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Memphis, Tennessee



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ Christian Coalition Executive Director **Ralph Reed** will leave the organization to form a new campaign consulting firm. Reed said the coalition has turned religious conservatives into "one of the most potent and well-organized political forces in all of American politics." Americans United for Separation of Church and State Executive Director **Barry Lynn** credited Reed with making **Pat Robertson** and the Christian Coalition "look less radical than they really are."

◆ Baptist historian **Walter Shurden**, professor at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., said fanaticism and cynicism threaten Baptists' advocacy of church-state separation. At a pastors conference in Kentucky, Shurden said many congregations are poorly educated about Baptists' historical position and that valid threats of a secular society cause churches to embrace "un-Baptist" policies that erode religious liberty.

◆ **Harland Malyon**, a member of the ACLU, has lost a bid to end a county sheriff's volunteer chaplaincy program that allowed religious and nonreligious volunteers to provide death notification, crisis intervention and counseling to victims. The Washington Supreme Court ruled that the program does not violate the separation of church and state. Δ

Groups back amendment after Istook makes changes

A proposal to amend the U.S. Constitution by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., has received the endorsement of the National Association of Evangelicals and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission after it was twice revised.

Originally opposed to Istook's proposal, the CLC endorsed the measure after Istook agreed to slight changes. The NAE withheld its support until Istook made more changes.

"This is yet another addition to a long list of supporters who prayerfully wish to restore religious freedom, to repair how courts have distorted the First Amendment. The public has long waited to reverse 30 years of court rulings such as those against prayer in the public schools," Istook said after the NAE endorsed the latest proposal.

In a press release, the NAE said that the amendment addresses the basic concern of the evangelical community "that government not deny equal access to public benefits on account of religion."

NAE President **Don Argue** said changes in the text of the proposal, "together with Rep. Istook's assurance that minority rights are protected — secures individual rights of conscience."

Other church-state specialists saw little substantive difference among Istook's

three proposals.

Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director **James M. Dunn** described the changes as cosmetic. "It's like putting lipstick on a pig," he said.

"I'd rather not have my religious liberty be based upon the assurances of Mr. Istook or any other government official. Baptists bled and died for constitutional guarantees that an uninformed, ill-advised lawmaker would diminish," he said.

Melissa Rogers, associate general counsel at the BJC, said the revised amendment would still permit government to endorse religion in various ways.

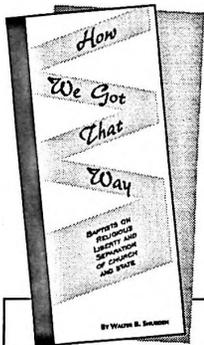
"The amendment would still appear to permit students to use the school intercom to lead their class in prayer or a judge or juror to lead the courtroom in prayer," Rogers said. She added that the new language would "still open the door to government funding of churches, synagogues, mosques, parochial schools and other pervasively sectarian institutions.

"Government-endorsed or -subsidized religion debases faith and entangles sacred institutions with government," she said. "We don't need an Istook amendment or a revised Istook amendment. We already have a religious freedom amendment, the First Amendment." Δ

Religious Freedom Amendment

To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: The people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. The government shall not require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, initiate or designate school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion.

— latest version of a proposed amendment to the Constitution by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla.



"Baptists are simply not perceived as freedom-lovers and freedom-givers and freedom-protectors by many persons in America today. If that is the case, and I think to a great degree it is, it is sad, sad, sad."

— Walter B. Shurden

in
"How We Got That Way:
Baptists on Religious
Liberty and Separation of
Church and State"

Copies of Dr. Shurden's address are available from the Baptist Joint Committee. For a single copy, send the BJC a self-addressed, No. 10 envelope with 55 cents postage. Multiple copies are available for 25 cents each, plus shipping.

Jewish group seeks removal of religious display in court

The American Jewish Congress has urged the Alabama Supreme Court to uphold a lower court decision ordering a judge to remove the Ten Commandments from his courtroom wall and to refrain from opening jury terms with a prayer.

The AJC has also called on the Alabama Judicial Inquiry Commission to investigate the conduct of Circuit Court Judge Roy Moore to determine whether non-Christians appearing in his courtroom can get a fair trial.

The request was prompted by remarks attributed to Moore that his "duty under the Constitution is to acknowledge the Judeo-Christian God, ... We are not a nation founded upon the Hindu god or Buddha."

Alabama Gov. Fob James has threatened to call out the Alabama National Guard to prevent the removal of the Ten Commandments display or the prayers.

In an amicus brief filed with Alabama's top court, the AJC said that the lower court's "insistence that Judge Moore confine his judicial authority to the secular matters within his authority, and that he not inject religion into his courtroom, is soundly rooted in this fundamental freedom preserving limitation on his authority."

