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**FCC drops controversial rules
on religious programming**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Pressured by religious broadcasters and members of Congress, the Federal Communications Commission voted 4-1 Jan. 28 to vacate guidelines that critics say discriminate against religious broadcasters.

The FCC issued new guidelines Dec. 29, when it approved a station swap in Pittsburgh allowing Cornerstone TeleVision Inc., a religious broadcaster, to move from Channel 40 to Channel 16, a channel reserved for noncommercial educational programming.

Since 1952, the FCC has reserved a limited number of television stations for educational broadcasters. Rules require that programs on those channels "be used primarily to serve the educational needs of the community."

In December, the FCC specified that more than half the programming on educational channels must "primarily serve an educational, instructional or cultural purpose in the station's community."

But a part of the FCC guidance dealing with religious programming drew sharp criticism.

The FCC stated that church services generally do not qualify as educational programming. A church service that is part of a historic event, such as the funeral of a national leader, would qualify, if its primary purpose served the educational, instructional or cultural needs of the entire religious community, the commission said.

"Programming primarily devoted to religious exhortation, proselytizing or statements of personally held religious views and beliefs generally would not qualify" as educational programming, the new guidance stated.

Rep. Michael Oxley, R-Ohio, and the National Religious Broadcasters led protests of the December action, saying the new guidelines violated rights of free speech and freedom of religion.

In vacating the earlier vote Jan. 28, the FCC said the guidance adopted a month earlier was intended to clarify what constitutes educational programming.

"Regrettably, it has become clear that our actions have created less certainty rather than more, contrary to our intent."

In hindsight, the FCC added, "We see the difficulty of minting clear definitional parameters for 'educational, instructional or cultural' programming, particularly without the benefit of broad comment."

FCC Commissioner Michael Powell, who dissented from the Dec. 29 guidance, said it "opened a Pandora's Box of problems. In today's decision, we put the lid back on that box."

Commissioner Harold Furchtgott-Roth, the other dissenter to the Dec. 29 guidance, faulted the new guidelines on their merits, not because they were unclear.

"It was not for lack of clarity that these parties objected to the decision but for infringement of freedom of speech and freedom of religion -- and rightly so, he said in a Jan. 28 statement.

In a dissenting statement, however, Commissioner Gloria Tristani called the FCC's reversal "a sad and shameful day for the FCC."

In vacating the new guidance, she said, "this supposedly independent agency has capitulated to an organized campaign of distortion and demagoguery."

She rejected claims that new FCC rules barred certain religious programming from reserved channels.

"Not true -- the Commission simply held that not all religious programming would count toward the 'primarily educational' requirement," she said.

The problem with the new guidance was not a lack of clarity, "but that we were too clear," she added.

"What the majority really means is that they prefer a murky and unenforceable rule to a clear and enforceable one," she said.

Oxley called the new FCC action a "complete and total victory for free religious expression." Earlier, Oxley and other GOP lawmakers had warned FCC Chairman William Kennard "to reverse this ruling, or stand by and see it overturned legislatively or in court."

"Religious broadcasters and their listeners were a target for an FCC that sought to limit their freedom to express religious faith," Oxley said. "It was wrong, and I'm thrilled that the FCC has seen the error of its ways."

NRB President Brandt Gustavson called the reversal "a total victory." He said the organization has filed a formal petition to clarify the previous policy is "null and void" and ensure that it will not be resurrected in the future.

Despite the FCC's approval of Cornerstone's move to Channel 16, the religious broadcaster notified the FCC in a Jan. 18 letter that it had terminated the station-swap agreement. Cornerstone asked the FCC to dismiss its application to acquire Channel 16 and to assign Channel 40 to another buyer.

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Super Bowl MVP Kurt Warner credits Christ for his success

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- National Football League quarterback Kurt Warner told a radio reporter he plans to use his rapid rise from obscurity to Super Bowl MVP as a platform to speak about his Christian faith.

Warner led the St. Louis Rams to a 23-16 victory Jan. 30 with a record performance in Super Bowl XXXIV, described as the best in history. Warner completed 24 of 45 passes for 414 yards and two touchdowns, the last a 73-yard play that broke a 16-16 tie with 1:54 left in the game. An attempted comeback by the Tennessee Titans ended with a tackle one yard from the goal line as time expired.

Upstaging the game, even, was the "Rudy"-like story of Warner's career that sports writers commented would seem corny if it were a movie.

Five years ago, he was working in a supermarket. He grew up in Iowa, dreaming of playing at the University of Iowa. Instead, he settled for smaller Northern Iowa, where he didn't start until his senior season and went undrafted by the pros.

The Green Bay Packers signed him as a free agent but released him. He later played arena football with the Iowa Barnstormers, passing for 183 touchdowns.

Warner signed with the Rams in 1998 but was sent to Amsterdam, where he led the NFL Europe league in passing. He joined the Rams this year as a backup, earning a \$254,000 salary, and took over when superstar-prospect Trent Green went down with an injury.

Finally getting his chance, Warner was named the National Football League's regular-season Most Valuable Player and led his team to its first Super Bowl victory.

