

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL



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NewsMakers

◆ The Rev. A. Roy Medley, executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, is the nominee for general secretary of American Baptist Churches USA. The executive committee of the general board of ABC will present the nominee to the entire general board at its Nov. 14-18 meeting. After confirmation, Medley would begin a four-year term beginning Jan. 1. As general secretary, he would join other American Baptist representatives serving on the Baptist Joint Committee board. Medley would succeed Daniel Weiss, who held the ABC post from 1988-2000.

◆ President George W. Bush announced he will nominate John V. Hanford III to be ambassador at large for international religious freedom. Hanford has worked as a congressional fellow in international religious freedom in Sen. Richard Lugar's office since 1987. He will serve as a non-voting member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

◆ New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, in his Oct. 1 address to the General Assembly of the United Nations on the topic of terrorism, said, "Surrounded by our friends of every faith, we know this is not a clash of civilizations. It's a conflict between murderers and humanity." He was quoted by *The New York Times*. Δ

Supreme Court agrees to hear Cleveland voucher dispute

The U.S. Supreme Court said Sept. 25 it will decide whether giving taxpayer money to parents to send their children to religious schools is constitutional.

The case, involving a Cleveland voucher program, is likely to result in a landmark decision regarding the future of educational "choice" programs.

"It's hard to overestimate the potential importance of this case," said K. Hollyn Hollman, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee. "Any endorsement of the Cleveland program by the Supreme Court would reverse longstanding precedent."

The dispute pits individuals and groups with vastly different views of the First Amendment and the proper relationship between church and state.

Cleveland's voucher program, established in 1995, allows up to \$2,250 for public school students to attend private, religious or suburban public schools.

There are 56 private schools currently in the program; 46 of them are religious in nature.

A state judge upheld the program in 1996. A state appeals court reversed that decision and struck the law down in 1997. The Ohio Supreme Court also struck it down on a technicality but declared the program does not violate church-state separation provisions in the state constitution.

After changes by state legislators, the law was up and running again.

In a new lawsuit in federal court, a judge held last December that the program favors religion and thus violates the Constitution. The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that ruling by a 2-1 vote.

The court said allowing the diversion

of government funds to religious institutions would be "in tension" with precedents of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The state of Ohio, backed by several pro-voucher groups, appealed to the nation's high court. Earlier this year, the Bush administration filed a legal brief asking the court to hear the case, arguing that vouchers are constitutional.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State has opposed the Ohio voucher program from the start.

"The court must not allow tax dollars to be diverted from public schools to religious schools, and thus force all taxpayers to finance religion," said Americans United Executive Director Barry Lynn.

But Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said he sees the court's review as "an opportunity to jettison damaging previous court doctrine and to affirm religious freedom."

"In this case, the lower courts have ruled that poor parents — in a school district where the public schools have seriously failed to educate — could not get vouchers from the state to educate their children in alternatives to those dismal public schools," Land said, according to Baptist Press.

BJC Executive Director Brent Walker disagreed, contending the "fundamental principle" that tax dollars should not be used to finance the teaching of religion "cannot be skirted by passing vouchers through the pockets of parents."

"Time and time again voters have said no to voucher proposals," Walker said. "Now it is time for the Supreme Court to declare them to be unconstitutional, too."

The case, *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, will likely be heard early next year. Δ

High court declines to hear religion bias dispute

The U.S. Supreme Court rejected an appeal Oct. 1 from a Muslim woman who claimed her supervisor discriminated against her by pressuring her to stop wearing a head scarf at her airport job.

The decision marked the third court victory for Alamo Rent-A-Car Inc., which had employed Zeinab Ali, The Associated Press reported.

Ali said she was told in 1996 to stop wearing the scarf or face transfer to a different position that had less customer interaction. She replaced the traditional scarf with a smaller hair covering but continued to complain to superiors, her lawyer said. She was later fired during cutbacks at the rental car company.

Ali sued the company claiming it had violated her civil rights. Alamo argued that her firing was legal and not related to religious matters. A judge dismissed the case and an appellate court upheld that dismissal.

