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**States consider moral issues
in ballot initiatives nationwide**

By Bob Allen

(ABP) -- Though overshadowed by flip-flops and recounts in the presidential election Nov. 7, a number of states also left up to voters to decide on ballot initiatives on moral issues. They included:

-- Legalized gambling: With opposition led by Baptists and other conservative evangelicals, gambling initiatives across the country met mixed results.

Gambling opponents lost in Colorado, where voters overwhelmingly approved a multi-state lottery, such as Powerball, with at least 20 other states.

In Massachusetts, a ban on greyhound racing lost narrowly.

South Carolina voters approved a referendum legalizing a state lottery, which Gov. Jim Hodges said would raise \$150 million yearly for education

South Dakota approved a referendum raising the maximum bet from \$5 to \$100 at Deadwood casinos. Supporters said it was needed to allow the city's casinos to compete with those in other states. South Dakota voters also rejected a constitutional amendment abolishing video-lottery games.

The gambling lobby lost ground in Arkansas, however, where voters rejected a lottery, along with casinos and charity bingo, though all were earmarked for education. Gov. Mike Huckabee, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, said government becomes a "pimp" when it uses gambling to fill its treasury.

Maine voters rejected video-lottery machines at Scarborough Downs Race Track 60 percent-40 percent.

Missouri voters defeated 69 percent to 31 percent a measure to ease restrictions on who can run bingo games.

West Virginia voters defeated a local referendum that would have allowed the Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Springs to open the state's first casino.

-- School vouchers: Voucher proposals, opposed by teachers' unions and governors in both states, lost soundly in Michigan and California.

California voters overwhelmingly rejected a school-voucher referendum that would have offered parents \$4,000 to send their child to a private school, regardless of income.

Michigan voters rejected more than 2-1 a proposal that would have required school districts with poor graduation rates to offer \$3,100 vouchers for students to attend a private, parochial or public school of their choice.

Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, noted that voters routinely vote down such proposals. "They seem to understand better than some politicians the folly of attempting to strengthen education by draining support from public schools, not to mention the damage of breaching the wall of separation between church and state," he said.

-- Homosexual rights: Four states considered ballot votes on gay rights in response to Vermont's recent law recognizing civil unions of homosexuals.

Maine defeated a referendum to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation 51 percent to 49 percent.

Nebraska voters overwhelmingly passed a ban on gay marriages by amending the state constitution to approve of heterosexual marriages only.

Nevada voters also amended their state constitution to ban gay marriages by a wide margin.

Oregon voters narrowly rejected a ban on instruction in public schools that encourages, promotes or sanctions homosexual or bisexual behavior.

-- Drugs: Colorado and Nevada approved the medical use of marijuana, while Alaska rejected a referendum to decriminalize marijuana.

Californians approved a referendum providing treatment and probation instead of prison for first- or second-time non-violent drug offenses, and Mendocino County, Calif., voted to allow adults to grow 25 pot plants apiece.

-- Abortion: Colorado rejected a law requiring a 24-hour waiting period for abortions.

-- Doctor-assisted suicide: Maine voters rejected 51 percent-49 percent a referendum to join Oregon as the second state to allow doctor-assisted suicide for adults who are terminally ill.

-- Gun control: Two states required background checks for gun shows.

In the shadow of last year's Columbine High School slayings, Colorado voters overwhelmingly approved a law requiring criminal background checks for the sale of firearms at gun shows.

A similar law in Oregon requiring background checks for gun-show purchases also passed easily.

-- English as official language: Two states established English-only laws.

Arizona voted 70 percent-30 percent to end bilingual education programs in favor of English-only instruction.

Utah voted 2-1 to declare English the official language of the state and requiring the state to establish rules for public and higher education institutions to assist non-English speakers to learn the language.

-- Interracial marriage: Alabama repealed by a 3-2 margin a century-old ban on interracial marriage and became the last state in the union to add language to the state constitution guaranteeing equal protection under the law regardless of race, color, religion national origin or gender.

Baptist theologian James McClendon dies

By Bob Allen

PASADENA, Calif. (ABP) -- Baptist theologian and educator James William McClendon Jr., 76, died Oct. 30 in Altadena, Calif., after two years of declining health.

