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**Theologian John Newport
remembered as reconciler**

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Colleagues remembered Baptist theologian John Newport as a gracious bridge-builder, renowned scholar and effective apologist for the Christian faith at his memorial service Aug. 21.

Newport, former vice president for academic affairs and provost at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, died Aug. 18 of complications from a stroke he suffered in June. He was 83.

Except for a three-year stint at Rice University in the late 1970s, Newport taught theology and philosophy of religion courses at Southwestern for nearly half a century. He began his teaching career in 1949 at Baylor University, where one of his students was the young Russell Dilday.

Thirty years later, when Dilday became president of Southwestern Seminary, he lured Newport back to Southwestern. Upon his return, Newport became chief administrator of the seminary's theology school and an influential figure throughout the Southern Baptist Convention and beyond. He retired from administration in 1990 but continued to teach through the remainder of the decade.

Though much of his tenure at Southwestern was lived out amid fierce denominational conflict, Newport was known as a voice of reason and a friend to people on both sides of the conflict. He was a major force behind organizing the Inerrancy Conferences of 1987 and 1988, an attempt by the six SBC seminary presidents to address in a scholarly fashion concerns about Baptist views of the Bible.

"He called himself a constructive conservative," Dilday said during the memorial service at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth. "He knew you could be conservative without being cranky."

Faculty colleague James Leo Garrett compared Newport to the New Testament figure Barnabas, "ever encouraging students and fellow professors."

Amid conflicts and controversies, Newport refused to exclude fellow believers and sought ways to call Christians together, Garrett added.

As a silent testimony to this, the worship program included a list of about 60 names of doctoral students Newport supervised in obtaining philosophy of religion degrees. The list included many prominent Baptist names who have taken opposing paths in the denominational conflict.

Newport was the kind of person who "invited everyone to the table," said Bruce Corley, professor of New Testament. "John found joy in fellowship with colleagues and students."

But Newport was also renowned for his intellect, voracious reading and ability to speak intelligently on nearly any theological subject, Corley added. "He never met an idea he would not tackle."

Corley challenged those present to keep the Newport tradition alive. "Who among us will keep together heart and mind as John did?" he asked.

Newport was the author of 11 books, including "Demons, Demons, Demons," "Life's Ultimate Questions" and "The New Age Movement and Biblical Worldview."

Several speakers at the memorial service quoted from Newport's own writings about the reality of heaven and assurance of eternal life.

"John has preached his own message here today, and he is in the city of hope," Dilday said.

Newport is survived by his wife, Eddie Belle; a daughter, Martha Ellen Newport of New York City; two sons, Frank Marvin Newport of Princeton, N.J., and John Newport Jr. of Nyack, N.Y.; and six grandchildren.

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North Carolina Baptist leaders bracing for funding challenge

By Bob Allen

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- Baptist leaders in North Carolina are reportedly gearing up to defend an option that allows churches to contribute to statewide ministries without passing funds on to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Traditionally, Baptist state conventions collect money from churches for a Cooperative Program unified budget that simultaneously funds both the respective state convention and the SBC. The state convention determines a percentage to divide those funds between intra-state and worldwide efforts. Under the arrangement, introduced in 1925, state and national conventions remain autonomous within their own spheres and cannot dictate policy to one another.

After conservatives won control of the SBC in the 1980s, however, a few state groups added flexibility to their giving plans to accommodate moderate churches that still affirm the state organization but want to bypass national ministries they no longer support.

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina currently has four giving options. Three forward various amounts to the SBC. The fourth divides funds between the state convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate splinter group that formed in 1991.

With conservatives gaining influence in the Carolina convention, however, some are now saying the state office should no longer count gifts to the CBF as Cooperative Program and that Tarheel Baptists should strengthen ties to the SBC.

Whether CBF gifts are counted as part of the Cooperative Program is important for bragging rights. Contributions to the unified budget are a traditional yardstick to measure loyalty to and support for the state convention. Those are factors that often come into play when it comes time to elect officers or appoint members of a particular church to key leadership committees.

More importantly, the amount given through the Cooperative Program is also used in a formula based on membership and denominational support to determine how many voting "messengers" a particular church is entitled to at the annual state convention meeting.

According to a report in the North Carolina Baptist newspaper Biblical Recorder, leaders anticipate a motion will come from the floor at the state convention's annual meeting this November to do away with the CBF option.

