



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Volume 53, No. 21

October 27, 1998

NewsMakers

◆ **Jim Bennett** of Tulsa, Okla., has begun an internship at the Baptist Joint Committee. He attended Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Okla., and just completed a year of study in the Netherlands and Malta.

◆ **John Binder**, retired executive director of the North American Baptist Conference, has been appointed to serve on the Baptist Joint Committee, as well as an 11-member search committee to find a new executive director for the BJC. **James M. Dunn** plans to step down as executive director by September and assume part-time responsibilities at the agency.

◆ **Rich Cizick** of the National Association of Evangelicals applauded recent administration actions in the area of religious persecution. "I think that a lot of conservatives need to acknowledge that the Clinton administration has done more to address the problem of religious persecution than the previous two administrations have done," he said.

◆ **Jay Sekulow**, chief counsel of Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice, criticized groups that are warning churches against distributing Christian Coalition voter guides. He said churches have a right to distribute nonpartisan voter guides. "The Christian Coalition voter guides are nonpartisan," he said. **A**

Congress OKs measure targeting religious persecution abroad

Congress has approved a bill designed to curb religious persecution abroad after backers agreed to give the president more flexibility in dealing with countries that permit religious persecution.

The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act now heads to the president, who is expected to sign the measure. The Senate unanimously approved the bill Oct. 9. The House, which had earlier approved tougher legislation, agreed to the Senate changes Oct. 10.

The final bill differed significantly from the bill initially introduced by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va. That bill called for the creation of a White House office that could impose automatic sanctions on countries that permit religious persecution. But several religious groups sought changes, fearing that the original version might actually hurt victims of persecution. Also, the business community lobbied to soften trade sanctions that could hamper free trade.

The revised bill provides more flexibility to the president in imposing penalties on other countries. It also houses the new religious persecution office in the State Department instead of the White House.

The Senate changes were sponsored by Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., to appease Republican and Democratic opponents of automatic sanctions and other provisions in the House bill. Other provisions sought by supporters of the original bill have been stripped, including explicit

sanctions against Sudan and immigration provisions.

Nickles said the purpose of the bill "is not to punish anybody; it's to promote religious freedom."

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., a co-sponsor of the Wolf bill, voted for the revised

The purpose of the bill is not to punish anybody; it's to promote religious freedom.

— Sen. Don Nickles
R-Okla.



measure but said the changes "some-what weakened our bill." He said the Senate version "stretches flexibility almost to the breaking point."

During Senate, debate, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said

that "one legislative solution mandating tangible and serious sanctions applied to over 70 cases can have a myriad of consequences we don't intend."

Most advocates of the original measure supported its passage despite the changes.

"Due to political realities in the Senate, this is a more modest bill," said Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom.

Other religious groups that were critical of the original bill lauded the changes incorporated in the final measure.

James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the changes "constitute a victory for measured and realistic guidelines for foreign policy related to religious persecution. We can all rejoice in a fresh focus on human rights. Since President Jimmy Carter's emphasis 20 years ago, the concept has not received adequate attention from the United States." **A**

Moyers receives award from Texas Baptist commission

Broadcast journalist Bill Moyers received the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission's Distinguished Service Award at a recent luncheon in Dallas.

In presenting the award, CLC Director Phil Strickland praised Moyers' commitment to religious liberty and the separation of church and state, based on his Baptist heritage.

Strickland also thanked Moyers for the "context of caring" out of which his life's work has been done and for demonstrating "the courage to go after truth and take the consequences."

Moyers expressed appreciation for the "steady, powerful witness" of the CLC and other Texas Baptists at the luncheon. "From popular culture to politics, there is a general coarsening of society," he said. "In a real sense, American society seems to be careening. The center is not holding. America is still very much up for grabs, and it needs now, more than ever, the kind of work you are doing."

Moyers grew up in Central Baptist Church of Marshall, Texas, and graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Δ

Religious leaders warn against biased voter guides

Religious leaders from a variety of faiths are calling on churches to refrain from distributing Christian Coalition and other voter guides that they charge are manipulative, partisan and threaten tax-exemption.

At an Oct. 21 press conference, leaders of The Interfaith Alliance, a group created to provide an alternative voice to the religious right, denounced attempts to use churches to support or oppose candidates for public office.

The group wants churches to participate in its Oct. 23-25 "Call to a Faithful Decision Weekend." The emphasis is designed to encourage people of faith to get involved in politics, but to refrain from using churches for electioneering.