Curtis Freeman, associate professor in Christianity at Houston Baptist University, a longtime friend who collaborated with McClendon on several projects, described him as one of the most important Baptist theologians in the latter half of the 20th century.

A native of Shreveport, La., McClendon was a graduate of the University of Texas. He later studied at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary under professors T.B. Maston and W.T. Connor, and at Princeton Theological Seminary.

McClendon taught at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary; Stanford, Notre Dame, Temple and Baylor universities; Goucher College; the University of Pennsylvania and for many years at the Episcopal Church Divinity School of the Pacific and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif. For the last 10 years he was retired at Fuller Theological Seminary where he served as scholar-in-residence and completed a three-volume systematic theology.

McClendon finished the third volume of his theology, which is titled "Witness" and is due for release soon, while on his deathbed. Earlier volumes were titled "Ethics" and "Doctrine."

Freeman predicted the new volume "is going to be a very substantial theological work."

Freeman said that, like others, McClendon wondered why Baptists have produced so few influential theologians in the tradition of A.H. Strong, Walter Rauschenbusch and E.Y. Mullins. His conclusion, Freeman added, was "Baptists have really not seen their own convictions and practices as a resource for theology."

McClendon preferred the lower-case "baptist" when referring to his faith tradition to include not only modern Baptists but also other free-church movements like Mennonites, Brethren, some Pentecostals and others, Freeman said.

McClendon also wrote about the importance of Christian convictions being embodied in the lives of individuals and churches.

He began his teaching career at a Southern Baptist seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., but was asked to leave because he helped raise money for a student to march with Martin Luther King.

From there he became the first Baptist to teach at a Catholic school in the United States when he moved to the University of San Francisco. After leading students and faculty to protest the war in Vietnam, he was dismissed once again.

He spent the bulk of his career teaching at an Episcopal school, and enjoyed being a Baptist in a multicultural and theologically diverse setting, said Texas pastor Kyle Childress, another longtime friend.

Since most of McClendon's career was spent outside of denominational schools, many Southern Baptists are unfamiliar with his work. However, his writings are influential for a group of younger, moderate Baptists who drafted a statement called the "Baptifesto" that critiques both moderates and conservatives in Southern Baptist life as being too dependent on a modern worldview based in Enlightenment Rationalism.

"He was really in some ways out of touch with 'big B' Baptists," Freeman said. However, McClendon's books are becoming widely used by some of the newer Baptist seminaries and theology schools, he added.

McClendon's theology "does not fit in the liberal/moderate/conservative spectrum," Childress said. "It's in a different place."

A memorial service was held Nov. 7 at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif. Another was scheduled Nov. 11 at Shiloh Baptist Church in Mooringsport, La., near Shreveport.

Childress, pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, Texas, was scheduled to preach at the memorial service in Louisiana. Childress said he was never a student of McClendon but became acquainted with him about 15 years ago and has corresponded with him and had him as a guest in his church.

"Jim had the great ability to have an in-depth conversation with the postmodernist philosophers and theologians, and at the same time he could sit in a Sunday-school class and have conversations with lay people in a way that light bulbs were going on in their heads saying, 'Yeah, that makes sense.' I think that's the mark of a great teacher," Childress said.

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Florida Baptist editor resigns for teaching post

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- The editor of Florida Baptists' state-convention newspaper is leaving to teach at a college in Mississippi.

Michael Chute, executive editor of the Florida Baptist Witness since 1995, has resigned effective Feb. 6, according to the paper's Nov. 9 issue. Chute, 50, has been named an associate professor and chairman of the communications department at William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Miss.

His wife, Kathy, has also been named executive assistant to the president for development and external relations at the four-year, liberal-arts school affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention. She currently teaches at Jacksonville University, a private school in Jacksonville.

Chute was quoted as saying he leaves Florida with "mixed emotions," but "after several months of prayerfully seeking God's will, there is no doubt the Lord is leading us to serve him at William Carey College," which enrolls 2,400 students on three campuses.

Chute, a former missionary journalist for the Southern Baptist Foreign [now International] Mission Board, said he has sought to make the Florida weekly "unapologetically a missions-minded Christian publication" during his tenure.