The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America issued a statement Monday expressing disappointment in the high court's decision and saying that the court is "insensitive to the pressures that can be faced by Americans of all faiths if forced to choose between their career and their conscience." Δ

BJC directors issue statement on terrorism, elect officers

Terrorist attacks on the United States, presumably the work of religious fanatics, illustrate a worst-case scenario of the perils of intertwining church and state, says a Baptist coalition for religious liberty.

Sept. 11 acts killing thousands in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania were prime examples of what can go wrong when religious zeal is wedded with political and military clout, said Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

BJC directors approved a statement calling for the United States to respond "in ways that respect the religious and civil liberties of all Americans, reject religious and ethnic stereotyping, and avoid the loss of innocent life." (See Page 3)

Walker, an attorney and Baptist minister who has led the Washington-based BJC two years, said there has been a "dramatic rise ... in expressions of civil religion" since events of Sept. 11.

"Much of the civil religion we are seeing is good," Walker said. "I really appreciated the members of Congress singing 'God Bless America.' It brought a really good, warm feeling in my heart."

Other public pronouncements, however, such as President Bush's terming the war against terrorism a "crusade" and pledging to "rid the world of evil," Walker said, are "bad theology."

They describe "goals that are accomplished by the kingdom of God rather than the reign of Caesar," Walker said.

The Bush administration has already responded to some of those concerns, apologizing for using the word "crusade" and renaming the nation's military response from operation "infinite justice" to "enduring freedom."

In other business at a regular board meeting held Oct. 1-2 in Washington, the BJC elected a new slate of officers and

approved a \$1,028,000 budget for next year. Walker blamed a poor economy, reduced giving in member denominations and increased competition for charitable giving as factors in presenting what he described as a "status quo" budget.

Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, was elected to serve as chair of the BJC. He succeeds June McEwen, a retired educator from Chattanooga, Tenn.

Ed Massey, an attorney from Erlanger, Ky., and a member of the Religious Liberty Council was elected first vice chair; and Margaret Ann Cowden, treasurer and chief financial officer of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA, was elected second vice chair. Elected secretary was Richard Bloom, general counsel

and secretary of the Baptist General Conference. Δ



Reginald McDonough



Ed Massey



Margaret Ann Cowden



Richard Bloom

44 national groups urge Bush to delay 'charitable choice'

Forty-four national groups concerned about religious and civil rights have sent a joint letter to President Bush asking him to postpone action on the "charitable choice" aspects of his faith-based initiative.

"While we applaud your recent efforts to unite and rally the nation and spur charitable giving to victims and communities, charitable choice is only a step backward toward divisiveness," the groups wrote in a letter dated Oct. 3.

Bush would like to extend charitable choice legislation, originally passed in 1996, which has expanded opportunities for religious organizations to compete for governmental grants to help them provide social services.

But the groups writing to Bush, including the Baptist Joint Committee, argue that charitable choice can permit religious discrimination in employment and allow proselytization of those needing government assistance. Δ

Rendering to God and Caesar after the events of Sept. 11



J. Brent Welker
Executive Director

The board of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs is a diverse crew. Hailing from 14 Baptist bodies from all over the country, the board members are racially diverse, clergy and laity, male and female, Democrats and Re-

publicans, seventh-day and Lord's day worshippers.

Despite their diversity, they are all Baptist Americans, grieving over the events of Sept. 11 and grappling with their dual renderings to God and Caesar. They worked through the struggle between head and heart, the competing urges to strike back and make peace, and the rub between freedom and security. They produced the following statement. It is excellent advice for all of us to follow. Δ

Statement of Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs on National Response to Events of September 11, 2001 Annual Meeting October 2, 2001

Citizens of this country and the world have recently suffered the most brutal acts of terrorist aggression on American soil. Our heartfelt sympathy and prayers go out to the families and friends of those who died or were injured in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Western Pennsylvania.

Since Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies, we also pray for those who perpetrated or aided in the aggression and those who wish our country ill.

We pray, too, for President Bush, members of Congress and the Cabinet, and all policymakers. And as Baptist Christians who are citizens of the United States, we support their efforts to seek justice and protect American citizens and our national sovereignty. Believing, however, that the complete elimination of evil from the Earth will be brought about only by the ultimate reign of God, we urge our governmental leaders to use language that is consistent with the role of civil government.