Protestants in Nicaragua protest use of textbook

A campaign to teach Nicaraguan public school students using a Roman Catholic textbook has angered Protestant leaders, who claim the book's use violates freedom of religion and promote anti-Protestant sentiments.

The textbook, produced by the Catholic Archdiocese of Managua, blames racial tension on Protestants and warns Protestants not to criticize Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary.

"Be careful, Protestant brothers. You're playing with fire. If you want to increase your numbers by misleading unprepared Catholics, don't mess with Mary, the mother of Jesus and our mother. It's something serious for which you'll pay heavily," the textbook states.

Gustavo Parajon, pastor and president of the Council of Evangelical Churches, said the Protestant community, which makes up 25 percent of Nicaragua's pop-

ulation, needs to "start a campaign" demanding respect for the constitutional separation of church and state.

Parajon said using the book in schools violates the constitutional guarantee of secular education and endorses a specific religion.

PBS to air documentary on Baptist seminary battle

PBS has announced it will air "Battle for the Minds," a documentary by Steven Lipscomb that explores issues of intolerance and freedom in Baptist life.

The documentary, an account of the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., has won several awards.

David Wilkinson, communications coordinator at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said that "Lipscomb skillfully and honestly reveals the truth: many of today's would-be Baptist emperors have no clothes. This documentary exposes the narrow agenda with which they would shackle Baptists."

Check local listings for its PBS debut on June 10.

Military to allow Indians to use peyote in services

Military officials said they will allow American Indian soldiers to use the hallucinogenic plant peyote in their religious ceremonies.

American Indians who use peyote for religious purposes believe it brings peace of mind, helps them think good thoughts, and heals illnesses.

Peyote use has been forbidden in the military because of its classification as a drug with psychedelic properties. Interim guidelines regarding its use were issued April 25. The revised guidelines were issued to comply with a 1994 law allowing American Indians to use peyote as a religious sacrament.

"If they're using peyote in their religious practice, it's a sacrament, not a drug," said Air Force Maj. Monica Aloisio, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

Capt. Mel Ferguson, a chaplain and executive director of the Armed Forces Chaplain's Board, said that "when people are allowed to practice their faith and nourish the spiritual dimension of their lives, that promotes and enhances military readiness."

Reflections

James M. Dunn

Executive Director



About once a year I bring you, faithful readers, up to date on the state of the Baptist Joint Committee. You offer extravagantly generous expressions of appreciation.

So, I answer your question: "What can I do?"

1. **Join the Religious Liberty Council** as a marvelous retired medical doctor in Abilene, Texas, did.

2. **Enlist others, especially young adults, in the RLC**, so the drumbeat for freedom will go on after we've gone on.

3. **Set up a little trust to pay the meal money for summer interns** as one faithful mother of a campus minister in North Carolina did. Her \$10,000 endowment with the North Carolina Baptist Foundation feeds a student.

4. **Take a BJC Offering one Sunday a year at your church.** A Westfield, N.J., church supports the BJC with about \$2,000 annually.

5. **Show *The Intersection*.** Bill Moyers and I talk about religious liberty as we did by video to the Plainview, Texas, Rotary Club thanks to Larry Voss.

6. **Subscribe to *Report from the Capital*.** You get 24 issues for \$10 a year.

7. **See to it that teen-agers in your church know something about what a Baptist is by using *Citizens of Two Kingdoms*, a youth curriculum.**

8. **Educate uninformed church members about the BJC and current issues with *On Guard*, a history of recent developments.**

9. **Explore perpetuating the message of authentic Baptists by endowment as Bill Crosby and other Kentucky Baptists have by putting over \$100,000 to work in the Kentucky Baptist Foundation.**

10. **Watch for clips, news items, editorials as do the Pages in Indianapolis or the Ralph Tingleys in Sioux Falls, S.D.**

11. **Send us stuff we cannot afford as does one Florida lawyer every year when he contributes his *Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory*.**

12. **Ask if the BJC is in your church**

budget. Over 300 churches have line items this calendar year.

13. **Encourage your state Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to follow Arkansas by including the BJC in its budget.**

14. **Make a regular personal gift.**

15. **Call us when you learn of a church-state issue near you.** Someone else may have already faced the same problem.

16. **Invite Brent, Melissa, Skip, Larry, Kenny or me to speak to your church, association, club or convention.** Cliff Gosney got the Tiger Bay Club in Daytona Beach to pick up a plane ticket for a string of speeches by this writer.

17. **Gladden interns' hearts by donating some pots and pans, dishes or stainless steel flatware for the apartments.** Call first.

18. **Speak up at your state Baptist convention for this faithful religious liberty voice.** Texas, Virginia and North Carolina conventions each use a different budget method but together sustain about 1/4 of the BJC budget. The American Baptist Churches of West Virginia also keep the BJC going.