Members of a budget committee said they discussed a possible challenge but decided not to recommend a change in the current giving scheme. The state General Board's executive committee held a similar discussion Aug. 15. Members of the budget committee say they are prepared to defend the multiple plans, if necessary.

The executive committee approved a \$35.1 million budget for next year that must be ratified by the full General Board in September and by the full convention later this fall.

A separate recommendation calls for a study of the state convention budgeting process, in light of a recent strategic-planning process.

The Cooperative Program funds Baptist State Convention of North Carolina ministries including colleges, children's and retirement homes and hospitals. Ministries of the SBC include missionaries in North America and overseas, theological seminaries and a moral concerns/religious liberty agency, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

The symbiotic relationship between autonomous Southern Baptist churches, associations and state and national conventions was described by one former leader as "a rope of sand with the strength of steel." Another popular analogy is the bumblebee, which supposedly according to principles of aerodynamics should not be able to fly.

The genius of the plan was demonstrated in massive growth in the mid-20th century that made Southern Baptists the second-largest faith group in the United States, behind Roman Catholics.

Whether that unity of purpose can survive the internecine struggle that has divided conservatives and moderates since the 1970s may be an open question.

Some programs -- like church starting, state missions, Sunday school and discipleship training and campus ministry -- are jointly funded by state conventions and national entities. That works well when relationships are healthy but becomes thornier when the respective organizations don't see eye to eye.

In some states, including North Carolina, Baptist colleges have started divinity programs as alternatives to conservative SBC seminaries. Seminaries, meanwhile, which traditionally offered only master's and doctor's degrees, have started baccalaureate programs.

In two states, Virginia and Texas, conservatives broke away from moderate-led conventions that they complained were no longer loyal Southern Baptists.

SBC leaders have said publicly that record giving levels suggest that most Southern Baptists are satisfied with the convention's current focus.

However, the denomination's largest affiliate, the 2.7 million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas, has recently opposed some of the SBC's more conservative stands and is expected this fall to consider changes in the way it funds the 15.8 million-member national convention.

Meanwhile, state leaders recently voted to establish a "Task Force on Cooperation" for "ongoing dialogue between the presidents of SBC entities and executive directors of the state Baptist conventions."

"The state conventions wish to work in partnership (with the SBC) to build the kingdom of God and be the missionary force God wants us to be," said Wyndell Jones, president of the Association of State Baptist Executive Directors. "

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News service announces fund honoring longtime journalist

By ABP staff

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Associated Baptist Press has established a fund honoring the memory of veteran Baptist journalist Al Shackleford.

Shackleford, 68, died July 23 from injuries sustained in an auto accident near his home in Franklin, Tenn.

The national, autonomous news service has already received memorial gifts honoring Shackleford, said Greg Warner, executive editor, and others have asked about possible gifts. He said Shackleford's widow has given consent for the fund.

"ABP and Al Shackleford are linked in so many ways, and many want to honor his life through an organization to which he was deeply committed" Warner said.

Shackleford's career in Baptist journalism spanned more than 40 years, the last eight as editor-in-chief of *Mature Living*, a magazine published by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He is perhaps best known, however, for being fired 10 years ago as director of the denomination's official news service, Baptist Press, an episode that caused many to hail him as a hero for press freedom.

Supporters of the firings of both Shackleford and news editor Dan Martin said the two journalists were biased against conservatives. Others, however, called the move an effort by the denomination's leaders to censor news coverage.

The event prompted the formation of ABP, an independent news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., that has a self-perpetuating board of directors and raises support from various sources. Shackleford was a founding member of ABP's board.

Warner said the ABP staff and board of directors would work with the Shackleford family to determine "the most appropriate way for ABP to honor Al's memory."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Information about ABP's Shackleford memorial fund is available from ABP Executive Director Philip Poole or Executive Editor Greg Warner at 1-800-340-6626. Gifts may be sent to ABP, P.O. Box 23769, Jacksonville, Fla. 32241.

Black pastor receives presidential medal

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Renowned Baptist preacher and civil-rights champion Gardner Taylor was among 15 recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom presented by President Bill Clinton at an Aug. 9 White House ceremony.

Clinton called Taylor, longtime pastor of Brooklyn's Concord Baptist Church and a founder of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, one of America's greatest preachers.

