

# Associated Baptist Press

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February 3, 1997

(98-7)

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## **Gary Bauer still considering run for presidency in 2000**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian advocacy group, says he has not closed the door on the possibility he will run for president in 2000.

Bauer says his decision will hinge on whether other candidates carry the conservative values banner. These values, he contends, have not been well represented in recent campaigns.

"They are focusing on issues that really ought to be the caboose of the train and ignoring the things that are the engine of whether we can remain a free or democratic society or not," he said.

The former adviser to President Ronald Reagan claims Americans are tired of politicians ignoring the country's "ballooning virtue deficit." He says he is praying about the idea of possibly running for the nation's highest office.

In a recent interview with Associated Baptist Press, Bauer discussed the nation's political atmosphere and what his first actions as a presidential candidate might be.

"What I'm doing right now is praying about it, and asking others -- friends and associates -- to pray about it, too, because I don't want to do anything foolish or anything that would hurt" the issues, he said in the hour-long interview.

Bauer said "a certain set of values" need to be represented in the 2000 presidential race, and if the campaign isn't about those values, "it won't be a campaign worthy of the American people."

Bauer said fiscal -- not moral -- issues have driven recent presidential campaigns. "There is always sound and fury over whether Medicare ought to be \$320 billion or \$302 billion," he said. "I'm a conservative and I think in all these programs, we need to save money, [but] it is not Medicare spending or the budget level at [Health and Human Services] that's going to determine whether or not the American experiment succeeds in the next century."

In contrast, Bauer said: "I want to see people talking about what is the proper use of our liberty. Does that include the right to take the life of your unborn child when you want to? Does it mean you can walk away from your marriage easier than you can walk a way from an aluminum-siding contract? Does it mean that we redefine what the very word marriage means so that it means virtually nothing under the new definition?"

Bauer said some other credible candidate may arise to make those issues the centerpiece of a presidential bid. "But as time passes, if nobody does that, then I'm going to cross that bridge when I get to it."

If Bauer were to run for president, he said, his first action would be to take a leave of absence from the Family Research Council. Originally formed in 1983, the FRC merged with another conservative organization, James Dobson's Focus on the Family, in 1988. In 1993, the FRC was reorganized into a separate tax-exempt organization. Dobson remains on the FRC board of directors. "I can't remember the last time we ended up on opposite sides of an issue," Bauer said of Dobson.

Then, Bauer said, he would use contacts he developed with the media during his eight years of working in government -- including two years as Reagan's assistant for policy development -- to try to gain as many opportunities as possible to speak about values.

Bauer has already taken preliminary steps toward candidacy. He made trips to Iowa and New Hampshire, states with early primary contests that serious presidential contenders must court early.

He also formed a political action committee separate from the FRC, the Campaign for Working Families. It has become the ninth largest PAC in the country within a year of its creation, Bauer said.

In his role as head of the FRC, Bauer must walk a thin line regarding politics. As a tax-exempt, nonprofit group, it is illegal for the FRC to support or oppose candidates for public office. As head of a PAC, however, Bauer may carry on such political activity.

In a letter to potential donors, Bauer said the PAC's purpose is "to elect pro-family, pro-life, pro-free-enterprise candidates" to the House and the Senate and to the White House in the year 2000.

Bauer said when he holds PAC fund-raising events while on trips for the FRC, he must count a percentage of the trip as a PAC expenditure. He said the PAC paid for his trip to New Hampshire when he told conservative leaders he was "praying about" a presidential run.

A December 1997 press release boasted that the PAC raised over \$2 million since its creation. In that release, Bauer said Americans are withholding their contributions to both the Republican and Democratic parties. "People are more and more inclined to give to those organizations that will reflect and promote their values," he said.

Bauer's PAC recently issued complaints against three California television stations that refused to air its \$100,000 ad campaign against partial-birth abortion.

The stations refused the ads because of graphic content. PAC leaders charged the stations were "attempting to censor" them. Just before the election, PAC officials altered the ads to make them acceptable to the stations.

The modified ads helped GOP Assemblyman Tom Bordanaro narrowly beat out moderate Republican favorite Brooks Firestone to make it to a runoff with the Democratic challenger. A Firestone staffer said Firestone was "partial-birthed to defeat."

