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Bush signs 'partial-birth' ban as opponents win injunction

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bush signed into law Nov. 5 the first federal restriction on abortion in 30 years, but barely an hour later a federal judge partially blocked its enforcement.

On Nov. 5, Bush signed a bill banning a kind of abortion procedure labeled by abortion opponents as "partial-birth abortion." In the procedure, a fetus is partially delivered from the mother's uterus, then its skull is pierced and its brain matter is removed.

Abortion-rights supporters say the bill is both unnecessary and unconstitutional. On Oct. 31, pro-choice groups filed three lawsuits in federal courts across the country to halt the bill's implementation.

Shortly after the ceremony, U.S. District Judge Richard Kopf in Lincoln, Neb., issued an injunction to prevent the ban from being enforced on four abortion providers who sued in his court. Kopf, an appointee of former President Ronald Reagan, cited a 2000 Supreme Court ruling that struck down a Nebraska abortion law that was substantially similar to the law signed by Bush.

In that decision, a narrow majority of the Supreme Court justices ruled that the bill's language was unconstitutionally vague. They also faulted it for failing to include an exception to the ban in cases where the mother's health would be endangered if the "partial-birth" procedure were not used.

The current bill's supporters say it addresses both of those concerns by tightening the legal language in the bill and including a set of congressional "findings" that the procedure is never medically necessary to preserve a woman's health.

The findings are based on testimony by some obstetricians and other medical experts. But most mainstream

medical groups dispute those claims and say the procedure may be a physician's only option in rare cases.

The White House marked the importance of the occasion by departing from usual bill-signing ceremony. In a nod to his view of the ban's importance, Bush added his signature in the auditorium of a federal office building, before a crowd of about 400 cheering abortion-rights opponents. During his speech prior to the signing, he was regularly interrupted by standing ovations and loud shouts of "Amen!" and "Thank you, Mr. President!"

On hand for the ceremony were many of the congressional supporters of the legislation -- including its chief Senate and House sponsors, Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) and Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio). The crowd also included a virtual "Who's Who" of the Religious Right -- including Southern Baptist leaders Jerry Falwell, Richard Land and Jack Graham.

"For years, a terrible form of violence has been directed against children who are inches from birth, while the law looked the other way," Bush said before signing the bill. "Today, at last, the American people and our government have confronted the violence and come to the defense of the innocent child."

Bush also alluded to the legal challenges to the law, which will almost certainly result in another Supreme Court case. "[T]he executive branch will vigorously defend this law against any who would try to overturn it in the courts," he said, to a loud standing ovation from the crowd.

A handful of abortion-rights supporters protested as Bush's motorcade made its way from the White House to the nearby Ronald Reagan Building for the ceremony. "The so-called Partial-Birth Abortion Ban is a dangerous piece of legislation that ultimately seeks to outlaw even the safest abortion procedures," said Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women, in a release.

Although many of the bill's congressional supporters said the bill was not meant as a vehicle for ultimately overturning other abortion rights, many activists on both sides of the issue agreed it may be just that.

"The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban is the first significant restriction of the almost unlimited assault on life in the womb since the [Supreme Court's] infamous Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973," Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said in a press release.

Likewise, NOW's Gandy said the bill's passage and signing "confirms that [Bush's] administration and Congress have both the power and the will to overturn Roe vs. Wade, one step at a time. This is the first ban on an abortion procedure since abortion became legal in 1973, but it will not be the last if George W. Bush remains in office."

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Arkansas Baptists back diversity, Federal Marriage Amendment

By Charlie Warren

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (ABP) -- In a harmonious Arkansas Baptist State Convention meeting Nov. 4-5 in Fayetteville, about 900 messengers approved a 2004 Cooperative Program budget of \$19.5 million, heard a report on racial harmony and diversity, endorsed a resolution in support of the proposed Federal Marriage

Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and elected Grant Ethridge, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lavaca, Ark., as president.