Clinton said in recent history, if anyone made a list of the five greatest preachers in America, "Gardner Taylor would always be at the top."

In his role at the PNBC, Clinton said, Taylor "helped to galvanize black churches all across America in the struggle for civil rights." He added that Taylor "speaks not just from the Scriptures but from his soul. The gift God gave him he in turn has shared with others."

On the day the 82-year-old Taylor was born, Clinton said, the Lord must have had in mind the Romans passage asking, "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

Clinton also presented awards to Jesse Jackson, founder and president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, and Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

In an interview with Associated Baptist Press on the steps of the White House, Taylor said, "I have been interested in civil rights, but I haven't been a civil rights leader. Nor have I been a political person. I have been a spokesperson for biblical religion."

He said the greatest threat to freedom and social justice today is "indifference -- a feeling that it's all already done, there's nothing more to do. And in this world, there's hardly ever everything done."

Jackson, also a longtime civil rights advocate, told reporters that he felt gratified to receive an award when often he has taken on causes -- such as attempting to free American soldiers -- that government leaders would not want him to take. "For moral leadership Jesus was killed, Gandhi was killed. Dr. King was killed. Mandela was jailed for 27 years. Those who dare fight to open doors must face resistance."

President John F. Kennedy established the award in 1963. It is the highest civilian award bestowed by the U.S. government and is awarded to those who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

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Gore, Lieberman accept nominations

By Kenny Byrd

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- Telling delegates and a national television audience that he may talk too much about substance and may not be exciting, Vice President Al Gore accepted his party's presidential nomination, saying the "presidency is more than a popularity contest."

Gore, who is often chided for appearing too stiff, addressed the Democratic National Convention Aug. 17. "I know I won't always be the most exciting politician. But I pledge to you tonight: I will work for you every day and I will never let you down," he said.

Delegates also heard from Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., who is the first Jewish vice presidential nominee from a major party in history. Lieberman does not campaign or work on the Sabbath -- Friday night sundown until Saturday night -- unless the work involves human needs. For example, he walked to Congress from his house on a Sabbath to cast votes in favor of the Persian Gulf War.

Gore, who has been criticized for being too close to scandals involving President Clinton, said: "We're electing a new president. And I stand here tonight as my own man."

Defending attacks from Republicans who say integrity needs to be restored to the White House, Gore bluntly addressed the issues of honor and family values.

He said family values include taking care of the elderly, getting cigarettes out of the hands of children, providing seniors with prescription drug benefits and others. He said there has been a lot of talk about "honor" in the campaign. "To me, honor is not just a word, but an obligation." He said enacting laws against hate crimes and against employment discrimination based on sexual orientation were issues of honor.

And in sharp contrast to the stand on abortion from the Republican presidential ticket, Gore said, "Let there be no doubt: I will protect a woman's right to choose. The last thing this country needs is a Supreme Court that overturns Roe vs. Wade."

Gore, a Vietnam veteran and former Vanderbilt Divinity School student, touted the country's good times and booming stock market. "But my focus is on working families. ... For all our good times, I'm not satisfied."

The election is not about "past performance," Gore said. "Let's make sure our prosperity enriches not just the few, but all working class families. Let's invest in health care, education, a secure retirement and middle-class tax cuts."

He criticized the tax cut proposal of his rival, Texas Gov. George W. Bush. "I will not go along with a huge tax cut for the wealthy at the expense of everyone else and wreck our good economy in the process."

Bush says his tax cut would not undermine spending on education and other necessary government programs.

But Gore said in the areas of campaign-finance reform, environmental polluters, the gun lobby and others, the GOP is "for the powerful. We're for the people."

Earlier in the week, Clinton addressed the delegation and touted the positive economic numbers and low crimes rates.

But the next night, former Democratic Presidential Candidate Bill Bradley said despite the booming times, the have-nots have been left out.

He said 44 million Americans -- more than all the people living in 12 states between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains -- do not have health insurance "Would we write off the health of all the people living in 12 of our 50 states? Unlikely. Yet because the uninsured are not concentrated in any one area, they seem invisible to us."

Bradley said, "Tonight, nearly one-fifth of the children in this country are ill-fed, ill-housed and ill-educated."