Welton Gaddy, executive director of The Interfaith Alliance, said "Make no mistake, the voter guides of the religious right have far more to do with voter indoctrination and partisan persuasion than with 'voter education.'"

The alliance is primarily concerned about the 45 million Christian Coalition voter guides that are expected to be distributed across the country. The guides will be given to churches to distribute on the Sunday before the Nov. 3 elections.

The coalition, founded by Pat Robertson, has been sued by the Federal Election Commission for alleged election law violations, but the group denies the charges.

Gaddy said, "Should religion and politics mix? Yes! Not only should religion and politics mix, for the integrity of religion and the good of the nation, religion and politics must mix. The crucial question is 'How?'"

He said that the timing of the distribution of the coalition voter guides "intentionally deflects scrutiny and prevents candidates from responding to inaccuracies and issue distortion in the materials. ... Instead of providing descriptive information, the voter guides produced by the religious right oversimplify public policy questions," he added.

Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance of Baptists, said that "the accusation, often leveled by Christian Coalition leaders, that our objective is to silence them is patently false." He added, "What all true Baptists decry is the abuse of the political system for narrowly sectarian and clearly partisan ends. Despite all their denials, what the leaders of the Christian Coalition are doing amounts to a crude

manipulation of vulnerable voters to such ends."

Christian Coalition spokesman Arnie Owens said the interfaith group's actions is just "another left-wing attack on the distribution of voter guides in an attempt to silence the pro-family movement. They are engaging in a misrepresentation of the truth." He said the coalition's voter guides are nonpartisan and that the timing of their release is coordinated to make the guides more effective.

Other groups have targeted the Christian Coalition voter guides and warned churches that distributing the guides may jeopardize their tax status.

American United for Separation of Church and State recently distributed a memorandum saying that churches can lose their federal tax exemption if they distribute partisan voter guides.

Also, the Texas Faith Network sent letters to Texas religious leaders warning against the use of the guides. "These guides focus on issues far afield from core issues of faith. ... We want to be clear: religious leaders and their congregations can and should be involved in issues of public policy and work to do God's will. We are not attempting to silence the views of the Christian Coalition. However, religious leaders violate a sacred trust when they endorse candidates from the pulpit or allow the distribution of partisan political literature." Δ

Survey shows support for vouchers declining

Support among Americans for vouchers has declined during the past year, according to a survey by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

The survey found that the support for school vouchers among black respondents had fallen from 57.3 percent to 48.1 percent, and among white respondents from 47 percent to 41.3 percent.

Although support for vouchers appears to be fading, black supporters of vouchers still outnumber opponents. According to the survey, vouchers are opposed by 39.8 percent of black respondents, 50.2 percent of white respondents and 50.2 percent of the general population.

David Bositis, senior political analyst for the center, said the survey showed a significant correlation between dissatisfaction with public schools and support for vouchers. The center seeks the improvement of the socio-economic status of African Americans and other disadvantaged groups. Δ

Dunn, but not finished



You've been there, haven't you? Joy and sadness set in at the same time.

That's what I'm feeling. Announcing my plans to shift gears beginning

September 1999, led dozens of you to write, call or e-mail kind words. I'm pensive.

Academics have come up with acronyms: **On The One Hand** and **But On The Other Hand**. Something useful might come from this exercise in ambivalence. Let's see:

On the one hand:

Marilyn and I knew a spiritual sense of calling when we came here in 1981.

It's useful to be moving into the computer age with a Macintosh given to me.

Old friends, old alliances, really old folks (from my 45 years in ministry) have kept the BJC afloat.

On the road about 100 days a year, wearily I've memorized the steward's spiel.

Evidences of massive ignorance and apathy about religious freedom make me anxious.

Hanging around as the "ex-executive" is usually asking for trouble.

The BJC has become the most pervasively ecumenical/interfaith operation in Baptist life.

By God's grace, I'm leaving voluntarily, bills paid, budget met, staff strong, not pushed out.

Pleading for support, virtually begging, goes against my grain when Baptists should give gladly.

This job threw me in the midst of all kinds of Baptists.

Attacks on "separation of church and state" were often mean, misinformed, malicious.

"No establishment" of any or all kinds of religion is necessary for freedom.

The Baptist Joint Committee works with any group that defends religious liberty.

But on the other hand:

Now, we are genuinely led to teaching at Wake Forest Divinity School.

What will I do when I can't yell, "Larry, Kenny, Matt! Help!"?

Trying to ignite and inflame young people with soul freedom fire challenges me.

