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## In this issue:

- **Republicans, Religious Right lose ground in '98 elections**
- **Texas Baptists airlift food, medicine to Honduras**
- **Biblical basis of reconciliation examined at conference**

## **Republicans, Religious Right lose ground in '98 elections**

By Laurie Lattimore

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP) -- The Republican Party and the Christian Right, going into the 1998 elections expecting to gain seats in Congress, instead suffered a surprising "left hook" Nov. 2, losing political ground and taking a hard hit on moral issues in statewide ballots.

Democrats gained five seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, weakening Republican control. Republicans continued to hold a 55-45 majority in the Senate but did not gain any seats. Among governors, Republicans suffered a net loss of one.

GOP leaders had expected huge gains in the election in reaction to the Monica Lewinsky-White House sex scandal. Instead, voters sent a status-quo message, rejecting candidates with extreme views both left and right.

One place where that message was clear was in Alabama, where incumbent Gov. Fob James -- who courted heavily the Christian Right during his latest term and hired former Christian Coalition guru Ralph Reed as his political consultant -- lost badly to challenger Lt. Gov. Don Siegelman. In a double whammy to the Christian Right, the new Alabama governor advocates a lottery to raise funds for education -- an issue long opposed by religious forces.

Joining two other Democratic governors elected in six of the Southeast gubernatorial races, Siegelman's victory has some observers questioning the power of the Christian Right in a region that has been a spawning ground for Christian fundamentalists in the last decade.

Fob James, who won his Republican runoff in June on his stands for prayer in schools and posting the Ten Commandments on courtroom walls, never got a chance to make religion an issue in the gubernatorial race.

"Republicans were stunned in Alabama, and Siegelman's victory is a major setback for arch-conservative forces in this state, which includes the Christian Right," said Linell Finley, a political scientist at the University of Alabama.

Despite the one-issue gubernatorial race, Finley said Siegelman would have won even without his lottery platform.

"I think Siegelman's victory is as much or more a vote against Fob James and the Christian Right," said Finley, who also is pastor of Montgomery's Rock of Ages Baptist Church, one of 27 predominantly black Southern Baptist churches in Alabama.

Other political candidates backed by the Christian Right around the country also suffered defeats -- including South Carolina Gov. David Beasley, who lost to Democratic state representative Jim Hodges, and Washington's Rep. Rick White, who lost to Democratic challenger Jay Inslee. In North Carolina, first-term Sen. Lauch Faircloth, popular among religious conservatives, was unseated by a Democratic challenger, Raleigh lawyer John Edwards.

Although most U.S. governors are still Republicans, Democrats won significant victories in American statehouses. Democratic governors hold just 17 of the 50 states. But the long-held Republican stronghold of California fell to a Democrat for only the fourth time this century, making the state Democrat-controlled in all three branches of government.

In Congress, observers said Republican losses make it less likely that President Clinton will be impeached. In the Senate, the GOP had hoped to gain five seats to achieve a filibuster-proof majority.

Political pundits said voters responded to Democratic candidates who campaigned on issues that matter to people, while Republicans banked on negative reaction to the White House sex scandal.

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family Inc. and leader in the Christian Right movement, told the New York Times the Republican showing in Election '98 was embarrassing. "It was a pretty resounding defeat in my view, especially when you have a president mired in scandal and you could not make that case to voters," he said. "That is pretty sad."

Even Ralph Reed, now an independent political consultant, said the Clinton focus was misled. Reed said Republicans thought "mistakenly that the Clinton scandals were a sufficient rationale for a Republican majority."

Steve Forbes, 1996 GOP presidential candidate who is expected to run in 2000, echoed that disdain for his party's tactics. "Republicans should have learned by now that you must give people compelling reasons to vote for you," he said.

The GOP may have "gained a very valuable lesson, which is you can't play not to lose," said Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. "They were determined to make this election about Bill Clinton, and evidently the American people were determined that this wasn't going to be about Bill Clinton," he told Baptist Press.

Finley said he was surprised at the sudden revelation by Republicans that the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal was an ineffective campaign tactic. He said public-opinion polls have been indicating all along the public perceived Republicans were exploiting the affair by trying to turn an immoral act into an illegal one.

