

Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

January 20, 1998

(98-3)

In this issue:

- **Christians on both sides of Republican abortion debate**
- **Two Baptist schools receive Luce grants**
- **Bible society unveils evangelism initiative**

Christians on both sides of Republican abortion debate

By David Finnigan

INDIAN WELLS, Calif. (ABP) -- People of faith at the winter meeting of the Republican Party's national committee lined up on both sides of a failed "litmus test" resolution that would have banned funds for politicians who support a controversial late-term abortion procedure.

After nearly three hours of speeches and divided but civil debate, the committee's 157 members on Jan. 16 scuttled an original resolution to deny party funds to politicians who support "partial-birth" abortions. Committee members instead voted 114 to 43 on a watered-down version that does not deny party funds but "strongly reaffirms" Republican opposition to late-term abortions and President Clinton's veto of a ban on partial-birth abortion passed by Congress.

Alabama state party chairwoman Bettye Fine Collins, a Southern Baptist, said the principle of "the sanctity of life," was behind her support of the original resolution.

"And I believe this is a test, but it's a values test," she told the committee's general session. "I think every person in this room would pray that God will continue to bless this great Republican Party."

The reworked version of the resolution came from Michigan state chairwoman Betsy DeVos, who attends a Calvinist, Christian Reformed church. She said backing off from the binding resolution was a strategic move and does not indicate Republicans are soft on abortion.

"Our difference is one of tactics, not one of mission," she said. "We are a pro-life party and shouldn't be ashamed of it. Can anyone imagine the Democrats having this discussion at their DNC meeting?"

Party leaders feared the candidate-specific resolution might threaten thin Republican majorities in the U.S. House and Senate. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and others flew to the wealthy desert resort of Indian Wells, Calif., to urge committee members to oppose the strict resolution backed by the party's more conservative, Christian wing.

"The worst thing you can do for the pro-life cause is lose our majority," said Catholic anti-abortion stalwart and U.S. Rep. Henry Hyde of Illinois. "I simply plead with you: we're increasing our majority in the House and Senate, we are, every year. But don't destroy that -- build on that, positively. I plead with you."

Texas national committeeman Tim Lambert, who attends a non-denominational Bible church, introduced the original resolution after national funds were sent to New Jersey for last year's tough re-election of Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, who supported Clinton's veto. She also vetoed a similar ban in the New Jersey Legislature.

Lambert advocated his resolution as a "threshold on which we judge our candidates." Its denial of campaign funds to pro-partial-birth-abortion politicians does not mean exile from the party, he said, just exile from funding. "Passing this resolution, the unamended resolution, is the right thing to do morally, it's the right thing to do politically," he said at the general session. "It's time we put aside our political fear and act on principle."

Despite their defeat on the original resolution, Lambert's supporters said they succeeded in highlighting funding problems like those involving Whitman.

"Clearly we stand on the side opposed to partial-birth abortion," said Texas state chairwoman Susan Weddington, a Southern Baptist. "And further, Texas is pretty united in simply wanting some basic restrictions like parental notification [of minors seeking abortions] among Republicans."

Republicans who backed the reworked version said partial-birth abortion is a horrendous procedure, but they did not like the idea of isolating candidates for their stand on just one issue.

"Once you start slicing and dicing, you wind up with a very small segment of the electorate," said Tennessee national committeeman John Ryder of Memphis, a Lutheran. When asked if he would have problems back home with activists allied with the Family Research Council or Christian Coalition, he said: "I have to answer to the Republican state executive committee. I think what we need is more persuasion and less attempt at compulsion in the Republican party."

Non-committee member Mike Jones, a Catholic who at 25 is executive director of the party's office for American voters abroad, said 80 percent of a federal election's 2 million overseas absentee ballots are for Republican candidates. Many of those voters support legal abortion and opposed the litmus-test resolution. "When Americans overseas return home after doing international business," Jones told Associated Baptist Press, "their concerns are that the streets are safe, the taxes are low, and the government is lean."

Non-committee member Ellen Sauerbrey, a Presbyterian and former state legislator running for Maryland governor, said she opposed the original resolution out of party unity. She added she sent a busload of her supporters last year to help Whitman get re-elected, "although I vehemently disagree with Christie Whitman on this issue."

There were no committee members speaking out in favor of partial-birth abortion. The winter meeting had little overt pro-choice posturing, though pro-choice party activists milled with committee members plus Washington-based political reporters seeking, however briefly, to trade the capital's winter for California's sun and golf.

-30-

Two Baptist schools receive Luce grants

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Two Baptist schools -- one in Asia and one in the United States -- have received recent grants from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Hong Kong Baptist University's national gallery of art will receive a three-year grant of \$120,000 for a new archive on the influence of Christianity on China. Another grant of \$150,000 will go to a new divinity school at Wake Forest University, set to open in 1999, to develop a series of multidisciplinary courses to equip students for churches' changing needs.

The grants are among nearly \$5 million in recent Luce Foundation gifts supporting programs in the arts, Asia, higher education, public affairs and theology. The foundation, based in New York City, was established more than 60 years ago by Time magazine founder and editor Henry Luce.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

Bible society unveils evangelism initiative

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (ABP) -- The International Bible Society has released a new translation of the New Testament and Psalms in a language spoken by 1.5 million people in Ghana.

The new translation in Dangme, one of 72 languages spoken in Ghana, required 16 years to complete. It is the first new Bible translation in the language since 1909.

It is also the first of 80 Bible and New Testament translations planned during the next six years in the "Let There Be Light" global evangelization initiative sponsored by the Bible society, based in Colorado Springs, Colo.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

END