

# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

## BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS



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1628 16th Street, N.W., Washington 9, D.C. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ C. EMANUEL CARLSON, Ph.D., Executive Director

This monthly newsletter is sent free to editors, executives, and institutions. In order to cover cost of production and mailing a charge of \$1.00 per year is made to all others.

February 1955

### CONGRESSIONAL INTERESTS

In the opening weeks of this first session of the 84th Congress, a number of bills have been introduced on issues that are of vital interest to Baptists.

In our December issue we summarized briefly the major proposals which had been made to that time for new manpower legislation. During the first week Congress was in session, bills were introduced in both Senate and House to set up an expanded reserve program and to provide for a National Security Training Corps. In a message to the Congress on January 13th President Eisenhower outlined his proposals for a four-year extension of the present Selective Service law and the establishment of a new National Reserve Plan. Legislation proposed by the Administration to implement the President's program has been presented in the form of two separate bills, one to extend the Selective Service law, and one to establish a reserve system.

Hearings on the extension of Selective Service began February 1st before the House Armed Services Committee, of which Representative Carl Vinson of Georgia is chairman. Hearings on the reserve plan will be held soon. The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee is Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia; hearings before this committee have not been scheduled as yet.

Bills have been presented in both House and Senate to provide federal aid for construction of public elementary and secondary schools. Hearings are already under way before the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee.

Time is an important element in this problem which becomes increasingly acute each year. According to the best estimates made by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the nation now has 941,000 classrooms, of which 225,000 are inadequate or obsolete because of fire hazards, sanitation, and other factors. By the school year of 1959-60, in order to take care of pupil population already born, we need to build 577,000 new classrooms. In other words, this means that by 1959-60 we need a total of approximately 1,300,000 classrooms to provide for children that have been born, putting 30 children in each room. In financial terms, it is estimated conservatively that school construction needs

amount to four billion dollars a year for the next five years, and somewhat less thereafter.

We can expect pressure from the advocates of parochial education either to block the proposals for federal aid or to remove the limiting phrase "public schools." As Baptists, we have been strong supporters of the public school system. This is a strategic time to express our convictions and the most effective way of doing so is by individually written letters or telegrams to influential members of the Congress. Senator Lister Hill of Alabama is chairman of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee of the Senate; Representative Graham A. Barden of North Carolina is chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee.

#### THE BINGO CAMPAIGN

With the coming of the new year and new legislative sessions in many states, attempts are being renewed to legalize bingo for religious and charitable purposes. The following paragraphs do not portray the complete picture, but represent just a sampling of the movements under way.

In Ohio two legislative efforts to legalize charity bingo failed in the last General Assembly two years ago. A resolution introduced in the House in the current session proposes a constitutional amendment to legalize bingo for religious, charitable and fraternal groups, stipulating that "no part of the gross proceeds of bingo games inure to the benefit of any person or any organization other than the charity, fraternity, or religious groups ostensibly to be benefited by the conduct thereof." Before the present law banning lotteries can be changed, the resolution must be passed by three-fifths majorities in both House and Senate, and then be voted upon by the people of the state in November.

In the state of New York, former Governor Dewey opposed the legalization of bingo and in 1943 vetoed a bill which would have legalized it on a local option basis. Early in 1954, eighteen bills designed to legalize bingo games for non-profit groups were killed in committee in the state legislature. However, both Democratic and Republican candidates for the governorship in 1954 included in their platforms planks favoring a referendum on the issue. In his January 5th message to the joint session of the legislature, Governor Averell Harriman recommended that the state constitution be amended to legalize bingo games conducted by religious, charitable and other worthy groups. As legalization by constitutional amendment is a three-year process, he also recommended that meanwhile legislation should be enacted to remove criminal penalties so these groups could begin conducting the games as soon as possible.

In this connection, it is interesting to note the estimate that \$25,000,000 is taken in annually from bingo games in New York state, about \$18,000,000 of this in the city of New York. Yet, New York state law at the present time prohibits bingo.

A bill has been introduced in the Indiana General Assembly that would legalize bingo, providing the prizes were not paid in cash. Also before the General Assembly is another bill introduced by Thomas C. Hasbrook, a Presbyterian lay leader, that would strengthen the present anti-gambling law. A similar bill introduced by Mr. Hasbrook was passed by

February 1955

the 1953 Assembly, but with a Senate amendment exempting churches and fraternal organizations from the provisions. This measure was later declared unconstitutional by the Indiana Supreme Court on the grounds that exemption of churches and lodges made it "class legislation in the highest degree."