The racial diversity report was the work of a unity committee appointed last year by ABSC President Jim Lagrone to explore racial diversity and unity within the state convention. The report noted, "Racial reconciliation and unity will not be achieved without God's people being infused with and empowered by the Holy Spirit, modeling Christlike behavior and being led by God's strong hand."

It encourages "intentionality" in becoming multiethnic at all levels of Baptist life and urges churches to drop racial stereotypes.

A long list of suggestions for churches includes encouraging joint worship opportunities, diversifying staff, incorporating strategies of successful multiethnic churches, conducting outreach ministries in ethnic neighborhoods, targeting special needs of ethnic groups, identifying and equipping "unity champions" in local churches, and establishing mission congregations designed to become racially diverse churches.

An equally long list of suggestions for the state convention, associations, institutions and agencies included developing a training module to help churches achieve racial reconciliation, devising a strategy for creating multiethnic congregations, diversifying staffs and board memberships, encouraging student organizations on college campuses to promote racial diversity and reconciliation, and identifying three to five existing churches willing to become pilot churches for multiethnic diversity.

Messengers approved without discussion the resolution supporting the Marriage Amendment. The resolution also opposed any effort to validate or legalize same-sex marriage or unions, while demonstrating "love for those practicing homosexuality by sharing with them the forgiving and transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Two other resolutions supported American Armed Forces and expressed appreciation to the host church and convention leaders.

Ethridge was elected unopposed as president. LeRoy Wagner, pastor of Percy Baptist Church of Percy, Ark., was elected unopposed as first vice president. Larry White, pastor of First Baptist Church of Crossett, Ark., was elected second vice president over three other candidates.

In an unprecedented move, outgoing president Lagrone, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Bryant, used his president's message to challenge Ethridge, his successor as president, to call a summit meeting to explore ways to meet convention needs of the 21st century.

"I challenge the incoming president of our convention to prayerfully call together a group of Arkansas Baptist leaders to ... seek God's face and find a direction of genuine reform and re-tooling so that we can better meet the needs of the mission field this century and fulfill the Great Commission," Lagrone said. "Everything must be on the table.

"We are having record numbers of men and women surrender to missions," Lagrone told messengers. "...The doors to take the gospel have never been as wide open as they are now. This is the day of the greatest missionary possibilities that we have ever seen. What is our Baptist response?"

In such a time, Lagrone noted, the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board have laid people off.

"We say we are mission-minded," he charged. "But we have to say no to our own people because we do not have enough money. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but he cannot get them through the Baptist gate."

He said Arkansas Baptists must figure out how to get money to the mission field again, and "our regular solutions are not going to work."

The \$19,518,232 convention budget includes \$8,152,766 (41.77 percent) designated for Southern Baptist Convention causes and \$11,365,467 (58.23 percent) for missions and ministries within Arkansas. The total budget amount is the same as the 2003 budget.

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New Mexico Baptists support family, answer call to minister in Bangkok

By ABP staff with reporting by John Loudat

ROSWELL, N.M. (ABP) -- Signaling a theme that likely will surface in many of this fall's Baptist conventions, Baptists in New Mexico adopted resolutions Oct. 29 favoring government support of the traditional family, endorsing public affirmations of God, and denouncing legal protection for homosexuals.

The 91st meeting of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico drew 348 messengers from the convention's 310 churches, plus 167 guests.

The family resolution warned that "the American judiciary system seems poised to redefine this honored institution to accommodate a self-determined lifestyle not in accordance with the ancient biblical record and American tradition." It added that "any interpretation of this basic institution other than the historical biblical one would undermine the moral, economic and physical well-being of the nation."

The resolution pledged that New Mexico Baptists will "oppose any legislation or court decision that would undermine or change in any way these standards and will seek to support any legislation that would strengthen these values."

Another resolution lamented that "recent and pending court decisions have threatened to remove the mention of God and his moral law from all aspects of American life." It urged New Mexico legislators "to take whatever actions are necessary to guard the freedoms and values established by our forefathers."