Warner has credited his wife, teammates and his faith in Jesus Christ for his success.

"Who am I? I am a devout Christian man," Warner told 40,000 people at a Billy Graham crusade in St. Louis last fall. "I am not a football player. That is what I do. When I throw a touchdown pass now, my thoughts are on how I can use this success on the field as a platform to glorify and praise my Lord Jesus Christ.

"People often ask the secret of my success as a football player. It has nothing to do with how I work out in the off-season or my diet. The secret of my success is simply Jesus Christ."

According to the Christian Web site Religion Today, Warner became a Christian four years ago after the parents of Brenda -- then his girlfriend and now his wife -- were killed by a tornado in Mountain View, Ark.

Kurt watched as Brenda, a Christian, responded to the tragedy with grace. He knew she had dealt similarly with a crippling injury to her son eight years earlier, when as a baby he was dropped on his head. Today the boy, Zachary, is legally blind and brain-damaged but is a fifth grader who can read.

Three months after Brenda's parents death, Kurt became a Christian. Two months after that, he proposed to her and has adopted both Zachary and Brenda's daughter, Jesse.

The family attends St. Louis Family Church. Pastor Jeff Perry leads a Bible study in the Warners' home on Wednesday nights during the football season.

Warner turned down an appearance on the David Letterman Show because it conflicted with his wedding anniversary. He has his own breakfast cereal, Warner's Krunch Time, and proceeds go to a Christian camp for children with special needs.

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-- By ABP staff

Clinton says nation's strength opportunity for advancement

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Delivering his last State of the Union address Jan. 27, President Bill Clinton sounded like anything but a chief executive winding down. Instead, he said the prosperity and progress of the past decade provide the opportunity for new advances in education, health care, poverty elimination, the environment and other areas.

"All of us," said Clinton, "will be judged by the dreams and deeds we pass on to our children. And on that score, we will be held to a high standard, indeed, because our chance to do good is so great."

Clinton urged lawmakers to pass a lengthy list of legislative proposals and offered both praise and criticism for the Republican-led Congress.

"For too long, this Congress has been standing still on some of our most pressing national priorities," Clinton said. He urged lawmakers to pass a "real" patients' bill of rights, gun-safety legislation, campaign-

finance reform, an increase in the minimum wage and to vote up or down on his judicial and other nominees.

But the Democrat commended lawmakers for working with him to balance the budget, saying the nation can pay off the \$3.6 trillion national debt in 13 years, making it debt-free for the first time since 1835.

On education, Clinton called on Congress to invest more in and demand more of public schools. He asked lawmakers to increase funding for Head Start, teacher recruitment, charter schools and building modernization. He also proposed a \$30 billion tax cut that would allow a deduction of up to \$10,000 per year for college tuition.

On health care, the president proposed expanding coverage for uninsured children and adults, dedicating \$400 billion of the budget surpluses to shore up Medicare and adding prescription-drug coverage to Medicare.

Clinton called for an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit and for proposals to help low- and moderate-income Americans save for retirement, medical emergencies, a first home or college education.

While crime has dropped for the past seven years, Clinton said nobody "believes we're safe enough" and challenged Congress to "make this the safest big country in the world."

He called for increased enforcement of existing gun laws and a new requirement that handgun purchasers have a photo license showing they passed the Brady background check and a gun-safety course.

"Every state in this country already requires hunters and automobile drivers to have a license," Clinton said. "I think they ought to do the same thing for handgun purchases."

He called for economic policies that protect the environment, arguing that in a "digital economy," it is possible to grow the economy and protect the environment at the same time.

In international affairs, Clinton said the United States should continue to encourage China and Russia "to emerge as stable, prosperous, democratic nations," to halt nuclear proliferation and terrorism and to reduce the gulf between rich and poor countries.

"We cannot accept a world in which part of humanity lives on the cutting edge of a new economy and the rest live on the bare edge of survival," he said.

Clinton called on Congress to follow the appeal of religious leaders to reduce the debts of poorest countries.

"In a world where over a billion people live on less than a dollar a day, we also have got to do our part in the global endeavor to reduce the debts of the poorest countries so they can invest in education, health care and economic growth," Clinton said.

He also saluted the role of religious organizations in dealing with the nation's social problems.

"We should help faith-based organizations to do more to fight poverty and drug abuse and help people get back on the right track with initiatives like Second Chance Homes that do so much to help unwed teen mothers," Clinton said.

In a statement detailing proposals in Clinton's address, the White House press office said the administration's budget proposes to increase "the involvement of interfaith and community-based organizations in after-school, housing, community-development, criminal-justice, welfare-reform, teen-pregnancy-prevention, and juvenile-justice programs consistent with the constitutional line between church and state."

Clinton also asked Congress to change tax law to allow low- and middle-income citizens who don't itemize deductions to deduct charitable gifts.

"We should support Americans who tithe and contribute to charities but don't earn enough to claim a tax deduction for it," Clinton said.

Clinton also proposed raising the caps on deductions by individuals of appreciated assets such as stocks and real estate.

Clinton also urged Congress and Americans to celebrate the nation's diversity.

