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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ John Patrick Michael Murphy, a Colorado Springs attorney, has collected nearly 90,000 signatures in support of a state constitutional amendment that would force religious and certain other non-profit organizations to pay taxes on land, buildings and personal property. Lucia Guzman, Colorado Council of Churches director, said the measure would force hundreds of small inner-city churches to close.

◆ Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Denton Lotz recently wrote the mayor of Sofia, Bulgaria, to complain that municipal authorities have prevented local Baptists from building an orphanage and church despite approval for the project from the national government. Lotz called the refusal to permit the construction a "religious freedom issue."

◆ Arnoldo Canclini, a prominent Baptist leader in Argentina, called for an end to government subsidies for the Roman Catholic Church there. Canclini said the subsidies show a preference to one particular church.

◆ Three Colorado bishops, J. Francis Stafford, Richard C. Hanifen and Arthur Tafoya, sent a letter to 200 Catholic priests saying that the Christian Coalition's Catholic Alliance does not represent the "so-called Catholic position" on public policy issues facing the nation. Δ

D.C. voucher plan clears House, faces Senate hurdles

The U.S. House of Representatives has approved a District of Columbia appropriations measure that would allow taxpayer-funded vouchers for private and parochial schools.

On a 211-201 vote, lawmakers approved a House-Senate conference report that would provide \$4.99 billion in D.C. funding for fiscal 1996. The measure must now clear the Senate, where a vote on a motion to limit debate was expected Feb. 27.

Senate voucher foes hope to strip those provisions from the measure, according to spokesmen for Sens. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C.

A Kennedy aide said limited public funds should not be funneled to private schools when D.C. public schools have so many unmet needs.

Hollings believes "government has a duty to public schools to run them well," a spokesman said. "But he believes government has a duty to private schools to leave them alone."

The House-passed proposal would provide up to \$5 million for two types of scholarships for private school tuition.

One type would be used to pay for the tuition, transportation and mandatory fees to attend an "eligible" institution, including private and parochial schools.

A second "enhanced achievement" scholarship would be used for non-sectar-

ian programs that operate outside of regular school hours to help students who are having trouble academically.

During the House debate, opponents said the bill would be used as a national precedent for private school funding.

The voucher proposal allowing for funding of religious schools is unconstitutional.

— Eleanor Holmes Norton
D.C. Delegate to Congress



They also argued the vouchers would help only a limited number of students and those primarily in religious schools.

Rep. Julian C. Dixon, D-Calif., said that only 1,500 to 2,000 students would be helped,

noting that the district has 80,000 students.

Supporters said the vouchers were needed to give parents some options. "This is about providing kids a hand up and a handout and an opportunity to become leaders in the community," said Rep. James Walsh, R-N.Y.

To get the \$5 million, the D.C. Council must accept the program and then decide how to allocate the money between the two types of scholarships.

D.C. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton expressed doubt whether the voucher program would take effect because of an "inevitable" court challenge.

"For a court," Norton said, "the issue would be, is the voucher proposal allowing for the funding of religious schools unconstitutional on its face? I believe that it is."

She said the bill would allow — for the first time in the nation's history — "direct tuition payments to religious schools." Δ

1936-1996

Six Decades
of Securing
Religious Liberty



The year 1946 was pivotal in the development of the Baptist Joint Committee. That year, the Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations, the antecedent of the BJC, became a full-time agency based in the nation's capital. It shared office space with the Baptist World Alliance and the District of Columbia Baptist Association. The organization hired Waco, Texas, pastor Joseph Martin Dawson as its first executive director. Dawson began a seven-year tenure Aug. 1, 1946, at the age of 67. One of his first steps as the first executive was the establishment of a newsletter, titled *Report from the Capital*. The six-page premiere issue, dated October 1946, listed four member bodies: The Northern Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention Inc. Δ

Telecommunications act raises free speech issues

A sweeping telecommunications reform bill signed Feb. 8 by President Clinton requires manufacturers to put a device in television sets to allow parents to block violent and other objectionable programs.

The overhaul package contains provisions intended to encourage telecommunications competition.

But the requirement for a so-called "v-chip" in television sets and regulations of Internet communications are drawing criticism.

Rep. Jack Fields, R-Texas, who voted for the bill, said, "Inserting the federal government into the area of deciding what should be on television or how the content of television programs should be rated sets a dangerous precedent that threatens the very rights the First Amendment is designed to protect."