Delegates and elected officials worked with Los Angeles community service organizations during the week of the convention to provide social services, such as food banks, tree plantings and clean-up projects. Karenna Gore Schiff, daughter of the vice president, participated one day in a food-distribution project.

Also outside the convention hall were picketers, protesting everything from the use of the death penalty and abortion to the corporate takeover of American politics. Inside the convention hall, some delegates protested the Boy Scouts participation in presenting the flags. The Boy Scouts have come under fire from gay-rights activists since winning a Supreme Court case upholding their ability to deny top scouting positions to homosexuals.

And both the death penalty and campaign-finance extremes came under fire.

Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Minn., asked the party to "prohibit soft-money fund raising at all Democratic conventions from now on."

Campaign finance reformers criticized both parties for using their conventions to hold fund-raising events.

Jesse Jackson urged Democrats not to avoid tough battles and tough questions raised by protesters, especially dealing with the use of the death penalty in America.

"When Governor [George] Ryan, the conservative governor of Illinois, imposes a moratorium on the death penalty, we cannot dodge that question. We are a better people than that, we are a better party than that," Jackson said.

Jackson criticized the GOP convention in Philadelphia for creating an "inclusion illusion." And he applauded Gore for selecting Lieberman as his running mate, saying that "when a barrier falls for one of the locked out, it opens the doors for all."

Lieberman's break with the Democratic Party on some issues, such as his support for education vouchers, met criticism from some delegates. The DNC platform opposed vouchers because they would undermine public education, but Lieberman says as vice president he would defer to the views of Gore, who opposes them.

DNC platform officials handed critics of "charitable choice" a key victory by carefully crafting the platform to support partnerships between faith-based organizations and government but insisted that tax funds must be distributed in a manner consistent with the First Amendment.

The platform language appears to seek greater safeguards for church-state concerns than most charitable choice supporters have been willing to accept.

Gore campaign spokesman Dagoberto Vega told Associated Baptist Press that Gore has not changed his support for charitable choice. "Because he believes in the separation of church and state, as long as there is a secular alternative and as long as no one is required to participate in religious services as a condition of receiving services, he believes charitable choice would work under those circumstances."

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Democratic platform softens faith-based funding language

By Kenny Byrd

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- Carefully crafted language in the Democratic National Committee's platform calls for government to partner with volunteer and religious organizations to fight social ills but insists that taxpayer funds not be used to advance religion.

The plank is a key victory for opponents of a series of proposals known collectively as "charitable choice" that would make it easier for houses of worship to receive federal funds.

If Vice President Al Gore endorses the language, it would appear to pull him away from earlier statements supporting charitable choice.

But Gore campaign spokesman Dagoberto Vega told Associated Baptist Press that Gore has not changed his views about charitable choice. "Because he believes in the separation of church and state, as long as there is a secular alternative and as long as no one is required to participate in religious services as a condition of receiving services, he believes charitable choice would work under those circumstances."

Other planks of the Democratic platform affirm abortion rights, while acknowledging that party members hold differing views on issues of personal conscience; support "sensible" gun laws and universal health-care coverage; and call for stronger laws targeting hate crimes and discrimination.

Both Gore and GOP presidential nominee George W. Bush have endorsed charitable choice as a way to address the nation's social problems, such as substance abuse and homelessness.

The DNC platform states that taxpayer funds should never be used to proselytize or to support discrimination.

As endorsed in the Republican platform, however, charitable choice would still allow religious groups to discriminate in hiring practices -- for example, a church would not be forced to hire a homosexual or an atheist -- without risking tax dollars. And it is unclear how the government would monitor whether tax dollars are being used to proselytize under charitable choice.

The DNC platform states: "Faith-based and community-based organizations have always been at the forefront in combating the hardships facing families and communities. Democrats believe it is time that government found ways to harness the power of faith-based organizations in tackling social ills such as drug addiction, juvenile violence and homelessness."

"However, in contrast to Republicans, Democrats believe that partnerships with faith-based organizations should augment -- not replace -- government programs, should respect First Amendment protections and should never use taxpayer funds to proselytize or to support discrimination," it concludes.

The GOP platform calls for expansion of charitable choice, which was first added to the 1996 welfare-reform laws, into all federal social-service programs.

Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., told Associated Baptist Press in an interview outside the DNC convention hall that the Democratic platform "reflects a more responsible way of dealing with faith-based organizations, because it specifically prohibits discrimination and proselytization, unlike the Republican platform, which supports charitable choice."