"Morality has a way of boomeranging, and the Republicans just found that out," Finley said. He called the GOP focus an insult to American voters. "The only reason Republicans publicized [Special Prosecutor Ken] Starr's 3,000 pages of explicit description of sexual acts is because they had no confidence in their legal arguments that any crime took place," he said. "And voters know that."

But Finley said Republicans still would have been unsuccessful in gubernatorial and Senate races even with a better campaign strategy because of the party's policies. The Lewinsky scandal "actually saved them from being exposed on issues of school vouchers, affirmative action and anti-gay initiatives that would cast them as very intolerant," he said.

While issues took a back seat in candidate races, voters did speak their minds on several state ballot initiatives. Voters in Arizona, Nevada, Washington, Oregon and Alaska said yes to legalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes. While Colorado now requires parental consent for abortions, the state joined Washington in rejecting attempts to make partial-birth abortions illegal.

Gambling was a big winner as California voters agreed to expanding casino gambling on Indian reservations and Missourians OK'd "boats in moats" -- allowing riverboat casinos not actually docked in the river to be legal gambling sites. That measure was in response to a court ruling that such casinos violated the 1992 legislative provisions for riverboat gambling. In South Carolina and Alabama, new governors are supporting lotteries for the first time in their states.

Proving that religious matters do not rest solely with the Christian Right, Alabama voters approved an amendment prohibiting the "burdening of the free exercise of religion unless government demonstrates it has a compelling interest in doing so."

Christian conservatives can rejoice with bans on same-sex marriages which passed in Hawaii and Alaska and with the defeat of a measure in Colorado that would have given homosexuals protection from discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.

-30-

-- Bob Allen contributed to this article.

## **Texas Baptists airlift food, medicine to Honduras**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptists are delivering water purifiers, generators and more than three tons of food and medicine to hurricane victims in Honduras.

Flooding and mudslides caused by Hurricane Mitch, the worst storm to hit Central America this century, claimed an estimated 7,000 lives in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Texans John LaNoue of Lindale and Mel Goodwin of Longview left Dallas Nov. 3 aboard a DC-4 cargo plane filled to capacity with food, more than \$50,000 worth of antibiotics and other medicines, three generators and three water purification units.

The three units combined are capable of purifying 24,000 gallons of water per day. Much of the medicine was donated by Baylor Health Care System of Dallas. A ton of rice, 2,700 lbs. of beans, 500 pounds of powdered milk and other food were loaded on the cargo plane from Arizona, secured by Southern Baptists' International Mission Board through GraceAire Ministries of Corpus Christi. Texas Baptists were sending another 2,600 lbs. of beans on a commercial airliner.

The plane was scheduled to land Nov. 4 in the capital city of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where the Texans were to make contact with Tim Patterson, representative from Southern Baptists' International Mission Board, to survey needs and determine additional responses.

Once the supplies arrived in Tegucigalpa, they were to be distributed by smaller aircraft to Baptist-designated points of need by Taca International Airlines. Scott Dickson, an executive with the airline and member of First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, arranged for Taca to make the planes available.

After the DC-4 was unloaded in Tegucigalpa, it was then slated to fly across the Gulf of Honduras to Belize City where Belizean Baptists were putting together a planeload of food. Texas Baptists currently have a missions partnership with Baptists in Belize.

Georgia Baptists were scheduled to deliver another planeload of supplies to Trujillo, Honduras, and Mississippi Baptists were flying in food disaster relief goods to LaCiba, Honduras.

Officials with Texas Baptist Men have been in daily contact with David Harms, a Baptist medical missionary serving in Trujillio, Honduras.

Harms said there is a desperate need for beans, rice, tortilla flour, powdered milk, sugar and cooking oil throughout Honduras, as well as anti-malarial medication, antibiotics and drugs to combat diarrhea and parasites.

-30-

## **Biblical basis of reconciliation examined at conference**

By Bob Allen

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Two Baptist pastors and a pastoral counselor examined the biblical basis of reconciliation at the Nov. 4-7 Reconciliation NOW conference in Louisville, Ky.

The New Testament describes reconciliation as a "seeking desire" in verses such as II Cor. 5:18-19, Rom. 5:10 and II Cor. 5:20, said Leslie Hollon, pastor of St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., one of two churches sponsoring the event.