The move marks a return to the classroom for Chute, who came to the Witness from a teaching position at Oklahoma Baptist University. While in Jacksonville, he has continued teaching as an adjunct professor at the University of North Florida.

Chute took over the official news journal of the Florida Baptist Convention at a tumultuous time. His predecessor, Jack Brymer, quit in a dispute with the commission that oversees the paper's work, complaining that conservative commissioners were attempting to pressure him into censoring the paper's content.

Chute has worked previously as managing editor of the Missouri Baptist newspaper, Word and Way; director of college relations for Southwest Baptist College in Bolivar, Mo.; and a communications specialist for LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, Tenn.

He earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Oklahoma Baptist University, a master's at Southwest Missouri State University and completed course work for a doctorate at the University of Southern Mississippi.

The Witness' associate editor, Shari Schubert, also recently resigned to return to her home state of Missouri, citing health problems.

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-- By ABP staff

Clinton signs Jubilee 2000 measure, hails bipartisan effort

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Calling it "one of the most important moments of the last eight years for the United States," President Bill Clinton signed into law the spending measure that includes provisions to begin canceling debts facing impoverished countries.

At a White House ceremony in the East Room Nov. 6, Clinton said, "I believe that this will put our country squarely on the side of humanity for a very, very long time to come."

The debt relief measure -- included in the 2001 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill -- includes \$435 million for U.S. participation in an agreement made with the leading industrialized countries of the world to cancel the nearly 50 countries' debt. The payment is only the first -- but the largest -- installment of a three-year initiative.

The measure stemmed from an unprecedented worldwide religious movement called Jubilee 2000. The name is taken from a term in the Bible used to describe every 50th year, which is declared a "jubilee." In the Old Testament, debts were to be canceled, slaves given their freedom and land returned to its original owners in the year of jubilee.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers said the bipartisan debt-relief effort has rallied a new consensus for poverty issues and proves that "what is morally right is also practically sensible."

Speaking at the White House ceremony were some leading figures in the Jubilee movement.

David Beckmann, president of Bread For the World, said not since the civil-rights movement "have religious people at the grassroots been so clearly responsible for raising a justice issue and winning change."

The group had backing from across the theological and political spectrum. Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson and Baptist evangelist Billy Graham supported the effort, as did Rainbow/Push Coalition founder Jesse Jackson and Baptist preacher Tony Campolo.

People of faith at the grassroots level have been credited with getting several lawmakers to support the initiative, including Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Ala., who became one of the measure's most active supporters.

With Clinton searching for a lasting legacy as he leaves the White House and signaling that worldwide social-justice issues will be a focus of his post-presidency efforts, Beckmann charged Clinton with a daunting task.

Beckmann said that Clinton has suggested that the Jubilee coalition build a stronger, long-term alliance that "could be the start of something bigger."

"I am convinced that if we could win a shift in U.S. priorities we could cut hunger and poverty in the world in half by the year 2015," Beckmann said. "Wouldn't that be a great day of jubilee?"

Turning to Clinton, Beckmann added, "And Mr. President, if you'll continue to provide leadership in this area after you leave the White House, I think we can make this happen. I think that perhaps we could end world hunger in our time."

Clinton applauded the bipartisan effort, saying that "if you get a group this diverse in the same room, you're normally there for a roast."

He said the nation is taking this step "because we understand that making the global economy work for everyone is not a political nicety, but an economic, strategic and moral necessity."

In many countries, Clinton said, a "child is three times more likely to die before the age of five than to go to secondary school. One in 10 children dies before his or her first birthday. One in three is malnourished. ... This is not right."

The foreign-operations measure also includes new funds to combat diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis as well as a \$300 million pilot initiative to provide free meals in schools in poor countries.

Clinton said the debt relief supporters "worked together across lines that too often divide -- lines of party, religion, geography -- to accomplish a common aid."

Many religious groups -- including Catholic, Protestant and Jewish -- joined the Jubilee coalition, which organizers say have hundreds of supporting groups.

The Southern Baptist Convention is one of the few national religious denominations that had little or no involvement in the debt-relief effort. An official from the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission said it has not done any work to support or oppose the initiative.

Other Baptist individuals and groups, such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, however, actively touted the measure.