There are still three states I've not visited: Nebraska, Montana and Wyoming.

Knowing that all are made "in God's image," meant to be free, calms my soul.

We'll see if I can offer institutional memory and all sorts of support for the next exec.

No outfit among Baptists spends more time, energy and intensity interpreting Baptist ways.

There's no one to blame but myself if it turns out I've blown it or left prematurely.

Finding folks who thank you for asking, for allowing them to help, gladdens the heart.

This job threw me in the midst of all kinds of Baptists.

Never before has defense of the concept been so needed.

"The free exercise" of religion is an entitlement of popular and unpopular faiths.

The BJC engages in the struggle because we believe in the competency of every individual before God in matters of faith.

Quoting

It is not my intention to end my relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee, but to continue to serve actively in a different role as long as my health, my successor and our mutual understanding of the Lord's leading allow me to do so. I am eager to retain friends and supporters who have sustained this ministry.

The exact nature and title of the position and my assignment in research, writing and speaking and development should be worked out in the months ahead and presented to the Executive Committee in March 1999 for consideration. It will obviously not be a full-time responsibility or a tenured one but transitional.

Many aspects of this service have been genuinely humbling, profoundly moving and spiritually enriching.

— James M. Dunn

Excerpts of letter to the Baptist Joint Committee
October 5, 1998

Through this ambiguity I'm always Dunn, but I'm not finished. D.V. Δ

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
Kenny Byrd
Associate Editor
J. Brent Walker
Book Reviews

REPORT (ISSN-0346-0661) is published 24 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee. Single subscriptions, \$10 per year. Bulk subscriptions available.



James L.
Williamson

How does a Catholic school like Messmer in Milwaukee become a public school? Easy, accept vouchers from the state to educate children who would otherwise be in public schools. State money can't make Messmer more Catholic; it can only make it more secular.

And it seems like religious schools want to have their cake and eat it, too. A Milwaukee voucher plan now up and running will provide roughly \$4,900 to a private school for each participating student. But there is more to the story. Messmer, a school of 366 students, charges \$2,800 in tuition fees to non-voucher students. Messmer officials, however, have reported that it costs about \$4,850 annually to educate a student and has requested that amount from the state for voucher students. This is significant because the maximum amount of the publicly funded voucher is either \$4,900 or the amount the school determines it costs to educate a child — whichever is less. Therefore, with its 165 voucher students (45 percent of the student body), Messmer will be receiving \$800,250. The other 200 children enrolled at Messmer are only paying \$560,000 combined in tuition. Something is wrong with this picture even if the practice is legal. Messmer is charging the government \$2,050 more per student to give "poor" children the same chance as others. That's about \$340,000 more than if the government had been able to get the same deal as the other 200 students. Meanwhile the Milwaukee public school system is losing more than \$800,000.

Moreover, the Milwaukee voucher sys-

tem is creating more questions than answers about government regulating private schools. Just weeks before the program began, Wisconsin dropped its requirement that participating private schools agree to uphold certain students' rights and nondiscrimination laws. The private schools do not have to accommodate children with disabilities, for example, or give fair hearings to children they expel. Officially, they cannot refuse to accept a disabled child, but they do not have to hire appropriate teachers or fully accommodate the disabled. Sounds like it's the school getting the choices, not the students.

"We are entering a new era in education in Milwaukee," said Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson in remarks made on the opening day of classes at Messmer. It is, unfortunately, an era in which private schools win by receiving public funds which public schools lose; an era in which private schools may become more wealthy and powerful but may also lose their unique religious contribution.

Religious schools should beware of the hand that feeds them. They may find some things hard to swallow since government usually regulates what it funds. Creating government oversight of private education will be the inevitable outcome of underwriting schools like Messmer.

Does a publicly funded voucher plan favor one religion? The fact that most schools accepting voucher students may be Catholic, suggests that it could. Δ

Dr. James L. Williamson is Scholar-in-Residence at the Baptist Joint Committee. He is the Fred Hale Professor of Education and Chair of the Department of Educational Administration at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.



200 Maryland Ave. N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-544-4226
Fax: 202-544-2094
CompuServe: 76420,54
Internet E-mail:
bjcpa@bjcpa.org
World Wide Web site:
www.bjcpa.org

*****AUTO***ALL FOR AADC

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HIST LIBRARY & ARCHIVES
BILL SUMNERS
901 COMMERCE ST STE 400
NASHVILLE TN 37203-3628



Non-profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Riverdale, MD
Permit No. 5061