"In the process of being reconciled to God, we are able to be reconciled to each other," Hollon said. That process also permits humans to relate properly to themselves, he said, in what the Bible calls "transformation."

Reconciliation "always acts in middle voice" in the Bible, Hollon said, explaining the Greek "middle" verb tense describes a person performing while also being affected by an act. "I reconcile even as I am being reconciled," Hollon said.

Reconciliation also "has the power to break the sin pattern" that leads to alienation with others in the first place, Hollon said, citing II Cor. 5: 16-20.

Reconciliation "isn't easy," Hollon said, but it's "why the church of Jesus Christ was created."

Instead of starting with Scripture, Lincoln Bingham, pastor of Louisville's St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, a co-sponsor of the event, cited the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty."

As a child, Bingham recalled, he was "disturbed by the brokenness of Humpty Dumpty." On further reflection, Bingham said, he found "there is a lot of theological profundity in this nursery rhyme."

Like Humpty Dumpty, Bingham said, "Man had a great fall." All the kings horses and all the kings men couldn't put Humpty together again. Likewise, humanity's brokenness "cannot be fixed by man alone," Bingham said.

Bingham, whose grandfather was a slave, said he has worked 42 years at "barrier-busting and bridge-building with intentionality" between the races.

A cooperative-ministry consultant for the predominantly white Kentucky Baptist Convention, Bingham also served 16 years simultaneously as chief executive officer for a black Baptist convention.

After walking "a tight rope" on the issue for many years, Kentucky Baptists are making gains in racial relations, he said. A high point came in 1983, when white Baptist leaders signed a statement pledging to move away from a paternal to a fraternal relationship with African-American Baptists.

"We have moved from pulpit exchanges to actual congregation partnerships," Bingham said. "We worship together. We work together."

Wade Rowatt, director of St. Matthews Baptist Church's counseling center, described reconciliation in family settings.

Rowatt, who for 25 years taught family ministry and pastoral counseling at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said his favorite Bible verse is Eph. 5:21, which urges family members to "submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

"I am sick and tired of this male-dominated and female-dominated argument," Rowatt said. "It's Christ-dominated."

Rowatt also applied Jesus' teaching on reconciliation in Matt. 18 to families. Verse 15 says if your brother sins against you, first go to that brother privately. "I think that's the first step in reconciliation; admit you are hurt," Rowatt said.

"Hurt" plus "anger" naturally equals "fight or flight," Rowatt said. "We need to change that equation by reading Ephesians 5:21." In that light, Rowatt said, hurt plus anger plus "God's love," equals "healing, salvation and wholeness."

"I think the toughest part of the Bible is taking seriously, 'Love your enemies,'" Rowatt said. "If you're angry, you're responsible to take initiative," Rowatt said, contrary to the natural impulse to expect the other party to apologize.

Going privately is also important, he added. "So many family problems are escalated ... when we go yell and scream, 'You wouldn't believe what my family member has done to me!'"

That verse also implies that the offended party goes to the offender as an equal, even in cases involving a parent and child. "Go with respect for the other person," he said.

"Christians don't fight to win," Rowatt said. "They fight to be reconciled. If we're out of relationship with one another, we're also out of fellowship with God."

Matt. 18:16 says if the brother will not hear, involve one or two or three more people. If the brother will not hear them, verse 17 says to take it to "the church." Rowatt said the idea is to go repeatedly to resolve a conflict. Outsiders are brought in not to take sides, he said, but to pray. "If you had terminal cancer, who are the first five people you'd call?" he asked. "That's your 'church.'"

Verse 17 also says if the sinful brother refuses to hear "the church," to treat him or her as a non-believer. "There is a time to back away," Rowatt said. "If we can't be reconciled, we can at least be distanced enough to keep from fighting."

Even those cases, Rowatt said, should be considered a "period of moratorium" with an long-term goal being reconciliation.

In response to a question about whether reconciliation is a Christian's ultimate goal, Rowatt said: "I would say reconciliation is the penultimate goal but not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to honor God."

For that reason, he said, divorce, while falling short of God's ideal, may in some cases be a lesser of evils and should not be considered "the ultimate sin."

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: More stores on Reconciliation NOW conference to come.

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