The law also establishes criminal penalties of up to \$250,000 in fines and two years in prison for people who put "indecent" material on the Internet.

Rep. Pat Schroeder, D-Colo, has raised concern over a provision that she says will prevent information on the Internet that tells where and how an abortion may be obtained.

Evangelical leaders plan voter guide distribution

A group of centrist evangelicals will produce voter guides for the 1996 elections to contrast with views offered by the Religious Right.

Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners Magazine* and a spokesman for the group Call to Renewal, announced the plans at a Feb. 1 news conference.

About 300 theologians, pastors and community organizers recently attended a conference sponsored by the group. Wallis said the group is an alternative voice to the Christian Coalition, but insisted it is not a Christian left group.

The leaders said that non-profit groups, religious and non-religious, were doing the best work for the poor. "Public policy must empower and fund those approaches," Wallis said.

Ron Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action, said he would like to see a voucher system instituted for welfare programs. He acknowledged church-state

concerns with the approach but said "the advantages outweigh the dangers."

The voter guides would not endorse candidates, the leaders said, but will attempt to define a criteria that religious citizens should ask of their candidates.

Clinton calls for humility, charity at prayer breakfast

The hardball world of politics needs a good dose of humility and charity, President Clinton said at the 43rd annual National Prayer Breakfast.

"Every one of us is subject to error in judgment as part of the human condition. ... We need a charitable outlook in our feelings and our dealings toward those with whom we disagree, because we do not know as we are known by God," Clinton said.

The president acknowledged "very important" public policy disagreements between Democrats and Republicans. Those disagreements, he said, are not just partisan or political, but part of the debate America must have as it moves into a new era.

But those debates should be conducted "with a great sense of humility," he added.

Earlier, Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., also called for more humility.

"I've often said that those who travel the high road of humility in Washington, D.C., are not troubled by heavy traffic," he said.

Religious use of marijuana viable criminal defense

Rastafarians may assert their belief that marijuana is a sacrament as a defense against drug-possession charges, a federal appeals court has ruled.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco overturned Feb. 3 the marijuana possession convictions of three Montana residents because the trial judge improperly barred evidence of their religious views. Drug import and distribution convictions were not overturned.

The Associated Press reported that attorneys said it may have been the first overturning of a drug conviction based on the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Rastafarianism originated in Jamaica and followers use marijuana as a ritual aid to meditation. Δ



Reflections

Henry J. Holcomb

Staff Writer
The Philadelphia Inquirer



Over the years I have been privileged to know several significant leaders well enough to write about them. Lyndon B. Johnson in retirement. George Bush as a young congressman. Hubert H. Humphrey as a candidate for president. Lloyd Bentsen as a U.S. senator. John Gilligan as governor of Ohio. Jim Florio as governor of New Jersey.

Each of these leaders taught me lessons and highlighted values that enrich my life today. But none holds more of my imagination, appreciation and respect than Barbara Jordan. In its report on her recent death, *The Times of London* wrote:

"She possessed one of the most recognizable voices in American politics ... a booming organ of magisterial authority. During an age when political oratory had given way to more superficial demands of television, Jordan still liked to harangue her audiences with Churchillian vigor ... she became a voice to be heard, and never to be ignored."

Though it was her considerable oratorical skills — with which as a student she led the all-black Texas Southern University debate team to a draw with Harvard's team — that made her famous, she was most comfortable working quietly in the legislature and teaching.

It was through her legislative work that I was privileged to know her. She was a young state senator in Texas when I was a young reporter covering the Senate for the morning newspaper in Houston, where Ms. Jordan lived.

As Molly Ivins, the Texas writer, once wrote, interviewing Barbara Jordan was like interviewing God — at least how one imagines interviewing God would be. In our every private conversation she was precise and thought-provoking. She was full of good humor, and she could share a lusty laugh and a good story. But

there was never a frivolous comment, never a mean-spirited word. This was true whether we were in her high-ceilinged statehouse office, having lunch at the Headliners Club or just relaxing at the Sholtz Bier Garten, an outdoor cafe where politicians and reporters retreated when weary of lavish buffets hosted by lobbyists.

Senator Jordan was resilient. She rebounded from two consecutive defeats in races for the Texas Legislature's lower house to become the first woman and the first African American ever elected to the 31-member Texas Senate.