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State convention staffers volunteer for Graham crusade

By Barbara Denman

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Staging an immense production such as the Billy Graham Crusade with audiences of 70,000 requires the work of thousands of dedicated volunteers serving behind the scenes.

Nearly 40 staff members of the Florida Baptist Convention, which is based in Jacksonville, seized the opportunity to serve as counselors, choir members, statisticians, ushers, special-needs providers and "prayer walkers" at the evangelist's recent North Florida crusade. Their spouses and family members also participated, comprising a team of nearly 100 volunteers from the Florida Baptist Convention family.

As they watched Graham preach on Thursday evening, thousands of Hispanics attending the crusade heard the voice of Herman Rios, director of the language evangelism and stewardship for the state convention. Seated in the glass-enclosed press box at Alltel Stadium, Rios translated Graham's sermon into Spanish for audience members listening through earphones. The worship service was translated into eight languages, including French Creole, Russian, Tagalog and several Chinese dialects.

Rios also served on the general planning committee for the crusade and as assistant vice chairman of the language committee. The experience gave him a "sense of history," said Rios noting the event may be one of Graham's final crusades.

Translating the evangelist's sermon was "very exciting, and not as difficult as I thought," Rios said, although Graham skipped three pages of his sermon manuscript. "I had spent a lot of time and meditation before the meeting, because I wanted to communicate what he said. I felt the presence of the Lord."

Each night, as individuals made spiritual decisions during the crusade, counselors filled out cards to stipulate each person's commitment. The collectors passed the cards to the statistics team, which sorted and counted the cards by gender, age and the decision made: whether to accept Christ, rededicate their lives to God or receive assurance that they are going to heaven.

Don Turner and Hugh Cater, whose work is to assist new Florida Baptist churches, were co-chairmen of the statistics committee, working from 10 p.m.-2 a.m. At the end of each service, they, their department secretaries -- Carol Wheeler, Sylvia Ashby and Summer Harville -- joined other volunteers to tally decisions and send response cards to another committee for follow-up.

The spiritual impact of this work came home for Turner, who served in a similar capacity during the Houston Crusade held in 1981. In that crusade, as he and his wife counted commitment cards, they came across the name of their 10-year-old son, Bryan, revealing that he had made a profession of faith during the invitation.

"Twenty years later, I am doing the same thing, and this time my son's wife is working by my side. That is rewarding."

Prior to the crusade, Turner also conducted a public-opinion survey for the Graham organization that identified and analyzed attitudes of North Florida residents to the crusade's activities. The survey was funded by the convention's evangelism division and Jacksonville Baptist Association.

As she sang in the 7,000-voice crusade choir, Kitty Herndon, secretary for the church music department, met persons of other denominations. "It was uplifting to know that we were all singing for the same Lord," she recalled.

Margaret Price, administrative assistance in the convention's evangelism division, served as a commitment counselor for those making spiritual decisions.

"On youth night, I had the privilege to counsel and pray with two young girls coming to accept Christ," she said. "Two more souls were added to his kingdom."

She said she also counseled with a 70-year-old woman who had attended church and "knew about Jesus but didn't know him personally. She came forward accepting Christ."

Brenda Forlines, director of church-and-community ministries, served in a variety of capacities both during and in preparation for the crusade at her local church. She collected 133 "Love in Action" toiletry kits for distribution in a five-county area. And as a counselor supervisor, she matched trained counselors with those making spiritual decisions.

But the real joy came when she led a 10-year-old boy to Christ. "He seemed so thrilled to hear that I would follow up with him after that night. The last thing he said was, 'You're going to call, aren't you.'"

Deaf ministry consultant Don Otwell was involved in the preparation since the beginning, serving as co-chair of deaf and hard-of-hearing committee and a chairman of the ministry committee. Participating with "all the different evangelical churches being involved is ... , I believe, a heavenly, experience," he said. "The involvement of the races together even in the interpreting for the deaf was a blessing."

Seventeen salvation decisions came from the hearing-impaired group.

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Counting money for Graham crusade has spiritual rewards, volunteers say

By Barbara Denman

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) --- While counting money may seem like the least-spiritual aspect of a Christian organization's activities, tallying donations to the Jacksonville, Fla., Billy Graham Crusade became a moving experience for the volunteers and staff charged with that responsibility.