Even if charitable choice were amended to prevent discrimination, Scott said, "you've still got an Establishment Clause problem."

Highlighting a policy difference between Gore and his running mate Joe Lieberman, the DNC platform also opposes the use of education vouchers, which would provide tax-funded vouchers for children to attend private and parochial schools.

It states, "Let there be no mistake: what America needs are public schools that compete with one another and are held accountable for results, not private-school vouchers that drain resources from public schools and hand over the public's hard-earned tax dollars to private schools with no accountability."

Lieberman has voted to support pilot voucher programs but says now that Gore will have the final say on vouchers in a Gore-Lieberman administration.

Lieberman's views on vouchers are also at odds with several Jewish groups, and one African-American pastor opposed to vouchers wants to meet with Lieberman to discuss the issue.

Timothy McDonald, pastor of First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta, told ABP, "What we believe is that Mr. Lieberman has only heard part of the story."

McDonald is chair of People For the American Way's African-American Ministers' Leadership Council, which has "requested an audience" with Lieberman to express concerns over education vouchers.

McDonald said Lieberman needs to hear that "vouchers don't work."

"And even he is using the language of helping inner-city black kids," McDonald continued. "That's a joke. Because in every place where vouchers come in with that principle, within three years it's opened up to everybody, and the ones who benefit the least are the poor, inner-city black kids."

Other issues in the 40-page DNC platform, which is designed to detail the party's policy stances, include:

-- The right of women to have an abortion "consistent with Roe vs. Wade, and regardless of ability to pay." Eliminating the right to choose is "only one (Supreme Court) justice away," the platform says, adding that Democrats want to "make abortion less necessary and more rare, not more difficult and more dangerous."

-- "Sensible" gun laws, including mandatory child-safety locks, a photo license ID, a full background check and requiring a gun-safety test to buy a new handgun.

-- Increased penalties against hate crimes.

-- A victims-rights amendment to the Constitution.

-- Universal health coverage for all Americans, beginning with children.

-- Passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, designed to prevent discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace.

In a jab at Republicans, the DNC platform inserted language purposely omitted in the last two GOP platforms. It states in part: "We recognize that members of our party have deeply held and sometimes differing views on issues of personal conscience like abortion and capital punishment. We view this diversity as a source of strength, not as a sign of weakness."

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Civil-rights leader says dream of MLK can now be realized

By Kenny Byrd

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- Rainbow Coalition founder Jesse Jackson said America stands at a moment "pregnant with possibility," where budget surpluses could be used to realize Martin Luther King's dream of economic justice.

The long-time civil rights leader and Baptist minister addressed cheering delegates at the Democratic National Convention Aug. 15, telling them he has spent much of his life "striving to bring light to dark places."

"I know something about the tides of change," Jackson said. "This is a moment pregnant with possibility; a moment that we have waited for more than a generation to come our way."

Jackson said King's dream of economic justice and opportunity for all has been deferred for too long. Assassinations, wars and staggering deficits have "limited" the nation's vision and "shackled" its imagination, he said.

"Now America has no global military rival," Jackson said. "Deficits have turned to surpluses. And there are promises to keep.

"This economy has enjoyed record growth, but America's working families are still struggling to get by. Jobs are plentiful but less secure. Wages are up but haven't made up ground lost over the last 25 years. Forty-five million people have no health insurance. They work one illness away from bankruptcy.

"In the midst of great wealth, one in five children still grows up in poverty. This is a moral disgrace that we must never accept. A coal miner still dies every six hours from Black Lung Disease. In Mud Creek, Kentucky, kids still go to schools with not enough books to go around."

Jackson criticized the Republican National Convention held in Philadelphia before the DNC meeting for creating an "inclusion illusion." And he applauded Vice President Al Gore for selecting Joe Lieberman, who if Gore wins would become the first Jewish U.S. vice president, as his running mate, saying that "when a barrier falls for one of the locked out, it opens the doors for all."

He also criticized Republicans for wanting to use the surplus for tax breaks that he said would benefit primarily the wealthy.

And he said Texas Gov. George W. Bush "tells us we should look into his heart."

"But whatever is in his heart, the question is what is in his budget," Jackson retorted. "He says leave no one behind -- but they are left behind in his budget priorities. This contest is not about race or religion but about resource distribution and budget priorities."