While ethnic and religious diversity strengthens America, Clinton lamented that those differences "all too often spark hatred and division."

"We've seen a man dragged to death in Texas just because he was black," Clinton said. "We saw a

young man murdered in Wyoming just because he was gay. Last year, we saw the shootings of African Americans, Asian Americans and Jewish children just because of who they were."

"This is not the American way, and we must draw the line," he added, urging Congress to pass legislation to strengthen federal hate-crimes enforcement and to outlaw discrimination in hiring, firing and promotion based on sexual orientation.

In the Republican response, Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Bill Frist of Tennessee highlighted GOP differences with Clinton on education and health care.

Collins told viewers that education is at the top of the Republican agenda.

"A good education is the ladder of opportunity," she said. "It turns dreams into reality."

Collins detailed a four-point educational agenda that calls for increased federal spending for elementary and secondary education, allowing local schools flexibility in education while requiring accountability in student achievement, more spending on teacher training, retention and recruitment and increasing the limit on tax-favored savings accounts for higher education.

Collins did not mention support for vouchers to pay tuition and private sectarian and nonsectarian schools. But in outlining the GOP priorities a few days earlier, Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi said Republicans remain committed to "choice in education."

Frist, a physician, criticized Clinton's health-care initiatives.

"It makes government even bigger and more bloated because each new program we heard about tonight -- and there were about 11 of them in health care alone -- comes with its own massive bureaucracy."

Frist said the nation's health-care system could be better.

"Costs are climbing," he said. "Too many people can't get insurance or breakthrough drugs. Too many heavy-handed HMOs tell doctors how to do their jobs.

"And yet we should remember that Americans still enjoy the best and most advanced health care in the world," he added.

Frist called for Republicans and Democrats to join together on a plan to reform Medicare that builds on two principles: "choice and security."

He also said Congress would pass "a real 'Patients' Bill of Rights'" with strong patient protections.

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World Vision lists 10 'global hot spots'

By Sarah Griffith

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An African "Arc of Conflict," Sri Lanka and Chechnya/Russia are among the 10 most politically unstable "global hot spots" for 2000, according to an international-aid organization.

Montenegro, Nigeria, Colombia, Angola, Pakistan/India, Sierra Leone and Indonesia also were named as potential areas for violence and war by World Vision.

"These conflicts will tend to remain on our annual list unless and until the international community significantly increases its efforts to resolve them," said Serge Duss, director of public policy and government relations for World Vision in a December press release.

What Duss calls the African "Arc of Conflict" includes the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, a border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia.

Those countries, along with Colombia and Indonesia, are "hold-over hot spots" from last year's list,

Duss said. North Korea and Iraq were left off of the year 2000 list, because "those areas seem to be stabilizing," Duss said.

World Vision described causes for instability in eight of the areas they named:

-- Montenegro is on the list because a planned referendum for independence there could develop conflict between those wanting to keep the republic under Yugoslav control and those wanting independence.

-- Similar tension exists between Russia and Chechnya. Russian military recently trying to gain control of the Chechnyan capital of Grozny threatens the stability of surrounding areas that cannot accommodate the more than 200,000 Chechnyan refugees.

-- A 16-year-old civil war in Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese government and the ethnic Tamil Liberation Tigers has resulted in 55,000 killed and another 800,000 displaced. The conflict has depleted the government treasury and raised inflation almost 20 percent.

-- In Indonesia, East Timor is struggling to form a new government. There are growing social and political troubles in Aceh and an economic crisis in the nation overall.

-- In Angola, civil war has left an estimated one million citizens dead and 1.7 million displaced.

-- More than 20,000 have been killed in Sierra Leone and more than 700,000 displaced as a result of nine years of civil war there. Citizens suffer from food and clean-water shortages as well as poor health care.

-- Conflict between a Muslim north and Christian south is causing conflict in Nigeria, and the nation's transition to democracy is unstable.

The areas in the African "Arc of Conflict" will likely remain unstable in 2000, according to World Vision:

-- Democratic Republic of Congo: A truce signed in July has been violated by all seven countries. Also, the war has displaced 1 million people and more than a million others may be facing starvation.

-- Republic of Congo: While more than 500,000 have been displaced, nearly 15,000 have died just in 1999.

-- Ethiopia/Eritrea: A border dispute continues. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands have been displaced and there are "reports of forced emigration and ethnic cleansing in both countries."

-- Somalia/Somaliland: An inoperative government and clan warfare over much of the country has more than 300,000 people facing starvation. Also, droughts, floods and a ban on the nation's export to nearby countries have caused more tension.

-- Sudan: Civil war for nearly four decades has created continuous conflict, now spreading into neighboring countries. No lasting peace agreement has been established. Two million have died and millions more are homeless, being threatened by starvation and disease.

This is the second year for the annual listing of global hot spots by World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization that focuses on helping the poor.

A Baptist ethicist said armed conflict remains a leading cause of hunger and poverty in the world.

"Supporting international efforts to resolve conflict and to advance human rights are practical steps Christians can take in our democracy that will reduce hunger and poverty," said Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: More information about World Vision's top 10 "global hot spots," is available on the organization's Web site, www.worldvision.org

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