The homosexuality resolution urged New Mexico Baptists to "work to undo" state legislation that protects "overt sexual orientation on an equal basis with the categories of race, religion and cultural discrimination."

In other business, the convention amended its bylaws to require churches that have never been represented at an annual meeting to be approved by a vote of the convention before their messengers can be seated. The change was prompted by a request from the Southeastern Baptist Association, which was concerned about a church in Hobbs that is supporting the convention "but has not demonstrated friendly cooperation with the purpose and work" of the convention, the association said.

Previously bylaws accepted churches that contributed a minimum of \$250 a year through the convention and

were considered "not [to] be in conflict with Scripture."

Now a new church must apply 30 days before the convention meeting and present "evidence that the church is in friendly cooperation with the convention and sympathetic with the convention's work, and evidence of their faith and practices, which are not in conflict with the Holy Bible, the Old and New Testaments."

Much of the focus of this year's annual meeting was on "Proclaim Together: Bangkok 2004," an ambitious project to send 350 to 500 New Mexico Baptists to Bangkok, Thailand, next summer to participate in a variety of ministries in the city of 11.6 million people. The goals of the project include at least one person from each church making the July 16-30 trip, others providing funds so someone else can go, and every New Mexico Baptist supporting the effort with prayer.

"We have received a Macedonian call ... to take the gospel to Bangkok," said the convention's executive director, Claude Cone. He urged messengers to "get under the burden for Bangkok," whether they go, give or pray.

More than 50 people came forward during the invitation extended at the end of the presentation to make commitments to participate in the mission trip to Bangkok.

Messengers also approved a 2004 budget that is the largest in the convention's history. It will require \$3,565,764 in Cooperative Program receipts from the churches, an increase of 1.73 percent. About \$1 million (30.5 percent) of that will be forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention, which represents no percentage change.

Larry Haslam, interim pastor of First Baptist Church in Farmington, was re-elected president by acclamation. Philip Fike, pastor of First Baptist Church in Portales, was elected first vice president and Ira Shelton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Quemado, was elected second vice president.

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Georgia settlement addresses 'faith-based' employment rights

By Robert Marus

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A closely watched case regarding government funding for "faith-based" social-service organizations has ended in a settlement that critics of the practice are counting as a victory.

The State of Georgia and the United Methodist Children's Home in Decatur, Ga., have reached separate agreements with plaintiffs in a case involving two contentious issues -- how public funds are spent at religious social-service providers and whether those providers are exempt from employment discrimination laws.

The latest settlement, announced Nov. 5, prevents the children's home from discriminating against employees or clients on the basis of religion or sexual orientation. It also prevents the children's home from attempting to steer clients who express questions about their own sexual orientation toward religious programs or other therapy designed to "convert" them into heterosexuals.

An earlier settlement required any organizations -- including religious ones -- contracting with the state Department of Human Resources to clearly separate any religious activities from secular, state-funded activities in the programs.

Lambda Legal, a gay-rights organization, filed the suit on behalf of two Georgia taxpayers, Aimee Bellmore and Alan Yorker. Bellmore was a youth counselor at the home who was fired when administrators discovered she was a lesbian. Yorker, a psychotherapist, was interviewing for a job at the home when his interviewer cut the session short upon discovering that Yorker is Jewish.

Both the employment-discrimination issue and the issue of providing taxpayer funding directly to churches and other pervasively religious organizations have been flashpoints in the controversy over President Bush's plan to provide government funding to religious service providers. The plan is commonly referred to as Bush's "faith-based initiative."

Although many social conservatives have long supported the idea -- which first was authorized in 1996 for a few federal welfare programs -- many who support strict separation of church and state oppose the idea as a violation of the First Amendment's ban on government establishment of religion.

Greg Nevins, Lambda Legal's senior staff attorney, said the lawsuit was both a legal victory for his clients and good for public education on the issue. "I think in the sense that this forms a baseline -- if an organization is motivated by faith and they are going to take money from the government, they can't take that money and discriminate in regards either to whom they provide the services or whom they hire," he said.