Bauer is outspoken on issues including abortion, homosexuality, tax reform and Christian persecution around the world.

Contrary to critics who charge him with championing Republican causes, Bauer said most of his speeches are nonpolitical. "It's an educational speech about family issues," he said. "It is just as often that Republican leadership is angry with me as is the Democratic leadership."

Bauer contends the U.S. Supreme Court is holding what amounts to an ongoing constitutional convention with judicial decisions that protect "the village atheist." He adamantly opposes attempts to legally protect homosexuals from discrimination. Companies which hire homosexuals should expect to "pay the price in the market place," he said.

Bauer said those holding traditional values face discrimination in America today.

"At what point will the educational establishment and the courts protect my daughter from being subjected to sex-education courses that violate the most deeply held values we've tried to give her and where the only option is for her to opt out and be embarrassed in front of the whole class?" he asked.

"I never hear anyone in the media or the ACLU worry about her sensibilities or the sensibilities of religious students," he said. "The only time I hear this argument is when it's applied to the village atheist, who may God forbid, have to hear a prayer."

## **Bauer's tough-talk rhetoric overstates facts, critics charge**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council and potential U.S. presidential candidate in the 2000 campaign, is known for fighting his side of the issues with tough words and a no-compromise attitude.

His critics charge, however, that his tough rhetoric often overstates court rulings against religious expression in public schools.

For example, when an Alabama judge last year issued an injunction against school-sponsored religious expressions in the state, Bauer termed it an example "of another outrageous case of a liberal federal judge abusing his power."

In a daily commentary following the ruling, Bauer said: "A federal district court judge has issued an order banning any public prayer or expression of faith in the state's public schools. He's threatening to fine or jail anyone who doesn't go along. Even more outrageous, this judge is actually going to send undercover police into the schools to search out anyone who violates his order."

Bauer critics say such rhetoric overstates the ruling's impact.

"The suggestion that this judge has outlawed prayer is a gross exaggeration," said Oliver Thomas, special counsel for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. "This kind of exaggeration doesn't serve anybody's interest except for people who want to raise money."

The Alabama ruling bars "school-organized or officially sanctioned" religious activities. It permits the use of religious texts for educational purposes and allows students to express religion in homework or reports or wear religious symbols on their clothing. The ruling also recognizes the right of students in secondary schools to meet for religious purposes during non-class time.

Elliot Minberg, legal director at People For the American Way Foundation, described Bauer's use of the term prayer "police" as "a very rhetorical term, clearly intended to inflame." Minberg said that Bauer is well known for "extreme statements on a variety of topics and courts are only one among them."

In a recent interview, Bauer defended his characterization of the ruling. "The message of this ruling is absolutely clear in my view and I believe that the average Southern Baptist is as mortified by it as I am," said Bauer, a 1968 graduate of Georgetown College, a Baptist school in Kentucky.

Thomas said there are thousands of school districts, and some occasionally make a bad decision regarding religious liberty. "But the notion that public schools are systematically excluding religion is pretty far fetched," he said.

Thomas urged leaders on both the right and left to avoid extreme rhetoric. "While I respect Gary Bauer's role as a voice for conservative values in the United States today, I do not respect anybody's misuse of that role," Thomas said.

Bauer is equally critical of the way other courts have handed religious-liberty disputes. He charged that judicial decisions on religious liberty always protect "the village atheist."

He also rejected the argument that the impact of such rulings is limited to school-sponsored prayer and religious expression.

"Quite the contrary," he told ABP. "There is a federal appeals court decision in which a kindergarten student was thrown out of school for praying over his meal and the Supreme Court refused to hear the case on appeal."

Bauer said he could not remember the specific case citation but that his office could provide the information. Bauer's staff later said it could not find the case. A spokeswoman for the FRC said Bauer was mistaken in some of the details but referred to a 1994 case involving a fourth grader, which never went to trial.

According to the Religious Freedom Reporter, the student, Raymond Raines, was interrupted on at least three occasions during the 1992-93 school year during his practice of praying before meals. "On each of these

occasions, Raines was taken from his seat in full view of the other students and sent to the principal's office where he was admonished for his attempts to pray and told that he must discontinue the practice," the report said.

