

Who's winning abortion battle 30 years after Roe vs. Wade?**By Robert Marus****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****January 28, 2003****Volume: 03-07-3425**

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – Thirty years after Roe vs. Wade, only two things are certain about the debate over abortion: Both sides are as entrenched as ever, and both sides think things look bad for their cause.

On Jan. 22, both anti- and pro-abortion-rights activists marked the 30th anniversary of the landmark 1973 case that legalized abortion in all 50 states. Meanwhile, a new Congress dominated by anti-abortion advocates is beginning its session, governing the nation along with a pro-life president and a federal judiciary beginning to tilt in the anti-abortion direction. As a result, abortion-rights groups are sending warnings more dire than ever about the allegedly imperiled state of legalized abortion. And some pro-life groups are anticipating increased restrictions on abortion.

But even as members of Congress propose new anti-abortion legislation and prepare to confirm more anti-abortion judges to federal courts, some pro-life leaders are questioning that strategy and the state of their movement.

Pro-life veteran John Whitehead, head of the conservative Rutherford Institute said Jan. 27 that focusing on a "political solution" is not the answer.

In an op-ed article, Whitehead said that even after 30 years of legalized abortion, "a hope persists among the pro-life community that Roe might someday be overturned." Yet, he added, "after years of so-called conservative presidents who paid lip service to the right to life, there is no end in sight for abortion-on-demand. Perhaps little more can be expected from the current administration."

Expanding on that point in an interview, Whitehead decried the fact that abortion has become a litmus-test issue for many Christian voters, while those same Christians do little else to end the "philosophy, the cultural fact" in American society that supports abortion rights.

President Bush, in a phone call to an anti-abortion rally Jan. 22, said the "right to life calls us to defend the sick and the dying, persons with disabilities and birth defects, and all who are weak and vulnerable. And this self-evident truth calls us to value and to protect the lives of innocent children waiting to be born," he told the gathering on the National Mall in Washington.

But Whitehead said uttering such phrases isn't much more than lip service – what a politician would utter to any special-interest group. "It's the same kind of thing he'd say to the veterans, saying, 'I'm behind you guys,' or a veterans group, or the restaurant association.... It's just politics," Whitehead said. "If he really believed it, he'd be lobbying for an amendment to the Constitution [outlawing abortion]."

But abortion-rights supporter Carlton Veazey thinks Bush is dead serious about combating abortion and has the power to do something about it. "It's not encouraging to see that the administration controls both houses [of Congress] and the executive department and possibly also will influence the Supreme Court," Veazey said. "We're at a really pivotal moment in the history of Roe v. Wade."

Veazey is head of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and also part-time pastor of Washington's Fellowship Baptist Church. His coalition of Christian and Jewish groups supports abortion rights not because they are supportive of abortion itself, he said, but because keeping the government out of such a decision honors the free will of women who are created in the image of God.

"I support abortion rights because I do believe in the moral agency of women," Veazey said. "I was brought up in a Baptist home in the South, and my father was a minister, and he believed very strongly in free will, and he believed that a woman had the right."

Veazey said he was particularly concerned about Bush's ability to appoint judges to the federal bench who have had a record of being adamantly opposed to legalized abortion. "We in the religious community will be mobilizing and

activating our members to be vigilant and work toward making sure that judges that are averse to abortion rights and women's rights will not come onto the Supreme Court or any lower [federal] court," Veazey said.

Judgeships are increasingly important to the debate. There likely will be one and possibly two vacancies on the Supreme Court during this session of Congress. The Court voted 7-2 in favor of Roe vs. Wade in 1973, but is now generally understood to be split 5-4 in favor of abortion rights.

One of the vacancies may be for the seat of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor – who has proven to be a crucial "swing vote" on abortion issues in the past. So far in his presidency, Bush has consistently nominated anti-abortion judges to important federal panels. Observers see no reason why his pattern would change with Supreme Court nominees.

Besides judicial appointments, several pieces of legislation affecting abortion rights are expected in the Republican-controlled congress. In particular, a ban on certain late-term abortion procedures, which anti-abortion groups label "partial-birth abortion," is expected to pass both houses of Congress and be signed into law by Bush this session.

