

Associated Baptist Press

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Clinton says big government is over; Americans must work together

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- "The era of big government is over, but we cannot go back to the time when our citizens were left to fend for themselves," President Clinton said Jan. 23 in his State of the Union address.

The key to a more perfect union is working together, Clinton said. "Our individual dreams must be realized by our common efforts."

Clinton addressed members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, Cabinet members and guests in the House chamber. He called on Americans to find common ground and said communities, religious groups, schools, businesses, parents and media all share a responsibility to help children make the most of their lives.

Clinton said Americans live in the age of possibility and spoke of the need for families to be strengthened and children protected.

The president challenged fathers to love and care for their children. A child-support check "will never be a substitute for a parent's love and guidance," he said, and called raising a child the most basic human duty.

The president urged Congress to require the so-called "V" chip in televisions that would enable parents to block shows featuring violence or sex. He invited leaders of the media and entertainment industry to meet with him at the White House about television content.

Shifting from children's home life to their education, Clinton challenged states to give parents the right to choose which public school their children attend. He has consistently opposed using tax dollars to pay for students to attend private or parochial schools.

Clinton asked Congress to allow tax deductions of up to \$10,000 a year for college tuition and said public schools should be able to require students to wear school uniforms if it will stop teenagers from killing each other over gang jackets.

The president sounded themes of unity and cooperation, but he also highlighted differences with Hill Republicans. Those differences, particularly over terms of a balanced budget agreement, led to two partial shutdowns of the federal government in recent months.

"I challenge all of you in this chamber," Clinton said, "never, ever shut the federal government down again."

He also said real welfare reform cannot take place unless Americans join with religious groups in their task of caring for the poor.

In the Republican response, Sen Bob Dole, R-Kan., said "we have starkly different philosophies of government and profoundly different visions of America."

Dole said the president is protecting the status-quo, defends a welfare system that no one can defend, defends an educational establishment "run by liberals" and has vetoed the first balanced budget in a generation.

"He (Clinton) is the chief obstacle to a balanced budget," Dole said.

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House honors Grahams with congressional medal

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives voted Jan. 23 to award the Congressional Gold Medal to evangelist Billy Graham and his wife, Ruth.

Rep. Charles Taylor, R-N.C., was primary sponsor of a bill commissioning the honor. The measure passed the House 403-2.

Congressmen noted Graham's preaching ministry -- which has reached more than 100 million people in person and 2 billion people through television -- as well as his record of concern for the poor.

Democrats and Republicans alike praised the Grahams for their work and committed service to the country. They noted Graham has been a spiritual adviser and confidant to 10 presidents.

"It is rare, in this day and age, to find such dedication to beliefs," said Rep. Fred Heineman, R-N.C. Heineman said he once attended a Billy Graham crusade and "the vestiges of that experience are still with me."

A congressional spokesman said fewer than 100 such awards have been given. Among previous recipients were George Washington, Thomas Edison, the Wright brothers and Winston Churchill.

Reps. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., and Pat Schroeder, D-Colo., opposed the measure. Slaughter later said she voted against the measure by mistake. A spokeswoman for Schroeder said she has a policy of voting against all commemorative bills that honor living people because such awards could be used for political pandering.

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Justices reject religious liberty plea in wrongful death judgment

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to review a \$1.5 million wrongful-death judgment against four Christian Scientists who claimed a religious-liberty defense.

The four were sued by the father of an 11-year-old Minnesota boy whose diabetes was treated with spiritual-healing methods rather than medical care. The Christian Scientists claimed the judgment against them violated their right to free exercise of religion under the First Amendment. The Supreme Court declined the case Jan. 22.

The boy, Ian Lundman, died in May 1989, less than three days after first complaining of stomach pain. His mother, Kathy McKown, did not seek medical treatment, citing teachings of Christian Science that prayer is the most effective treatment for illness and that conventional medicine interferes with spiritual healing. In addition to her own prayers, she retained the services of Quinna Giebelhaus, a Christian-Science nurse, and Mario Tosto, a Christian-Science practitioner, to pray for Ian.

Kathy McKown and Tosto were indicted for manslaughter after Ian's death, along with the boy's stepfather, William McKown. The indictments were dismissed, however, because of a Minnesota law that specifically allows parents to rely exclusively on "spiritual treatment" for their children. Similar laws exist in more than 40 states.

After Ian's death, Minnesota amended its law to require that parents who rely on spiritual healing must report to health authorities when a child faces a serious health danger. The new law allows the state to order medical treatment against parents' wishes in an emergency.

After the criminal charges were dismissed, Ian's father, Douglas Lundman, filed a wrongful-death suit against the First Church of Christ, Scientist, and the McKowns, Tosto, Giebelhaus and others later dismissed from the suit.

At first, a trial court awarded Lundman \$9 million in punitive damages from the church and \$1.5 million in compensatory damages from all defendants.

An appeals court later reversed the judgment against the church, while upholding the monetary award against the McKowns, Tosto and Giebelhaus.

Both of those actions were left standing by the high court's Jan. 22 refusal to review the case.