As our country responds — diplomatically and militarily — let us be careful not to compound the tragedy by sowing seeds of hate, casting blame where it does not belong, and seeking vengeance instead of justice.

The response should be directed in ways that respect the religious freedom and civil liberties of all Americans, reject religious and ethnic stereotyping, and avoid the loss of innocent life. We applaud the administration for defending in particular the rights of American Muslims and Arab-Americans.

We affirm the right of peaceful dissent as protected by the First Amendment and express faith in the Constitution and our ability to protect liberty while providing adequate security for all Americans.

As we come together experiencing a sense of heightened patriotism and national unity, let us also respect each other and our differences, take the necessary steps to seek justice without forgoing our way of life, and remember that being free is at the core of what it means to be Baptist Christians in the United States.

June McEwen, *Chair, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs*

Louisiana school board violated Constitution with Bible distribution

A Louisiana school board violated the Constitution by allowing a school principal to endorse religion, a federal judge has ruled.

In a Sept. 27 decision, Judge F.A. Little said the Rapides Parish School Board violated the constitutional rights of a Muslim child whose parents filed a lawsuit claiming their child was part of a group called into the office of Principal John Cotton last December and given Bibles.

Little said the school board erred in permitting Cotton "to set aside a special time for a religious exercise that it did not set aside for anything else, thereby creating an impression that the school endorsed a particular religious belief: Christianity."

The district's argument that Hesen Jabr could have refused the Bible was "unrealistic," Little said.

"The pressure created by the principal in his office was coercive and, thus, illegal," Little decided. "This court can imagine no more intimidating or coercive environment in an elementary school than those conditions in the principal's office."

Little barred the school district from "distributing Bibles as the school board distributed Bibles at Paradise Elementary School," but stopped short of issuing a permanent injunction for all Rapides schools. Δ

Baptist Joint Committee

Supporting Bodies

- ◆ Alliance of Baptists
- ◆ American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- ◆ Baptist General Association of Virginia
- ◆ Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Baptist General Convention of Texas
- ◆ Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
- ◆ 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

Dionne: Faith harmed by efforts to identify God with causes

While decrying a "radical Islamic faith" that may have led to terrorism, Americans "flocked to houses of worship" for solace, observed *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne Jr., in a discussion he led during the annual meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee.

In analyzing the religious response to the events, Dionne said that religious faith cannot be supported just because it brings comfort in moments of anguish. "Faith is suspect when God is harnessed to immediate human ends and identified entirely with a personal, political or national cause," he said. "Faith is brought down by a pridefulness that expresses an unwavering conviction that our own desires and interests coincide perfectly with those of the divine."

Dionne, a Roman Catholic, said his hope is that "we will view faith as much a challenge as a comfort."

In dealing with the issue of religious fanaticism, Dionne referred to a column he wrote for the Sept. 18 edition of *The Washington Post*. In it, he poses a question to Monsignor Martin Geraghty, the pastor of St. Francis de Sales Church in Rockaway, Queens. Dionne asked Geraghty if religious commitment could lead to fanatical and irrational acts. His response: "It does happen. It has happened. It's not what faith and religious commitment and an understanding of God in the world is

all about. But the relationship between religion and psychology is too close. We can end up with fanatics."

The enigma, Geraghty says, is that "religion is so close to life that it's always there. It's close to the life of people and groups and the power of nations and nation states. But it isn't the midwife of violence."

Dionne noted that positive effects have been shown in the days and weeks following the Sept. 11 attacks. For example, he

said, the American flag has returned to the symbol of solidarity and community for which it was intended. Dionne said that during the Vietnam War there were differing ideas about what the flag meant and whether groups were using the flag for some political purpose.

He also emphasized the changed tone in Washington, one in which politicians from

across the political spectrum are coming together and passing legislation in near unanimous votes.

In the discussion that followed his prepared remarks, Dionne was asked whether he believed the nation could "bottle up" the solidarity it is experiencing now and use it after attention returns to traditional domestic issues like healthcare and education reform. He responded that the reaction in Washington is partly dependent on the outcome of the country's response to the terrorist acts.

However, he said the best outcome of the period after the attacks would not be an end to partisanship because real differences remain between political parties. Δ



Dionne addresses BJC board.

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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