"When a check and envelope comes in written in scrawled, illegible handwriting, I can almost see the withered, bony hand that signed the check," said bookkeeper Kim Williams, a member of Fort Caroline Baptist Church in Jacksonville. "Often the note accompanying the check tells of a widow on a fixed income, reminding me of the parable of the widow's mite."

"When we find \$7.62 in an envelope, which evidently came from a cleaned-out piggy back, with a note that reads, 'Pray my dad will come to the crusade,' we can't help but be touched," she said.

Some checks were received with notes saying the donors would like to give more, but their spouses are ill or they are out of work.

At times like these the volunteers stopped what they were doing and prayed for the requests sent in with the money, said volunteer Jan King, a member of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. "We have prayed for special needs, health for families and persons to come to know Jesus," she added. "It has been a special time."

King and other volunteers served with the Graham organization six months before the actual crusade began, providing basic accounting functions for the crusade organizers. Days before the event began, 70 percent of the crusade's \$2.6 million budget had been received through donations. The remainder of the funds was given during the crusade's offerings.

Some of the contributions were made during the pre-crusade rallies and training classes. After functions for children and youth, wadded dollar bills made their way into the headquarters offices. "We call them 'jeans dollars' because we know where the kids have stuffed them," King said.

Dollar bills came in with verses and notes written on them. Often a note attached to the donation explained that the giver had received Christ during a crusade many years before. Donations came in from all over the world -- many from cities where previous crusades have been held. Some were even mailed from prison.

Not all the contributions were small, King noted. Some large bank checks were received anonymously with no return address or identifying marks.

Prior to her involvement in the Graham crusade, King worked in a large corporation. "It has been refreshing to know how many Christians are in the world," she said. "We didn't always see that in the corporate world."

"This job," she said, "has eternal dividends."

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Crusade director ready to move on -- again

By Kristi Hodge

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- The Billy Graham Crusade in Jacksonville, Fla., is over, but for crusade director Scott Lenning it's time to move on to the next crusade, destination yet unknown.

Lenning's family will soon move for the 17th time in 17 years to lay groundwork a year in advance of Billy Graham's next crusade.

Moving has become such a way of life for Scott and Tami Lenning and their three children that they've placed a specialty license plate on their van that reads, "MOVNAGN."

"Moving again" would make it hard for many families to make new friends, but the Lennings say one benefit of their travels is the friendships they have established across the United States.

The family seeks out a new church in each crusade city, where they find it easier to make friends than in a larger and established congregation.

In Jacksonville, the Lennings worshipped at The Church at Chet's Creek, a Baptist church formed in 1998 in a rapidly growing area of town.

Lenning said the family was drawn to the casual, contemporary format of the church services held at an elementary school and to the home Bible studies that allowed them to get to know people quickly.

Referring to his family as "professional newcomers," Lenning said, "new churches are easier for us to plug into, because everyone is new."

"I like the freshness of a new church," he said. Trying to become established as a church is a lot of work, but it's also exciting. We always take this freshness with us to our next location."

Bible study leader Christy Mobley said the Lennings have been prayer partners with her and her husband, David, who also leads the small group.

"They've been such an encouragement to us," she said. "They are always upbeat, even though they have the strain of moving every year. I don't think it would be something I could do each year, but they've been called to it and are happy doing it."

There are both benefits and tradeoffs to having an integral part in Billy Graham crusades. The Lennings have scrapbooks filled with pictures of friends they've gained over the years and memories of seeing thousands come to know Christ.

But they've also never had a Christmas tree, since they are usually in the process of moving during the holiday season. Born in three different U.S. cities, children Jonathan, 12, Brittany, 9, and Scottie Marie, 7, go to a different school every year.

But spending family time in a closely-knit congregation has drawn the family closer, Lenning said.

"The Lennings have become part of our family," said Stephen (Spike) Hogan, pastor of The Church at Chet's Creek.

"They've never made a big deal of their roles in the crusade, other than to ask for our prayers that God would work in a mighty way through it," he said. "So, we know them as our friends. We hate to lose them when they leave, but we know that they will also be a blessing to their next church family."

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