

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL



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NewsMakers

◆ Rep. **John Lewis**, D-Ga., is scheduled to speak at the annual Religious Liberty Council luncheon to be held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Atlanta. Lewis, a Baptist minister, played a key role in the Civil Rights Movement, including participation in events such as the 1963 March on Washington. The RLC event is scheduled at noon on June 29.

◆ **Charlie Baldwin**, a third generation Baptist minister, has been named deputy chief of the U.S. Air Force Chaplain Service. His three-year assignment as deputy chief over 600 chaplains and 450 enlisted chaplains' assistants is scheduled to begin May 1. Pending Senate approval, he will be promoted from colonel to brigadier general.

◆ The Rev. **Barry Lynn**, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said the Bush plan to fund faith-based organizations for the provision of social services is "stirring up unnecessary religious tensions." This comment came after a survey conducted in part by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that Americans support the idea of allowing faith-based groups to receive government funds but only as long as those groups are part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Δ

Survey: Specifics prove hurdles for Bush's 'faith-based' plan

Most Americans support the notion of government contracting with religious groups to provide social services, according to a new survey.

However, the same poll indicates strong concern about specifics of implementing plans like President Bush's proposed faith-based initiative.

The poll released April 10 was presented jointly by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

The survey of 2,041 adults was conducted during March by the Pew Research Center. It found that 75 percent of respondents favor government funding for faith-based organizations while 21 percent oppose it.

However, more than 40 percent of respondents oppose government funding of Muslim mosques, Buddhist temples or Mormon churches. And 78 percent of respondents oppose the ability of religious groups to only hire people of the same faith while taking tax dollars.

President George W. Bush wants to expand the existing "charitable choice" provisions to allow religious groups to apply for federal funds for a plethora of social programs.

The biggest hurdle facing supporters of funding faith-based groups is the "widespread resistance to any sort of discriminatory hiring practices on the part of religious organizations that receive

government funds," says the survey.

Strong concerns are also expressed about what religious groups might do to the people they are trying to help, the survey said.

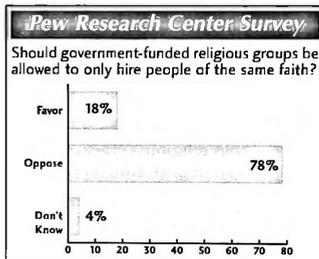
While 68 percent worry that tax funds for faith groups "might lead to too much government involvement with religious organizations," about 60 percent would prohibit groups that encourage religious conversion from receiving the funds.

Sixty percent also expressed concern that religious groups would proselytize recipients of social services.

The issue of charitable choice divides Americans along both party and racial lines. "On the Republican side, white evangelicals are more enthusiastic than other conservatives and moderate Republicans," a summary of the survey says. "Among Democrats, a bare majority of white liberals favor the idea, while black Democrats embrace it as strongly as Republican evangelicals."

Holly Hollman, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said the survey "demonstrates what we know to be true. While the idea of government support for religion has superficial appeal, the implications of Bush's charitable choice plan are disturbing to most people."

The full survey can be found on the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life website: <http://pewforum.org/events/0410/report/execsum.php3>. Δ



Agency seeks to boost offerings of faith-based credit unions

The federal agency that oversees credit unions wants to find ways to expand the services offered by the country's 489 faith-based credit unions.

Dennis Dollar, the acting chairman of the National Credit Unions Administration, said his agency will "identify and eliminate barriers" that keep the faith-based credit unions from serving more clients.

"Faith-based credit unions serve their membership in a very unique way," Dollar said. "I believe that by enhancing the options so that faith-based credit unions may also serve their surrounding communities, [it] not only allows them to provide affordable financial services outside their immediate membership, but by doing so may also strengthen the overall financial viability and safety and soundness of the institutions."

Dollar said his plan is in line with President Bush's desire to increase the role of faith-based organizations in providing social services. He said he wants to cut red tape that keeps these credit unions — with assets of more than \$2 billion — from expanding their services.

"Those 489 credit unions are benefiting their members tremendously, and many of them have much to offer their communities," he said. Δ

Christian Scientists qualify for federal funds, courts say

A Christian Science nursing facility that relies on prayer instead of conventional medicine for treatment can receive federal payments through Medicare and Medicaid, according to a ruling left standing April 2 by the U. S. Supreme Court.