It also left standing a Minnesota Court of Appeals' finding that church practitioners or clergy can be held liable for malpractice based on alleged negligence or unreasonable performance of a religious function.

A large group of religious organizations had asked the high court to accept the case solely to settle that question.

In permitting claims of religious malpractice, Minnesota "requires civil courts to interpret church doctrine to determine if an adherent violated tenets of his own religion," the religious groups argued in a friend-of-the-court brief.

The First Amendment bars civil courts from interpreting religious doctrine, the brief states.

The groups had hoped the court would repudiate once and for all the doctrine of clergy malpractice, said Brent Walker, general counsel of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee, one of the groups filing the brief.

"Secular courts are uniquely ill-suited to pass on the reasonableness and efficacy of religion or to second guess the clergy on spiritual matters," Walker said

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High court declines to revive Pennsylvania abortion policies

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- For the third time in recent weeks, the U.S. Supreme Court has struck down a state's attempt to restrict abortions funded by Medicaid beyond federal guidelines.

In its latest action, the high court refused Jan. 22 to review a decision by a federal appeals court disallowing two conditions placed on Medicaid-funded abortions by the state of Pennsylvania.

One restriction required that a woman seeking an abortion because of rape or incest must have first reported the incident to law enforcement authorities. The second required that two physicians certify that failure

to end a pregnancy would endanger the life of the mother.

Medicaid is a jointly funded federal-state program that provides health care services for indigent Americans. The program does not routinely pay for abortions, but since the fall of 1993, federal guidelines allow funding for abortions in cases of rape and incest and to save the mother's life.

The appeals court noted that federal regulations allow doctors to waive reporting requirements if a victim of rape or incest is unable to comply for physical or psychological reasons. Pennsylvania's policy lacked such a waiver.

Federal regulations require only one physician to certify that an abortion is necessary because the life of the mother is endangered. The appeals court said Pennsylvania's requirement for a second certification makes the attending physician's certification irrelevant.

In recent weeks, the high court also let stand lower-court rulings that rejected attempts by Colorado and Nebraska to deny funding for abortions in the cases of rape or incest.

From 1982 to 1993 federal law provided funding for abortions only when they were necessary to save the life of the mother. The restriction on abortion funding, named for its sponsor, Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., has been a regular fixture on funding bills for federal health-care programs. Congress expanded coverage to include cases of rape and incest when it approved the Hyde Amendment for fiscal 1994.

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Baptist building project delayed in Bulgaria

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Months after gaining permission to build a church and orphanage, Baptists in Sofia, Bulgaria, still lack necessary paperwork to proceed with the project.

The Baptist World Alliance has written to Sofia's new mayor, Stephan Sofiansky, urging that the Union of Baptist Churches in Bulgaria be allowed to build.

"We continue to have problems with our Baptist Project in Sofia," said Theodor Angelov, president of both the Bulgarian Baptist group and the European Baptist Federation. "The Sofia municipality does not want to give us the documents we need to continue the building work. We went to court and they offered all kinds of objections why the Baptists should not be allowed to build an orphanage. I am very much troubled by this situation," he said.

The project would be the first new building for Baptists in Bulgaria since the fall of Communism. After being besieged by appeals from Baptists around the world, the Sofia government approved the building plans last September for a church and an orphanage.

"We appeal to you to find a solution to the present impasse and to allow completion of our building projects as soon as possible," Denton Lotz, general secretary of the BWA, asked Sofiansky in a letter.

"This refusal to give permission to build is a religious freedom issue," Lotz said. "We are very concerned that the Sofia city government does not give permission for our Baptist convention to complete their building project. We had thought with the fall of Communism and the new freedom that has come to Bulgaria that religious freedom would be guaranteed for all people."

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-- By Wendy Ryan

Oklahoma City pastor named to lead state convention

OKLAHOMA CITY (ABP) -- Oklahoma City pastor Anthony Jordan has been elected executive director-treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

Jordan, 46, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, was elected Jan. 19 by the state convention's executive board.

Jordan will succeed William Tanner, who retires June 30 after leading the state convention since 1986. Previously, Tanner was president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for 10 years.

Jordan was recommended unanimously by an executive director search committee. The executive board affirmed the nomination 49-1 in a secret ballot vote.

Search committee chairman Keith Russell described Jordan as "a strong conservative" who "identifies well with the rank and file of Oklahoma Baptists."

Jordan currently represents Oklahoma on the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

As a pastor in Oklahoma, Jordan has been active in pro-life efforts and in opposition to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group that supports its own missionaries and promotes other alternatives to conservative-led SBC programs.

Jordan's election is effective May 1, but under state convention bylaws must also be approved at the annual convention meeting in November.

A native of Ponca City, Okla., Jordan came to Northwest Baptist Church in 1982 following a six-year pastorate in Jackson, Mo.

He holds an undergraduate degree and an honorary doctorate from Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., along with a master's and doctor's degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I come with a Bible in my hand," Jordan said. "I know no other way to lead than through the Word of God."

"I don't come without an agenda," he noted. "I have an agenda burned in my heart over many years. I come with a heart full of dreams and visions God has burned in my heart over these many years."

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-- By Dave Parker and Bob Allen

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