Derrick Dickey, a spokesman for Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) said the settlement means that "all Department of Human Resources contracts will provide that the faith-based organization has a clear division between its religious and secular activities, and that also in the hiring practices that there will be a distinction in the activities between the religious hiring and the secular hiring."

But Dickey said the settlement doesn't change the governor's view "that direct funding of secular activities of faith-based organizations is permissible under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution."

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Missouri Baptists cut funds for William Jewell College

By ABP staff

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- The Missouri Baptist Convention broke a 154-year tradition and voted Nov. 4 to stop funding William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., over issues of homosexuality and morality.

Messengers at the annual meeting eliminated the Baptist school from the convention's 2004 budget. Last year the convention gave \$900,000 to the college, about 3 percent of the school's annual budget.

Controversial layman Roger Moran of Winfield argued for cutting the college's funds because the school gave an award to a homosexual student and allowed a theatrical production some Baptists considered lewd to be staged on campus. Moran, a frequent critic of the college and some other institutions, is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

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The defunding of William Jewell came as no surprise to most Missouri Baptists. "It was a foregone conclusion; the only question was when," said William Jewell President David Sallee, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

In response to criticism, William Jewell's trustees voted in February to affirm the college's mission statement, which declares its Christian and Baptist nature, but declined to answer specific "personal" questions about the faculty and trustees and a question about the college's "official teaching position on the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the creation account."

The convention previously defunded five other Missouri Baptist institutions that changed their charters to take control of trustee appointments away from the convention. The convention is suing those institutions -- Missouri Baptist University, Missouri Baptist Home, Windemere Conference Center, the Baptist Foundation and the Word and Way newspaper.

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Carroll Institute hires first faculty, denies competition with Southwestern

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Although the new B.H. Carroll Theological Institute is being founded by former administrators and faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, founders insist the new seminary is not formed in reaction to changing leadership at Southwestern and will not seek to draw students away from Southwestern or other traditional seminaries.

Four faculty members resigned from Southwestern in early November to become the inaugural faculty of the institute.

Bruce Corley, a New Testament professor and former dean of theology at Southwestern, has resigned to become president of the Carroll Institute, announced Russell Dilday, former Southwestern president and an organizer of the new enterprise.

Corley, also a former faculty member at Baylor University's Truett Seminary, will be joined by Jim Spivey, Budd Smith and Stan Moore.

Spivey, who has taught church history 16 years at Southwestern, will teach historical theology at the Carroll Institute. At Southwestern, he also has been administrative dean for the seminary's Houston campus.

Smith, who has taught Christian education at Southwestern for 24 years, will teach in that same field in his new assignment. At Southwestern, he also has directed the Oxford Studies Program.

Moore, a former missionary to Brazil, has taught church music at Southwestern for 16 years. He currently is acting dean of the School of Church Music there.

Dilday and Scotty Gray, a retired administrator at Southwestern, announced the first faculty appointments at a news conference Nov. 4 at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

Park Cities will become the first of what organizers hope will become 100 teaching churches -- the backbone of the Carroll Institute's concept. Numerous other churches have expressed interest in the concept, but no other agreements have been finalized, Dilday said.

Neither Dilday nor Gray will draw compensation from the seminary, although Dilday has been given the honorary title of chancellor. Gray has served as director of the seminary during its initial development.

Jim Denison, pastor of Park Cities Church, said the concept of a teaching church tied to seminary studies will provide a more practical education than an institutional seminary.

"This is a new way of doing theological education that at the same time returns us to our roots," Denison said. He and the other organizers cited the original vision of B.H. Carroll, who as pastor of First Baptist Church in Waco founded the precursor to Southwestern Seminary as a department of Baylor University.

Carroll became the founding president of Southwestern when it separated from Baylor and moved to Fort Worth in the early 20th century. This happened in the context of educating ministerial students within the local church, Denison said. "We are returning to his vision and advancing his vision."