19. **Look for a foundation that should be standing with us.**

20. **Explain to friends why we must stick together for the free exercise of religion.**

21. **Study *How We Got that Way*.**

22. **Get from us what your public school lawyers need to know.**

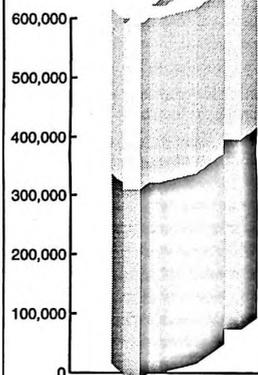
23. **Write "Letters to the Editor" regarding religious liberty.**

24. **Surprise us.** We rejoice in the creativity of fellow freedom lovers.

25. **Keep on giving through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, American Baptist Churches or through your own conference or state convention.**

26. **Pray, whatever else you do.** We battle with principalities and powers. One generation is all it takes to lose our most precious freedoms to those who would use government to prop up religious causes. Δ

Endowing
the Baptist
Joint Committee



\$321,000 given, pledged

April's gifts and pledges pushed the Baptist Joint Committee's endowment campaign past \$321,000. To reach the \$600,000 goal, the campaign needs:

28 gifts of \$10,000, or
280 gifts of \$1,000, or
2,800 gifts of \$100.

Please give, pledge generously to endow Baptists' most reliable voice for religious liberty.

Baptist Joint Committee

Supporting Bodies

- ◆ Alliance of Baptists
- ◆ American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- ◆ Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
- ◆ National Baptist Convention of America
- ◆ National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.
- ◆ National Missionary Baptist Convention
- ◆ North American Baptist Conference
- ◆ Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- ◆ Religious Liberty Council
- ◆ Seventh Day Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Southern Baptist state conventions/churches

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

James M. Dunn

Executive Director

Larry Chesser

Editor

James Byrd

Associate Editor

J. Brent Walker

Book Reviews

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200 Maryland Ave. N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-544-4226
Fax: 202-544-2094
CompuServe: 70420,54
Internet E-mail:
BJCPA@erols.com
World Wide Web site:
www.erols.com/bjcpa

Tax code impacts giving

Eliminating the tax deduction for charitable gifts would reduce sharply amounts Americans donate to churches and other charities, according to a year-long study released April 28.

Commissioned to assess the impact on charitable giving of various tax reform proposals, the study was conducted by Price Waterhouse and the Washington, D.C., law firm of Caplin & Drysdale. It was commissioned by two private organizations, the Council on Foundations and Independent Sector.

The study, based on data from 93,000 federal income tax returns filed in 1992, concluded that elimination of the charitable tax deduction "would place an enormous new burden on charities at the very time that the federal government is continuing to cut sharply the funding of social programs and calling on charities to pick up the slack."

Independent Sector President Sara Melendez said the study refutes the idea that the charitable deduction has little impact on gifts to charities.

"Most people don't give because they receive a deduction," Melendez said in a prepared statement. "They give because it's the right thing to do. However, the amount they give clearly is greatly affected by the charitable deduction."

The study found that taxpayers who itemize deductions represent less than 30 percent of all taxpayers but account for 75 percent of gifts to charities.

Citing a 1995 Gallup Poll, the report noted that nonprofit groups as a whole draw about 18 percent of their income from charitable gifts, but churches and religious organizations receive 83 percent of their revenue from contributions.

"This study explodes the myth that churches will not suffer if the charitable

deduction is eliminated," said J. Brent Walker, Baptist Joint Committee general counsel. Walker was one of four representatives of religious organizations serving on a 32-member Working Group on Tax Restructuring sponsored by the Council on Foundations and Independent Sector.

"Not only should we preserve the charitable deduction, we should allow nonitemizers to deduct their contributions, too," Walker said.

The study examined the potential impact of tax reform proposals offered in the 104th Congress and is expected to be part of future tax reform debates.

It estimated that a flat tax with no charitable deduction and a reduced tax rate would have cost about \$3 billion in gifts from individuals.

The study offered no estimate on how replacing the income tax system with a national retail sales tax would affect charitable giving. But it concluded that a national sales tax system would sharply raise expenses of charities by requiring the collection of a 15 percent tax on revenue from most services provided by charitable groups.

Giving could increase by as much as \$34 billion under the Unlimited Savings Allowance, or USA tax. The plan retains the charitable deduction and allows an unlimited savings deduction. But if taxpayers chose to save rather than give to charity, increases in giving under the plan may be reduced, the study suggested.

Melendez said Independent Sector takes no position for or against the tax restructuring proposals.

"But while we do not support or oppose tax restructuring, we will work aggressively against any move to eliminate the charitable tax deduction," she said. Δ

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