Pro-life activists often point to the 40 million abortions performed in the U.S. since Roe became the law of the land. However, the abortion rate for women of childbearing age is at its lowest point since 1974. The number of abortion providers is in decline, as is the number of cities in which abortion services are available. And increasing numbers of Americans in polls disapprove of abortion – especially among the "post-Roe generation" of children born since 1973.

But Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute said these facts have done little to change the "culture" of abortion that exists in the nation. "If you read the polls very carefully, most Americans are for abortion in one way or another," he said. Polls that show a majority of Americans disapprove of abortion in a hypothetical sense also often show that a similar majority of Americans support abortion rights when presented with a more personalized situation – such as if the respondents themselves were pregnant or their daughter or girlfriend were.

Whitehead said he'd like to see a return to the days of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Christians engaged in fervent pro-life activism that included more than just voting and making donations to crisis-pregnancy centers. "The whole approach is picketing abortion clinics, voting, [supporting] crisis-pregnancy centers, and [conducting] education, especially in churches," Whitehead said. "I think one of the great failures is the churches don't get more involved in this issue and really talk about this issue."

Whitehead charged that if anti-abortion Christians were really serious about their belief that abortion is murder, then they would have the fervency of the Christians who largely populated the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. "Where African-Americans had a Martin Luther King to be the focal point, we don't have a Martin Luther King," Whitehead said.

But to him, this is an equally important movement on behalf of unborn humans. "This is a civil-rights movement for women and children," Whitehead said.



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Heifer International hoofs it onto 'West Wing' episode

By Cliff Vaughn

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) – In the Jan. 8 episode of NBC's presidential drama, "The West Wing," President Bartlet, portrayed by actor Martin Sheen, tried to drum up support for more foreign aid. "We live in an interdependent world and we should act like it," the fictional president told an audience. "We live in a global community, and we should sustain it."

As the Senate considered the \$17 billion foreign aid bill on the fictional drama, White House Press Secretary C.J. Cregg, portrayed by actress Allison Janney, set up a photo opportunity for the president that involved a goat from Heifer International.

But while the television show "The West Wing" may be fiction, Heifer International is not. The Little Rock, Ark.-based nonprofit organization gives food- and income-producing livestock to poor families around the world. Its goal: end world hunger.

Heifer was begun by a Christian farmer in 1944 and currently gives 27 kinds of livestock to families in 47 countries. Heifer's gifts include bees, cows, fish, pigs, water buffalo and goats, like the one named Ron that the fictional President Bartlet and staff surrounded for the picture at the end of the episode.

"They explained our mission in a way you could understand three or four times," said Ray White, Heifer's communications director, in a telephone interview from Little Rock. "It related to the storyline they were developing."

In a TV industry where a shot of a logo on a coffee mug means significant exposure, Heifer's appearance on "The West Wing" was a rarity. "It's unusual to get that much airtime," White said. Heifer had no control over the message or portrayal, but White said the storyline "was beyond our wildest expectations."

How did Heifer manage to nab the spotlight on one of NBC's top-rated, award-winning dramas?

"It's a culmination of years of effective work in the field helping alleviate hunger and poverty around the world in the right way," said White. "It's also kind of [a] serendipity."

When White took the job at Heifer two years ago, he began thinking of celebrity endorsements to help raise Heifer's profile. A name that came to mind was Bradley Whitford, best known for his role as Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Lyman on "West Wing."

When White worked as an editor at the Philadelphia Inquirer, he lived across the street from Whitford's sister, Debbie Ward. The White and Ward families were good friends, and White contacted Whitford through the Wards. He learned that Whitford and his wife, Jane Kaczmarek, who plays the mom on the Fox television network's "Malcolm in the Middle," already supported Heifer. The discovery led to a photo shoot in Greenwich Village, where Whitford and Kaczmarek posed with a water buffalo. During the shoot, White and Whitford brainstormed about how to raise Heifer's profile even further.

"It was a collective idea," White said of the plan for a Heifer storyline on "West Wing." Whitford took the idea to the writers and "it actually happened," White said. "It was our wildest fantasy that could happen to help promote Heifer. To be watching while that thing was aired the first time was an amazing experience."

Equally amazing, White says, is Heifer itself. "It's an amazing place," he said. "Your heart brings you to Heifer. When you understand how effective it is, that is so powerful."