Raines' attorney, Timothy Belz, said the case was settled before it went to trial in a St. Louis district court. Raines was never kicked out of school, Belz said, but did leave on his own accord to attend a private school.

Cathy Cleaver, FRC director of legal studies, said Bauer confused parts of the Raines case with another case, which did go to a federal appeals court. Student Brittany Settle received a zero for a research paper on Jesus Christ. The court ruled against Settle, saying that teachers have broad leeway in determining class assignments.

In addition to criticizing America's courts, Bauer has also been vocal on the U.S. government's policy on China.

Bauer and the FRC opposed the Clinton administration's decision to extend a favorable trading status with China, which Congress approved last year. Bauer opposed the extension because he says the Chinese government engages in Christian persecution.

Bauer said China has a "government-recognized, and I would argue -controlled, church that is comparable to the Russian Orthodox Church during the time of the Soviet Union, in which what is preached is being regulated." Preaching about the Second Coming and presenting the gospel to children are impermissible, he said.

But leaders of China's official Protestant body, the China Christian Council, say charges of government control and systematic persecution "maliciously misrepresent" the plight of Christians in China. The government does not censor church services, leaders say. Where religious persecution does occur, it is the result of misapplication of religion laws by local officials and not government policy, they contend.

Bauer said U.S. companies dealing with China "should remember they're American companies" and use their leverage to promote change.

But he insisted there is no inconsistency between his tough stand on the issue and the fact that the new building housing FRC offices was paid for by owners of Amway Corp., which operates a manufacturing business in China.

"If I allowed the building I was sitting in to regulate what I said about this issue, I think I would be open, legitimately, to very severe criticism," Bauer said. "And this is a city where quite frankly, I don't think there are many people who would do what I've done in the last year sitting in a building like this," he added.

He said the FRC's new six-story building in Washington was built with funds from two wealthy families. One is the Michigan-based DeVos family that co-founded the Amway Corp., a company which sells household products through a network of home-based distributors.

"Amway is a 49-percent owner of the building," Bauer said. "I don't want to get in a public dispute with the DeVos family. Clearly they disagree with me on this issue. When I talk to the family, I routinely attempt to tell them that their approach is wrong and mine is right."

A public-relations officer for Amway clarified that funding for the FRC office building came from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation.

John Gartlend, Amway's Washington-based lobbyist, said Amway and the DeVoses disagree with Bauer over policy toward China. Gartlend said Amway's business ties in China could lead to an expansion of that country's middle class, which could lead to more religious and political freedom. "We can reach the same goals by helping them reach economic power," he said.

## Giving to churches declines, study says

By Marv Knox

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. (ABP) -- American church members' hearts may be turning away from God, if their pocketbooks are a fair indicator, a new study shows.

Giving as a portion of income fell to 2.46 percent in 1995, according to empty tomb inc., an organization that monitors giving to U.S. churches and charities.

The 1995 figure is the latest data available from eight mainline Protestant and eight evangelical denominations, said Sylvia Ronsvalle, who with her husband, John, operates empty tomb inc.

The 2.46 percent giving figure represents a 21 percent decline from the 3.11 percent of income American Protestants gave to their churches in 1968, the Ronsvalles said.

While evangelicals out-give mainliners, both have declined in the percentage of personal income they contribute to their congregations.

Evangelicals contributed 4.08 percent in 1995, a drop from 6.14 percent in '68.

Mainliners gave 2.90 percent of income, down from 3.32 percent 27 years earlier.

The report shows giving to congregational finances has shifted back and forth over the last decade. Church finances received 2.16 percent of members' income in 1985, 2.03 percent in 1992 and 2.06 percent in 1995.

However, giving to "benevolences" outside the church -- what Baptists might call missions -- has continued to slide. Church benevolences received just 0.41 percent of members' income in 1995.

"The trend suggests the portion of income given to benevolences will be virtually zero by the middle of the next century," the Ronsvalles said.

In looking at giving as a window into the heart, they conceded Protestant theology emphasizes salvation by grace.

But they added: "Grace has symptoms. If one does not have the symptoms, does he have the condition?"

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