Without comment, the high court turned away a claim that the payments violate the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state.

Both the Medicare Act and Medicaid Act of 1965 originally made specific allowances for adherents of Christian Science religion, which, according to court documents, "objects to medical care and embraces prayer as the sole means of healing."

A U.S. district court ruled in 1996 that allowing the group to qualify for federal payments violated the First Amendment's ban on establishment of religion.

Congress responded by replacing "sect-specific" portions of the two laws with neutral language accommodating "any person who is relying on a religious method of healing and for whom the acceptance of the medical health services would be inconsistent with his or her religious beliefs."

The changes enabled individuals who hold religious objections to medical care to receive governmental assistance for care at "religious nonmedical health-care institutions."

The taxpayers' group Children's Healthcare is a Legal Duty Inc. that won the previous case against such payments sued again, but this time lost in the district court.

Ruling in favor of the Christian Scientists and several religious groups that filed friend-of-the-court briefs in support of the religious exemption, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed the new arrangement is constitutional.

The 8th Circuit said the new legislative language was designed "to accommodate all persons who object to medical care for religious reasons, not only Christian Scientists."

The appeals court said the act was constitutional under the three-pronged "Lemon test" frequently used in disputes over the establishment of religion. The court said the measure has a secular purpose, it neither advances nor inhibits religion and it does not create excessive entanglement between church and state.

The court said the law merely allows

individuals "to be reimbursed for a subset of those services for which they would be reimbursed if they had sought treatment at a medical institution."

The taxpayers' suit had argued that, "Tens of millions of Medicare and Medicaid dollars have been paid by the federal government directly into the coffers of the Christian Science Church's sanatoria for the nonmedical care of its members by faith-healers."

CHILD is a nonprofit national membership organization established in 1983 to "protect children from abusive religious and cultural practices, especially religion-based medical neglect." In documents asking the Supreme Court to overturn the ruling, CHILD lawyers called the 8th Circuit decision "convoluted."

The group's lawyers had urged the high court to reverse the 8th Circuit before its reasoning spreads "in this era of rapidly replicating government programs yielding aid to religious entities." Δ

Religious freedom commission suggests halting Vietnam funds

Citing the Vietnamese government's "grievous violations" of religious freedom, a federal commission on international religious freedom is urging top officials of the Bush administration to raise the issue with global financial institutions and Vietnamese officials.

"Despite the increase in religious practice among the Vietnamese people in the last 10 years, the Vietnamese government suppresses organized religious activities forcefully and monitors and controls religious communities," wrote Elliott Abrams, chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, in letters sent March 29 to Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill.

The commission called for the United States to withhold support for a proposal that would have the World Bank and International Monetary Fund give Vietnam \$800 million in loans for economic reform.

"The Commission believes that supporting international economic aid that primarily benefits the Vietnamese government without requiring a commitment to substantially improve its protection of religious freedom ... may be interpreted as a signal of U.S. indifference," Abrams wrote.

But he said the United States should not withdraw its support for "loans made for the purpose of providing for basic human needs of the Vietnamese people." Δ

Tax support of faith-based groups OK until people see how it works



K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

A recent survey suggests that Americans like the idea of funding for faith-based organizations — until you show them how it works. The study, presented by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Research

Center for the People & the Press, demonstrates that the current “charitable choice” initiative is not what the public wants and, in fact, is highly divisive.

In addition to providing an interesting look at public opinion on an important policy debate, the poll results contain good news and bad news for friends of religious liberty. The good news is that the public’s concerns reflect support for the constitutional separation of church and state, which protects our religious liberty. The bad news is that a large generation gap exists between those who recognize government funding as a threat to religious liberty and those who do not.

At first glance, the basic finding of the poll presents a puzzle for defenders of church-state separation. What does it mean that 75 percent of those polled favor government funding of faith-based organizations? Certainly, it does not mean that Americans are willing to disregard the constitutional principles that have served to protect religious liberty.

Support for the general concept of funding for faith-based organizations deteriorated and appreciation for church-state concerns became increasingly evident as the poll explored specific proposals.

The answer to the puzzle may be found in the response to another question the pollsters asked. Seventy-five percent of those polled said that churches, synagogues and other houses of worship contribute to solving important social problems. Thus, the number of respondents that generally favor government funding of faith-based organizations may simply reflect the recognition of such contributions.