He urged Democrats not to avoid tough battles and tough questions raised by protesters.

"When Governor [George] Ryan, the conservative governor of Illinois, imposes a moratorium on the death penalty, we cannot dodge that question. We are a better people than that. We are a better party than that," Jackson said.

Jackson told the crowd that "the long arm of justice reaches neither for the political left nor the political right but for the moral center."

He added: "Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' Politics asks the question, 'Would it work? Can I win?' Morality and conscience ask the question, 'Is it right?'"

"In the end, if it is morally right, politics and popularity has to adjust to unyielding power of the moral center."

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Convention speaker blasts political fund raising

By Kenny Byrd

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- Challenging his own party from the convention floor, a maverick for campaign finance reform asked Democrats to put an immediate ban on "soft money" fund raising.

Minnesota Sen. Russ Feingold has criticized both parties for their reliance on unrestricted funds that flow into party treasuries and are used to boost candidates' own campaigns.

Both parties were criticized for seizing on their respective conventions as opportunities for raising funds. A particular fund-raising controversy marred the Democrats' gathering.

Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Calif., had planned to hold a fund raiser at the Playboy Mansion, but canceled it after party leaders threatened to cancel her speech at the convention. Sanchez called off the event but declined to speak at the convention anyway.

In a break from carefully scripted pep-rally speeches that dominated both conventions, Feingold told fellow Democrats: "I cannot stand before you ... without mentioning my concern and dismay that soft money has become so much a part of this convention. It should not be."

"I, therefore, urge the DNC to prohibit soft-money fund raising at all Democratic conventions, from now on," he said.

Feingold went on to say that Vice President Al Gore would sign a bill banning soft money, but Texas Gov. George W. Bush would not.

Feingold went even further at a speech delivered to Shadow Convention participants a few blocks away from the Staples Center where the DNC was meeting.

There, Feingold said, "I do believe in full public financing of all elections in the United States of America, and that's where we have to go."

He said the country has devolved from a "representative democracy to a corporate democracy" and it is no longer one person, one vote, but "a system of one million dollars, one million votes

He described current fund raising as " a system of legalized bribery and legalized extortion."

Feingold said one Republican senator reportedly raised between \$600,000 and \$700,000 at seven different fund raisers during the single week of the party's recent convention in Philadelphia.

And he said he would find little comfort in saying that Republicans are worse than his own party, because Democrats claim to be the party of the people.

Coming to Los Angeles, Feingold observed: "We see corporate names emblazoned in gigantic letters across the very building where the nominee will be chosen. Corporate-sponsored parties, corporate-sponsored concerts, corporate-sponsored golf tournaments, corporate-sponsored wine tastings, corporate-sponsored yacht cruises, corporate-sponsored shopping excursions, and of course, in between, the corporate-sponsored breakfasts, lunches and dinners."

"The story is not whether to have a fund raiser at the Playboy Mansion, but the obscenity of unlimited special-interest soft money contributions," he said. "The story is not whether the president is upstaging the vice president by holding fund raisers in L.A. this week; it's the staggering size of the contributions required to get into the darn thing."

Feingold said the DNC was beginning with a reception, including \$100,000 and \$50,000-plus soft-money contributions, led by Prudential, The American Council of Life Insurance and American Express.

Another fund raiser was to be hosted by Bell South, US West, EchoStar Communications and UPS. "Didn't they get a good-enough deal on the 1996 Telecom bill?" Feingold asked. "I thought they did."

The Shadow Conventions met at both conventions to bring disenfranchised voters to discuss three issues organizers say are being ignored by the two major parties -- overcoming poverty, changing the approach to fighting substance abuse and campaign-finance reform.

Bell South and Blue Cross Blue Shield also hosted a "media lounge" at both conventions for members of the media, providing reporters free food and drink. They handed out small gifts in the lounge and gave reporters cards from their communications office urging reporters to "keep in touch."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: More information about in the influence of money in politics is posted at the Center for Responsive Politics' Web site, www.opensecrets.org

Drug war should focus on treatment, not jail, says Republican lawmaker

By Kenny Byrd

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- The United States has a "sorry record" on fighting drugs and should rethink its tactic of throwing drug users into jail, a Republican lawmaker told participants at the Los Angeles Shadow Convention.