Heifer mandates that livestock recipients share animal offspring through a program called "Passing on the Gift." For example, 105 rabbits in China in the 1980s multiplied into hundreds of thousands of offspring, benefiting more than 2,200 families.

"I don't know of any other organization that turns recipients into donors the way we do," White said. And gifts like Whitford's help get the ball rolling and energize the Heifer team. "It lights us on fire," White said.

Whitford and Kaczmarek aren't Heifer's only celebrity supporters. Others are Walter Cronkite, Ed Harris and Amy Madigan, Jimmy Carter, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Susan Sarandon, Ted Danson and Mary Steenburgen, and Ed Asner.

But Wisconsinites Whitford and Kaczmarek, who now live in Los Angeles with their children, seem to look continually for ways to help people in general and Heifer in particular.

In 2002, Whitford and Kaczmarek created the Clothes Off Our Back auction, to which various TV stars donated their Emmy Awards outfits to charity. Whitford donated his Ralph Lauren tuxedo and Kaczmarek her Heidi Kaczinski gown, with the proceeds benefiting Heifer. At least four other stars from "West Wing" participated in the auction.

"They seem like family to me," White said of Whitford and Kaczmarek. "They have, I think, really good values. They don't act like stars or celebrities. They're down to earth."

Asked if his work load had increased since the episode aired, White joked, "Just a tad."

"People have been calling our regional offices and saying, 'How can I help?' They want to take direct action."

It's more work, but it's worth it, he said. "The work is good for the soul and is good for the earth and is good for the people."

Cliff Vaughn is associate director for EthicsDaily.com.



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Students urged to lead church into the streets
By Ken Camp
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BELTON, Texas (ABP) – God may be calling a new Moses today from a university campus, leadership consultant Reggie McNeal told a group of Christian student leaders. “Consider that you may have been put on the planet to lead the church out of the captivity of institutionalism,” said McNeal, director of leadership development for the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Christianity grows increasingly vibrant in parts of the world where it is a “movement in the streets,” but in the United States the church largely remains bound by institutional structures, he said. “In North America, we have shrink-wrapped the energy of the gospel of Jesus Christ into real estate, programs and people processes. We are desperate for people like you to come along and recapture the energy,” he told the Christian Association of Student Leaders. McNeal, author of “A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders,” was keynote speaker at the Christian Association of Student Leaders conference Jan. 23-25 at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton. More than 200 leaders of student government, university ministries, fraternities, sororities and other aspects of campus life attended the conference, sponsored in part by the Baptist General Convention of Texas. God uses at least four things to shape the heart of a Christian leader, McNeal told the students: – Culture. Current student leaders are “amphibians,” born in the modern era but having come of age in a postmodern world, he explained. They not only understand the emerging culture and the challenge of multiculturalism, but they also have roots in the old way of being. As a result, Christian leaders on college campuses can help churches move “out of the institution and into the streets.” “You are a special breed of leader God put on this planet for just such a time as this. It takes enormous courage to lead in transition times,” he said. Instead of inviting people to “become like us in order to join the club,” churches must “go open up shop where people already hang out,” McNeal said. “We cannot afford to think and act like club members. We have to think and act like missionaries who know how to penetrate the culture, not just manage activities for club members.” – Community. Leaders are shaped by their families of origin – their original communities – and by the people they lead. Because they are leaders, they shape the lives of others within their community. “The way we live our lives, we are building somebody’s past. Our decisions create the past others draw from,” he said. – Communion. Christian leaders critically need real “face time with God,” McNeal said, not just time spent filling in the blanks of a discipleship workbook. “You are shaped through communion. Listen, hang out and get to know God. Don’t settle for anything less than a relationship,” McNeal urged. - - Conflict. Student leaders need to realize that “conflict goes with the territory of leadership,” he said. Some critics are helpful teachers who should be heeded; some are “saboteurs” who must be dealt with decisively; and some are just “gnats” who need to be ignored, McNeal said. Young Christian leaders need the direction of Scripture and the counsel of wise, godly friends to discern the difference, he added. Leaders understand that reconciliation with every enemy may be impossible, because reconciliation demands the cooperation of all parties involved in a conflict. But forgiveness is a unilateral decision that always is possible. “Forgiveness will keep conflict from scarring your soul,” he said. “When we don’t forgive, we put ourselves in a jail, inside a cell that opens from the inside.”