Fortunately, no new legislation is need-

ed to provide what the public wants — opportunities for government funding within the constitutional safeguards that protect religious liberty. That is because the law long has distinguished between two types of entities: religiously affiliated organizations and pervasively religious organizations, both of which are “faith-based.”

While public funding has been allowed to flow to the secular activities of religious affiliates, it has not been allowed for pervasively religious organizations because public funding for any part of them would unconstitutionally advance religion. This distinction should be preserved, not only because it is consistent with the public’s apparent desires, but because it effectively protects religious liberty.

The bad news in the poll reveals sharp generational divisions. Specifically, support for church-state separation is much lower among young people. Respondents over the age of 50 were more concerned about the threats posed to the Establishment Clause.

This finding should be a wake-up call for all Baptists and others who are committed to religious liberty. The challenge is to increase educational efforts within our churches and communities to promote the constitutional principles we cherish.

The BJC is eager to provide assistance. We welcome opportunities to speak to youth groups or provide materials about religious liberty issues of particular importance to students, such as the role of religion and prayer in public schools. In addition, our *Citizens of Two Kingdoms* curriculum is specifically designed for teaching Baptist history and religious liberty to youth. Why not lead a study for your youth group on Baptist distinctives?

If you are interested in learning more about how the BJC can help in your educational efforts, or if you are planning a youth trip to the D.C. area and would like someone from the BJC to speak to your group, please contact us. Δ

President Bush declares dates for Jewish Heritage Week

President George W. Bush issued a proclamation declaring April 22-29 as Jewish Heritage Week and urged all Americans to join in observing the week “with appropriate programs, ceremonies and activities.”

The proclamation is issued annually by U.S. presidents.

In the proclamation, Bush stated, “The Jewish community has played a vital role in our Nation’s history, tracing back to colonial times.”

He said, “In fleeing persecution, pogroms, and the horrors of the Holocaust, they sought a new life in the United States where they could worship in freedom and pursue their hopes and dreams in peace. The many oppressions historically borne by the Jewish people remind us that we must remain committed to religious liberty and tolerance for all.”

Bush said the Jewish community’s “rich heritage and culture continues to enrich our society’s national fabric. In many communities large and small, Jewish families have shared their resources, time and talent to help others. Their contributions to our national life and character help make America a better place.” Δ

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Bush touts character education, faith-based initiatives

Saying America needs not only to teach its children to read and write but also to "be bold enough to teach them the difference between right and wrong," President George W. Bush led a panel discussion to promote character education in the nation's schools.

Sitting beneath a portrait of Abraham Lincoln in the State Dining room of the White House, Bush said: "Parents have a tough battle in America today. Their children sometimes receive conflicting messages. And what public education ought to do is stand on the side of parents and be willing to reinforce the values that parents teach their children."

The president said the U.S. budget should reflect the nation's priorities. His proposed budget "triples the amount of character education money available for public education," he said.

Bush quoted Martin Luther King Jr., who said: "Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education."

The budget Bush submitted to Congress increases the amount of money available for abstinence education programs. It also encourages after-school programs "to be run by faith-based and community-based programs that exist because they've heard the universal call to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves."

Bush has proposed an increase in feder-

al aid to faith-based organizations that engage in providing social services by proposing to expand "charitable-choice" funding provisions. House lawmakers have introduced legislation to expand the effort, but critics of the plan say it violates church-state separation.

Meanwhile, a coalition of religious, education and civil-liberties organizations urged House lawmakers to reject parts of the Community Solutions Act, introduced by Reps. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., and Tony Hall, D-Ohio.

In an April 11 letter, the coalition urged rejection of the charitable choice provisions of the Watts-Hall measure.

"'Charitable choice' is an unconstitutional and dangerous proposal that will harm religion, authorize government-funded discrimination, undermine the accountability of taxpayer dollars, foster litigation against state and local governments and violate the personal rights of Americans seeking help," the letter states.

Citing groups that separate religious activities from social service offerings, the coalition said charitable choice is not necessary for partnerships between religiously affiliated groups and the government.

Signers included Americans United for Separation of Church and State, American Association of School Administrators, American Jewish Committee, Baptist Joint Committee, Catholics for a Free Choice, National Education Association, People For the American Way, The Interfaith Alliance and others. Δ



President George W. Bush greets youngsters at White House education event.



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