Most speeches on the Texas Senate floor in those days were hard to hear over the din of wheeling and dealing, small talk and laughter. But whenever the lieutenant governor said, "The chair recognizes the Senator from Harris [County]," a hush fell over the ornate chamber.

I remember one particular debate on legislation designed to improve state government employment opportunities for minorities, which at that point were nil. Someone sought to delay action by sending the proposed law to a study committee.

Senator Jordan arose and said that, in the interest of saving the taxpayers the cost of an elaborate study, she would spend that afternoon standing on the Capitol steps, from where she could observe several state office buildings. "If I need more than one hand to count the number of minority citizens leaving work, then I will vote for your study"

The legislation passed — without the study delay.

It was during the Watergate scandal that she became forever etched in the minds of many Americans. She was the first Southern black elected to Congress since Reconstruction and she became a key inquisitor at the Nixon impeachment hearings. At a key moment her voice boomed: "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total. And I am

not going to be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution."

A debilitating illness cut short her career in Congress and confined her to teaching from a wheel chair at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas.

My last visit with Barbara Jordan was several years ago, at a Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs religious liberty conference in Washington. I was given the honor of leading the invocation before her address.

The remark that sticks in my mind from that day came during the question-and-answer period, when a preacher asked her for advice on how to present Christian values and concerns in secular situations like work and politics. Her response — which instructs me loudly even today — went something like this:

"You would do well to pursue your causes with vigor, while remembering that you are a servant of God, not a spokesman for God — a *servant of God*, not a *spokesman for God* — and remembering that God might well choose to bless an opposing point of view for reasons that have not yet been revealed to you."

May the example of her resilience and persistence, may her eloquent appeals for an end to divisiveness and may her calls for creation of community live on.

May her example and words move us now. Δ

Henry J. Holcomb is president of the Board of Deacons at First Baptist Church, Philadelphia. This article appeared in his church newsletter and is reprinted with permission.

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Book Review

Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson

*Edwin S. Gaustad, William B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1996,
246 pp.*



"If there had never been a priest, there would never have been an infidel." Guess what famous Baptist uttered this pithy, if less than diplomatic syllogism. It is, in fact, a trick question. It came from the pen of the thoroughly non-Baptist, Thomas Jefferson.

Actually, as Edwin Gaustad shows us in his new religious biography of the great Virginian, Jefferson would probably not meet most Baptists' criteria for the label "Christian." However, his efforts on behalf of religious liberty put us in his debt. This dualism of Jefferson's religious life — one private, one public — is the focus of the book, and Gaustad's synthesis of the two holds the work together.

On the public Jefferson, Gaustad gives us a thorough accounting of the statesman's lifelong struggle to separate church and state. He chronicles such famous accomplishments as the disestablishment of the Anglican church in Virginia, the Virginia Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom, and his work on the First Amendment (through James Madison). Gaustad also delivers stories of Jefferson's less-well-known religious adventures. One that stands out is the religious mudslinging in the presidential election of 1800 when the Adams camp seized upon Jefferson's statement in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that it did not matter if "my neighbor says there are twenty gods

or no god; it neither picks my pocket or breaks my leg." To the Federalists, and their Congregationalist supporters, Jefferson was at best a deist, maybe an atheist, and certainly no friend to God. Gaustad does a good job of filling in gaps left by history books and giving life to these historical events.

Jefferson's private religion must have proved much harder to reconstruct, but Gaustad pieces together a convincing portrait. Jefferson believed that religion was a matter between the individual and God. Gaustad tries many phrases to describe Jefferson's theology, and one comes away with the feeling that he is not satisfied with any of them. Perhaps Unitarian Rationalist best fits this man's theology, which is based on a single, loving God who endows each person with the gift of rational thought and an innate moral sense. All of his religious convictions had to pass the tests of his scientific beliefs. Jefferson also was convinced of a future explosion in Unitarianism coinciding with the spread of education. In his own words, Jefferson was "a sect of one."

Perhaps Gaustad's central accomplishment lies in demonstrating what drove Jefferson so relentlessly in the church-state arena. This book describes a man dedicated to religious liberty for both selfish and selfless reasons. Thus, when Jefferson swears "on the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man," the reader takes note of the emotion of his declaration. Thomas Jefferson was unable or unwilling to express his religious beliefs freely and openly, but he worked diligently to ensure that others could. ▲

— Philip T. Kingston
BJC Intern

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