"We are jailing a whole young-adult generation of blacks and Latinos," Rep. Tom Campbell, R-Calif., told the group of disenfranchised voters meeting at both conventions to discuss issues they say are being ignored by the major parties, such as the drug wars, poverty and campaign-finance reform.

"We cannot spend our way out of the problem; we cannot incarcerate our way out of the problem," Campbell said. The cost of the nation's failed drug policy, he added, is "lives spent behind bars" and "the damage of children raised without a mother or a father because of incarceration."

A Democratic House member also spoke to the shadow group, saying that he would advise General Barry McCaffrey, the U.S. drug czar, to resign "except they'd appoint another jerk just like him, that I would have to ask to resign, too."

Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., a leader in the Congressional Black Caucus, criticized mandatory-sentencing laws. He also said he has proposed a bill that would restore the voting rights of "people who have been to prison, have a federal felony, paid their dues, went to jail, got on probation and parole."

"They should have the right to vote in elections when they come out," Conyers said.

Campbell said the best way to measure the availability of drugs is the street price of heroine and cocaine, which now cost one-fourth as much as they did 20 years ago. Since 1980, he said, the number of drug-overdose deaths has increased 540 percent. The proportion of high-school seniors reporting that drugs are readily available has doubled in two decades, and incarceration for drug offences has risen tenfold.

While most drug users in the country are white, Campbell said, most of those serving prison terms for drug crimes are black. He said 11 percent of the nation's drug users are black, but more than 60 percent of those in state prisons for drug felonies are black.

"You can't tell me there's no racial aspect to this," he said. "You can't tell me that a black person who's using crack is treated the same way as a white person who's sniffing some cocaine."

Campbell said, "Education works better than jailing people." And he added that the United States could find money for education programs by refusing the Clinton administration's request for \$1.3 billion to fight a war on drugs in Colombia.

"Even if every penny were spent on eradication of crops in Colombia, this investment would be less effective than spending that same amount of money on treatment," Campbell said, pointing to statistics from The Rand Institute.

"For too long you've been short-changed by leaders who were poll driven and focus-group centered," he railed. "Their brains work fine; it's their backbones that need a little help."

"The promise of America lies not in incarceration but in rehabilitation, and sees America's strength not in fighting a war in another country but in establishing the peace that comes from justice within our own," he said.

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Panel discussion tees off against Religious Right

By Kenny Byrd

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- The Religious Right is manipulating voters by using faith to win votes, charged panelists at a discussion held in conjunction with the Democratic National Convention.

Speaking at an Aug. 15 forum on challenging the Religious Right, Interfaith Alliance Executive Director Welton Gaddy, said: "How religion will impact government is no mere theoretical concern. It is an issue crucial to the integrity of religion and to the vitality of government."

"We have seen the negative consequences of using faith to win votes," he said. "That is the strategy of the Religious Right."

Gaddy said Religious Right organizations attach religious language to a partisan political agenda, thereby "associating the values of faith and the positive platform of a particular candidate or party ... so that disagreeing with a candidate or the party constitutes a breach of faith."

Gaddy said he grew up in the Southern Baptist Convention and "saw firsthand members of the Religious Right come into a denomination and use religious language to accomplish political purposes. And the issue was power."

"I saw them ... sway thousands of people who were good, thoughtful, tolerant people." Gaddy said. "Those political operatives stole my denomination, and given the chance, they will steal this country."

Another panelist, pollster Peter Hart, said he sees an unusual trend this election year. While three in four Americans believe the economy is headed in the right direction, more than 40 percent say the country is not headed in the right direction, he said.

Candidates who demonstrate a moral compass by sharing their religious and spiritual connections with the voters "indeed have made a difference," Hart said, but voters have a negative reaction to the overuse of religious rhetoric during a campaign.

"Voters are not embracing the moral views of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell," he said. "Indeed, they do not like the religious litmus test," he said.

Tim McDonald, pastor of First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta, said the Religious Right movement is more about power than morality.

In an emotional address to the crowd, he said, "The quest of the Religious Right has very little to do with morality and very little to do with family. It has more to do with power. That is what they're after."

He said if religion is to be anything, it cannot be a "tool or a pawn of the political process or any political party whether it is Democratic or Republican. But it has to be the conscience that critiques both the parties, and the conscience that deals more with principles and truth and righteousness."

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