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News briefs from ABP's Washington Bureau**By Robert Marus****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****January 28, 2003****Volume: 03-07-3428****Muslims, Christians protest Florida church sign**

WASHINGTON – National Muslim groups ,as well as local Christian groups, are protesting a sign in front of a Baptist church in Jacksonville, Fla. The marquee sign at the First Conservative Baptist Church in Jacksonville's Mandarin neighborhood reads, "Jesus Forbade Murder, Matthew 26:52, Muhammad Approved Murder, Surah 8:65."

According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Koranic verse referenced in the sign actually "says that those who believe and are steadfast in battle will overcome much larger armies, and is not an endorsement of murder."

The verse reads, "O Prophet [Muhammad]! Inspire the believers to conquer all fear of death when fighting, [so that] if there be 20 of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome 200; and if there be 100 of you, they might overcome 1,000 of those who are bent on denying the truth, because they are people who cannot grasp it."

Some ecumenical and Christian groups have condemned the sign's characterization of Islam. "As a Christian, I am disappointed at this un-Christian effort to disparage Islam," Interfaith Council of Jacksonville president Tom Borland said in a statement. "Jesus never attacked other faiths." The Florida Council of Churches, which represents 3,500 mainline Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches in the state, also condemned the sign as an "expression of hatred." (ABP)

Virginia committee rejects voucher proposal

RICHMOND, Va. – A committee of Virginia's state legislature has rejected an attempt to amend the state's constitution to allow for state funding of private religious schools. The Virginia House Committee on Privileges and Elections rejected, by a bipartisan 13-7 margin, a measure that would have begun a process to amend the constitution.

Supporters of government scholarships to students for use in private schools – commonly called vouchers – won a victory last year in the U.S. Supreme Court. That ruling said a Cleveland program that offered vouchers did not violate the Constitution's ban on government support of religion, even though many of the vouchers were used in parochial schools. However, the constitutions of many states – including Virginia – have language that specifically prevents direct or indirect public funding for religious schools.

Voucher opponents say vouchers are both unconstitutional and bad educational policy. But voucher supporters argue that they may be the only solution for some students trapped in under-performing public schools. (ABP)

Court declines Ten Commandments case

LEXINGTON, Ky. – A federal judge has added to the confusion in Ten Commandments jurisprudence by dismissing a lawsuit against a Kentucky county that posted the Ten Commandments in its courthouse.

On Jan. 22, U.S. District Judge Karl Forester dismissed the suit, brought by the American Civil Liberties Union against Mercer County officials. Foster said the Ten Commandments display had a legitimate secular purpose in educating about the influence of historical documents on American law.

The display reportedly includes the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and other historical legal documents in an exhibit entitled, "Foundations of American Law and Government." Previous federal court rulings have suggested such broad historical displays do not violate the First Amendment's ban on government endorsement of religion.

However, other recent federal rulings out of Alabama and elsewhere have suggested that government display of the Ten Commandments does not pass constitutional muster if the religious document is given more prominence than the other texts displayed.

ACLU officials have vowed to appeal the ruling. Because of the discrepancies among federal courts, the U.S. Supreme Court may soon have to take up the issue. (ABP)

Virginia argues for 'secular' school prayers

RICHMOND, Va. — The Commonwealth of Virginia says mealtime prayers at a state-run military college do not violate the Constitution because they have “a secular purpose.”

In Jan. 21 oral arguments before a panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Virginia Solicitor William Hurd said the prayers do not violate the First Amendment’s ban on government endorsement of religion because prayers are necessary in the military. “We have prayers in the military because commanders believe it helps develop spiritual fitness,” Hurd said. He termed spiritual fitness “an undeniable component of military readiness.”

But U.S. District Judge Norman Moon had earlier ruled the practice unconstitutional. “Because the prayers are drafted and recited at the direction of the institute’s superintendent, the result is that government has become impermissibly entangled with religion,” he wrote in the opinion accompanying his ruling.

The state’s chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union had earlier sued the school on behalf of two VMI cadets who had complained about the prayers to school officials, to no avail. (ABP)

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