to "create a connectionalism" between state conventions and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization of moderate Southern Baptists disenchanted with the Southern Baptist Convention's current leadership.

"We are not here to try to get state conventions to put the CBF in their budgets," he said.

Vestal, a former moderate candidate for SBC president and a leader of the Fellowship, said he desires to see "each state convention free of Southern Baptist control, secular political control, and free to pursue whatever it feels God wants it to pursue."

"It is important to preserve historic Baptist principles at the state convention level," he said.

Baugh, a member of Vestal's church, observed that the Southern Baptist denomination has been "torn asunder by certain SBC leaders' use of dishonest means to achieve their goals."

Baugh said truthfulness must be restored to the Southern Baptist family. He noted that if a class-action suit had been filed in 1978-79, "when the first lie was told that not one seminary professor believed the Bible was true," there would be no controversy today.

The retired grocery executive told Associated Baptist Press that "character assassinations" must be stopped. "We have to stop lying, cheating and slandering. It kills families, ruins businesses, tears churches apart and has torn asunder the Southern Baptist Convention."

Kentucky pastor Richard Bridges of First Baptist Church of Bowling Green led a session and offered three suggestions on how to foster truthfulness in state conventions.

First, he said, tell the truth about ourselves. "We pastors need to tell the truth about where our minds and consciences are," he said.

Bridges also noted the truth must be told about what it means to be Baptist. "We have either forgotten or overlooked the fact that many of our laity don't know what it's like to be Baptist, he said. Bridges also pointed out that two or three generations ago, Southern Baptists became "programmatically," which led to turning programs like the Cooperative Program into a "sacred cow."

"The Lord Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for the Cooperative Program. He died for me and you. I don't think he cares how we do it as long

as we do it," Bridges said.

Third, Bridges said, the truth must be told about state conventions. Programs should be examined to see if they are still useful today, he suggested.

The two-day meeting also allowed participants from approximately 12 states to share concerns and approaches that are working in their state conventions.

After the group discussed the document Vestal presented, which included seven points and a preamble, a three-person committee was appointed to reword the document, taking into account suggestions from participants. The committee consisted of Leslie Hollon of Missouri, John Jeffers of Alabama and Greg Snowden of Mississippi.

The revised document eliminated some of the stronger language but basically incorporated all the original ideas. After much discussion and debate, an amendment, offered by Phillip Reynolds of South Carolina, was added to the fifth point.

The preamble reads: "It is time for healing in the Southern Baptist family. Now is the time for renewal and revival. The world desperately needs our witness. The problems of our day are too dangerous for anything less than a unified witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

In answer to how such a renewal can occur, the revised document called for each state convention to:

-- "Renew its commitment to historic Baptist principles, the authority of Scripture and the priesthood of all believers, resulting in the autonomy of all Baptist bodies and the voluntary character of cooperation in missions and evangelism.

-- Renew its commitment to the love of Christ as the method and means of cooperative ministry.

-- Renew its commitment to the centrality of Jesus Christ and his kingdom as the basis for our mission.

-- Renew its commitment to religious liberty, and its corollary, the separation of church and state, and avoid being used as an instrument of, or promoting, any secular agenda.

-- Confess that there have been far too many unethical actions in Southern Baptist political movements; let each state convention resolve that such actions will not be tolerated in its life and work; and let each state convention renew its commitment to truth and integrity which ultimately will result in a renewal of love and trust among all Southern Baptists."

Participants were encouraged to take the document and use it as they see fit in their own state conventions.

After the meeting, Ronald Crawford, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., who served as co-chairman of the meeting along with James Bruner of Macon, Ga., said the meeting accomplished several objectives, including fellowship, the sharing of information and encouragement.

It also accomplished, he said, "a kind of renewal of commitment around ethics in state convention life."

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Senate rejects public
funding of abortions

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate rejected Sept. 28 an attempt to lift all restrictions on public financing of abortions for poor women.

The Senate defeated, 59 to 40, an amendment offered by a Senate panel to

lift restrictions on federal funding of abortions. Instead the Senate adopted a modified version of the Hyde amendment.

Named for Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., the Hyde amendment has banned federal funding for abortions except to save the life of the mother. The new version, approved by the House in June, adds exceptions in the cases of rape and incest.

Anti-abortion advocates maintain that members of the public who are morally opposed to abortion should not be forced to subsidize them. Abortion-rights advocates counter that such provisions are discriminatory to poor women who are financially unable to exercise their constitutional rights.

Although the ban remains part of the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2518), observers predict the abortion-funding debate will continue as Congress begins to grapple with the issue of national health care.

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-- By Pam Parry

House approves non-profit postal-rate reform measure

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives approved Sept. 29 a measure that would incrementally raise the postal rates for state Baptist newspapers this month and for the next five years.

By a narrow margin of 207-206, the House approved an appropriations bill (H.R. 2403) that would result in a 12 percent increase for second-class non-profit publications and a 12-18 percent increase for third-class non-profit mailers that would be phased in over a six-year period. This year non-profit mailers would face about a 2 percent increase.

Brian Hummell, assistant director of the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers, projected the rate increase would become effective Oct. 24.

The measure, expected to be acted on by the Senate any day, would reform how non-profit postal rates are calculated, adding stability to the preferred rates.

The provision would assign non-profit mailers overhead costs equal to half of the corresponding commercial rate overhead, but the measure also stipulates that the rate increase would be phased in during a six-year period.

Non-profit mailers have benefitted from a preferred rate that reflected only the cost of handling that class of mail. Congress had appropriated funds to the U.S. Postal Service for the non-profit mailers' share of overhead expenses.

In recent years, the postal subsidy has been reduced as government has attempted to cut spending.

A compromise, drafted by Rep. William Clay, D-Mo., was drawn after the Clinton administration proposed 150 spending cuts that included funding for preferred postal rates.

While saving the government \$152 million over four years, it would have meant a 35 percent rate hike in October for non-profit mailers.

Hummell said that overall the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers is satisfied with the reform because it is far better than what could have happened.

The measure also would charge second-class non-profit publications the commercial rate if their advertising exceeds 10 percent and a 3.5-cent-per-piece surcharge on flat mail pieces.

An amendment opposed by many non-profit mailers, one that would have disallowed the use of third-class postal rates for solicitation of contributions that would be used to influence government, was not offered.

President Clinton is expected to sign the bill if it is approved by the Senate.

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-- By Pam Parry

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