Ironically, when Baylor University formed Truett Seminary in 1991, it was hailed as a fulfillment of Carroll's vision of placing a seminary within a university. More recently, Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson, in his inaugural address, pledged to tie Southwestern to the founding vision of Carroll.

Although Carroll's name and vision have been tapped in various ways, this is the first time an institution has been named for him.

The Carroll Institute is needed, organizers said, because of its different approach to theological education and because existing seminaries are not producing enough trained ministers to meet demands.

"In the past 20 years, the number of Southern Baptist churches has grown by 17 percent, but the number of ministers has grown only 10 percent," explained a document distributed to reporters. "The number of SBC seminary graduates per church has declined 30 percent. The number of SBC seminary graduates per member of SBC churches has declined 45 percent."

"Carroll Institute will not aim at recruiting students who desire to attend one of the residential seminaries already in existence," according to information given to reporters. "It will recruit students who desire to continue ministering in their own local congregations while pursuing theological education at a teaching church very near their home base."

Instruction will be delivered in four ways, the organizers said:

- Traditional classroom settings with face-to-face interaction between teachers and students.
- Live electronic instruction via the Internet, akin to distance-learning concepts in use in many universities.
- Online classes.
- Electronic correspondence studies.

The institute is expected to have a small headquarters somewhere in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Classes will begin in fall 2004, and tuition will cost \$100 per credit hour. The rate will be the same for both Southern

Baptist and non-Southern Baptist students.

The business plan calls for reaching 500 to 1,000 students enrolled in the Dallas-Fort Worth area alone, with 200 to 300 at each additional teaching church site.

The institute will develop both a physical library and a virtual library, Dilday and Gray said. Students also will access other existing libraries in or near where they live.

The institute's library received an initial boost from Eddie Belle Newport, widow of John Newport, longtime academic vice president at Southwestern. The 4,892-volume Newport library will be housed at the institute's headquarters.

In addition, 500 volumes were donated by Lois Hendricks, widow of William Hendricks, longtime theology professor at Southwestern Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Texas Christian University's Brite Divinity School.

Six other retired faculty members are "in the process of making their libraries available to us," reported Carl Wrotenbery, retired director of libraries at Southwestern.

Full implementation of the Carroll Institute's business plan, including endowments, will require \$35 million to \$50 million, Gray said. The initial cost is estimated at \$8 million to \$10 million.

Required funding for the first year will be about \$400,000, Dilday said. To date, about half that amount has been raised, he added, including one large gift and a number of smaller and mid-sized gifts.

The Carroll Institute plans to remain an autonomous Baptist institution that will "seek to build collaborative and collegial relationships with all Southern Baptists, with the Southern Baptist denomination as a whole, with state conventions and with local churches," the press statement said.

Dilday and Denison insisted the Carroll Institute will not serve only moderate Baptist churches disaffected by the rightward shift in the SBC. "We do not see this as a moderate seminary," Denison said, adding that the institute will not become "politically identified."

Information given to reporters said the "sole authority for faith, practice and teaching" in the institute will be "Jesus Christ, whose will is revealed in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The confessional position of Carroll Institute is the consensus of opinion concerning those articles of the Christian faith and practice that have been most surely held and expressed in historic Baptist principles and practices."

Articles of incorporation filed with the Texas Secretary of State May 1 list three men as directors of the corporation: Gray, Herbert Howard and William Latham, all of Fort Worth.

A strategic plan document lists 16 people as members of the strategic planning group that has birthed the Carroll Institute. In addition to Dilday, Denison, Gray, Howard and Latham, they are Tom Chism, Tom Coston, Robert Feather, Tom Hill, Cheri Jordan, Hilda Moffett, Joan Trew, Fran Wilson, Michael Wright, Wrotenbery and Jerry Yowell.

The institute also announced a website--www.bhcti.org.

A formal launch of the institution, along with announcements about a headquarters location and more teaching churches, will occur in January, Dilday said.

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