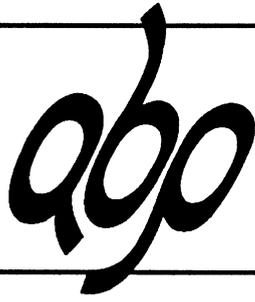


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**BGCT leader disputes
Baptist Press story**

DALLAS (ABP) -- A Texas Baptist leader has challenged the accuracy of a recent Baptist Press story on the state's funding of Southern Baptist Convention seminaries.

A July 3 story in the SBC's official news service reported that churches giving money through the Baptist General Convention of Texas adopted budget "will no longer be able to forward money" to SBC schools, due to a funding cap imposed in April.

BGCT Treasurer Roger Hall, however, told the Texas newspaper Baptist Standard that the article failed to note that the "adopted" BGCT budget is but one of three giving options offered to churches.

Hall said the BP story "tends to misrepresent the giving possibilities by any Texas church through the BGCT."

"Our policy has been and is that a church may send funds through the BGCT, and we will forward them to Baptist causes as the church directs," he said.

He said the story implies that "churches may only contribute through the adopted plan or cannot give to the SBC seminaries through other plans."

"This certainly is not factual," he said.

Hall said the report "continues a pattern of misrepresenting the BGCT's support for SBC causes."

Hall said so far this year, Texas Baptist churches have given \$9.3 million to the SBC's Cooperative Program through the BGCT, including \$1.6 million for seminaries.

Leaders of the SBC and the BGCT are at odds over budget changes adopted last year reallocating funds formerly sent to SBC seminaries to Texas schools. Moderate leaders in Texas claim the SBC schools have departed from traditional teachings. SBC leaders accuse the BGCT of being anti-SBC. Meanwhile, a breakaway state convention that supports the SBC is working to lure BGCT churches into the fold.

Lawmakers adding limits on 'charitable-choice' bill

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Supporters of President Bush's "charitable-choice" plan have long argued that religious social-service programs are more effective than secular programs because they include an element of faith. But now GOP leaders in the House of Representatives are requiring that religious aspects of federally funded programs be stripped out of such programs.

Another controversy erupted when news media reported a deal was cut between the Salvation Army and the Bush administration. The Salvation Army would support the faith-based initiative and in turn Bush would work to enable groups like the Salvation Army to receive taxpayer funds while discriminating against homosexuals in hiring.

A Salvation Army spokesperson told Associated Baptist Press that the news reports misrepresented the deal and there was never a quid-pro-quo. But later Bush issued a statement saying the administration had decided not to pursue the Salvation Army's request.

The charitable-choice measure, which would make it easier for faith-based organizations to qualify for federal funds -- is moving swiftly through House committees and a full House vote is expected in days.

The House Ways and Means Committee approved the bill July 11 after watering down a popular portion of the bill to allow non-itemizing taxpayers to deduct charitable giving from their income.

Earlier, the House Judiciary Committee approved the initiative on a 20-5 party-line vote.

Before approving the measure, lawmakers made clear that religious groups would have plenty of red tape if they accept government funds. One GOP lawmaker said religious groups taking federal funds would have "to leave their religious practices at the door."

"Religious organizations receiving direct funding will have to separate their social-service program from sectarian practices," said committee chairman James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis. "If any part of a faith-based organization's activities involve religious indoctrination, such activities must be set apart from the government-funded programs and hence privately funded."

The committee also approved provisions that would mandate self-audits of government funds flowing to religious groups.

The revised bill offered by Sensenbrenner also makes clear that volunteers cannot come into a federally funded program and proselytize or otherwise engage in sectarian activity.

Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., asked Sensenbrenner about religious groups that feel they have to include faith in their programs. "What if the organization that gets the money believes that a religious message is inherent in providing the service?" he asked. Frank said in encouraging people to get off drugs or to stop violent behavior, "What if inherently in their message is, you do this by becoming a Christian or a better Christian or a better Muslim or a better Jew? Is that allowed under the bill?"

Sensenbrenner responded: "The answer to the question is no it is not, and those organizations would not be eligible for funding." He added. "It is up to the religious organization to make a determination if they can separate out their religious mission from their social-service mission."

But Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., said the new language "in terms of proselytization is a restatement of present law without charitable choice." Scott and other Democrats on the panel failed to add amendments to the bill requiring religious organizations that take tax dollars to forfeit their long-standing exemption from civil-rights laws dealing with employment discrimination based on religion.

Rep. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., disagreed with Scott but first acknowledged that, "We're requiring [religious organizations] to leave their religious practices at the door, but we're not going to require them to change their hiring practices because to do so would undermine the character of the organization."

The revised bill also requires churches to set up separate accounts to receive tax dollars.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said, "Does anybody here believe that setting up an additional church bank account and then forbidding government activities from looking beyond that account, as this bill does, could possibly lead to mischief?"

Observers say the changes and new regulations in the bill appear to be exactly what religious groups opposed to charitable choice have feared -- that the government would give out federal funds and then begin telling faith groups how to run their programs.

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