During the 1954 session of the Michigan legislature, a resolution to permit voters to decide on a proposed constitutional amendment legalizing charity bingo was sidetracked in the Senate. The chief backer of the measure, the Michigan Association of Non-Profit Organizations, was successful in a drive to secure the 286,000 signatures of voters required to put the issue on the ballot for the November elections. In the weeks preceding the election, Protestant ministers throughout Michigan worked valiantly to arouse interest among their constituencies. Political observers gave credit for defeat of the proposal to the strong campaign conducted by the Detroit and the Michigan Councils of Churches. However, the measure was defeated by a narrow margin, and there are indications that the backers of it may try to push it through in the 1956 elections.

In each of the states where attempts are being made to legalize bingo by means of legislation or constitutional amendment, Protestant leaders are waging a battle against such measures. The New York State Council of Churches has set as a prime objective for 1955 the marshalling of Protestant churches into a "vigorous, coherent force to stop the legalization of gambling in any sheep's clothing guise." The general secretary of the council, Kenneth A. Roedarmel, is quoted in The Christian Century as saying:

"We must reject as undemocratic and immoral the implication that a form of gambling which would continue to be prohibited to the general public as wrong and antisocial is right and proper when conducted by our churches and by moral leaders in our society. Legalized bingo is but another step in the breakdown of legal rules which are based on the understanding of right from wrong. There is no difference between a bet on a bingo card and a bet on a roulette wheel. The same professionals run both, the pay-off to the house is the same, the price for exclusive territories to political or law-enforcement agencies is the same, and the disastrous effects on the gambler who cannot afford to lose are identical."

Jewish leaders have also expressed opposition to the proposed measures. Members of the Association of Reformed Rabbis of New York and Vicinity recently adopted a resolution disapproving legalization of bingo and other games of chance "in religious institutions."

Vice-Chancellor Donellen of the archdiocese of New York was asked by The Christian Century to comment on the Catholic viewpoint toward the proposed legislation. He stated that the Roman Catholic Church has "nothing to say" about it, for, "It isn't a moral issue for us since we don't believe gambling in itself is a moral evil."

Legalization of bingo games held for humanitarian purposes was favored in an article entitled "Bingo, Morality and the Criminal Law," which appeared recently in The Catholic Lawyer, a magazine published by the St. Thomas More Institute for Legal Research of St. John's University

School of Law. The article was written by Prof. Frederick Ludwig of the law school and the Rev. Dominic Hughes, O.P., of the university's graduate school. Concerning this article, Religious News Service said, in part:

"Generally, they said, churches, religious organizations, educational institutions, official volunteer fire, first aid and rescue squads, and charitable, fraternal, service and civic organizations ought to be allowed to operate controlled bingo, lotto and similar games.

"But dice, roulette or slot machines and like apparatus should be excluded from any authorizing legislation, they added."

"Any evil in gambling, they said, must lie solely in the risking of money on the outcome of the game." But they added that they could not see that the wager itself was evil."

"Arguing that legalization would aid private humanitarian enterprise, they said such enterprise was 'often totally dependent on an individual generosity that has been shrinking not because of niggardly parsimony so much as frugality forced by rising living costs and income taxes.'

"Summing up their case, the writers contended that through the flexible regulation of bingo, rather than its complete prohibition, 'the interests of morality, public order, public revenue and social works are all served.'"

Presenting another side of this picture, when the state police superintendent of Louisiana took the position in 1953 that charity bingo and other gaming devices were prohibited by the anti-gambling laws of the state, Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel ordered bingo and other games of chance "absolutely discontinued" in Roman Catholic churches of the archdiocese of New Orleans. Religious News Service quoted the Archbishop as saying in his pastoral letter on the subject that Catholics should be "trained to recognize Church support as a direct responsibility and not as a by-product from a certain amount of pleasure and social relaxation."

The position of many Protestants on the question of legalization of bingo for churches and charitable purposes was summarized well in a statement made by Protestant Episcopal Bishop Horace W. B. Donegan of New York. Quoting once more from Religious News Service:

"The Church," he said, "has no business seeking a special privilege to promote gambling, and the state has no business, under our doctrine of separation of Church and State, offering to the Church a special exemption from moral restrictions imposed on the citizens generally."

"The bishop declared that 'regardless of what the conscience of some other Churches may dictate in this matter, the long-standing policy in this diocese of the Episcopal Church will remain unchanged.'

"We will not sanction the use of bingo or any other gambling devices by our parishes," he said. "We will continue to raise our support in one way only, through the practice of Christian stewardship, through gifts and offerings and through the work, sacrifice and generosity of our people."

"Only so can the Church maintain its moral leadership."