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Bringing you IMPORTANT news from our nation's capitol

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901 Commerce st. #550, Nashville, TN 37203 (615) 244-2495 FAX (615) 242-0065

www.faithandfamily.com

505 Second St. NE, Washington, DC 20002 (202) 547-8105 FAX (202) 547-8165

A For Faith & Family Ministry Partner

Richard D. Land, President Tom Strode, Editor Jerry Price, Assistant Editor

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Jesus said to us, "You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world." Salt is a preservative. Salt is a purifying agent, but salt must come into contact with that which it would preserve, and salt must touch that which it would purify.

And it not only purifies and preserves, it stings and irritates. That's why when Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," and "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14), He preceded it by saying, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11).

We live, by the grace of God, in the greatest nation that has ever been seen on planet Earth. God has blessed us wonderfully; yet he has often blessed us in spite of ourselves. Our salvation will never be in America, but in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Government can't save us. Government is usually part of the problem, not part of the solution. King Josiah is the perfect example that the government cannot bring revival. King Josiah heard the Word of God. It broke his heart. He called for reforms. He instituted right and Holy worship in the temple. He got rid of pagan excesses. He instituted true religion, and what happened? All of Josiah's reforms died with him because only the king's heart was changed. The people's habits were changed, but not their hearts. When the king died, the reform died.

We have a right, we have a responsibility, we have an obligation to be involved in the civic process. We

are to hold up a moral standard as salt. Jesus commanded us to be salt and light.

Dr. Richard Land
President, SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

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Senate confirms Brown, Pryor, two others

The U.S. Senate overcame filibusters and confirmed both Janice Rogers Brown and William Pryor as judges on federal appeals courts in votes June 8 and 9, respectively.

Senators voted 56-43 for Brown's nomination to the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals and 53-45 for Pryor's nomination to the 11th Circuit Court. Along with Fifth Circuit nominee Priscilla Owen, Brown and Pryor were hotly contested selections by President Bush who received votes as part of a compromise agreed to in late May by 14 senators.

Seven Democrats committed not to filibuster the three nominees but made no commitment on other judicial appointees, reserving the right to filibuster in "extraordinary circumstances," which were not defined. The seven Republicans in the agreement committed not to support an attempt to change the rule requiring 60 votes to end a judicial filibuster.

The Senate confirmed Owen by a 56-43 vote May 25.

"Despite more than four years of heated rhetoric and mischaracterizations of their records, up-or-down votes on Justices Owen and Brown did not result in the sky falling, or the end of the minority party's free-speech rights," Sen. John Cornyn, R.-Texas, said in a written statement after Brown's confirmation. "The same will be true when we vote on the President's other well-qualified nominees to the federal bench—and we will."

"William Pryor believes in interpretation of the law—not rewriting the law according to his own political views," Majority Leader Bill Frist, R.-Tenn., said during debate, according to Baptist Press.

Senators also approved June 9 two nominees to the Sixth Circuit whose confirmations had been blocked. They voted 96-0 for David McKeague and 95-0 for Richard Griffin.

The Democrats involved in the compromise made no commitments to oppose the filibusters of two other appellate nominees, William Myers to the Ninth Circuit and Henry Saad to the Sixth Circuit. Other appeals court nominees whose fate remains uncertain are Terrence Boyle and William Haynes, both recommended for the Fourth Circuit, and Brett Kavanaugh, a choice for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Organizations that favor abortion and homosexual rights have been among the leaders in opposing the filibustered nominees.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has urged GOP senators to act to end the filibusters of appellate nominees before there is a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Many observers expect Chief Justice William Rehnquist to retire this summer. Rehnquist has been battling thyroid cancer since last fall.

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Specter expects Senate to override veto on stem cells

The stem cell battle continues in Congress, with Sen. Arlen Specter, R.-Pa., warning President Bush he expects to have enough votes to override a veto of a bill that would provide federal funds for destructive embryonic research.

The House of Representatives approved its version of the legislation May 24 in a vote far short of a veto-proof majority. When the President reaffirmed the next day his intention to veto such legislation, Specter said, according to *The New York Times*, "I don't like veto threats, and I don't like statements about overriding veto threats. I think if it really comes down to a showdown, we will have enough in the United States Senate to override a veto."

Meanwhile, another Republican, Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, said he might try to filibuster such a bill if it reaches the floor. "I have conveyed to Senate leadership that we must do everything we can procedurally to stop unethical embryonic stem cell research in the Senate, and I will work to do just that," he said. "We simply should not go down the road of using taxpayer dollars to kill young humans."

Specter has 38 cosponsors for his bill, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, S. 471.

The House voted 238-194 for its version of such legislation. The House majority is about 50 votes short of the two-thirds vote that would be needed for an override.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and other pro-life groups oppose the legislation.

The measure in each house would underwrite research that uses embryos left over at in vitro fertilization clinics. It would alter Bush's policy prohibiting federal funds for stem cell research that results in the destruction of human embryos. The President's rule, announced in August 2001, allows funding for research only on embryonic stem cell lines already in existence prior to his announcement of the policy.

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High court rules unanimously for religious liberty

The U.S. Supreme Court has delivered an important victory for religious liberty.

The justices unanimously upheld May 31 a federal law that protects the religious free-exercise right of prisoners. They sustained the inmate portion of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), overturning a Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals opinion in the process.

The Sixth Circuit, based in Cincinnati, Ohio, was the only one of five appeals courts that had ruled against RLUIPA, contending the law's accommodation of prisoners' free-exercise rights violated the First Amendment's ban on government establishment of religion.

The decision provided support for a law enacted in 2000 that bars government policies that substantially burden free exercise of religion by inmates and, in land-use cases, by a person or institution. The government, however, can gain an exemption from the law if it can show it has a "compelling interest" and is using the "least restrictive means" to further that interest.

Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said RLUIPA is consistent with the establishment clause "because it alleviates exceptional government-created burdens on private religious exercise. Were the court of appeals' view the correct reading of our decisions, all manner of religious accommodations would fall."

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission President Richard Land said the "unanimous nature of the [*Cutter v. Wilkinson*] decision helps to underscore what a tremendous win this is for the free-exercise, religious rights of all Americans. Every American who loves religious freedom should rejoice over this decision."

The ERLC signed onto a friend-of-the-court brief filed by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty on behalf of a diverse coalition of nearly 60 organizations in support of RLUIPA.

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Feds may enforce ban on marijuana, justices rule

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled June 6 a federal drug-control law supersedes a state measure permitting the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

The justices voted 6-3 to reverse a lower court decision blocking enforcement of a federal statute that prohibits marijuana use. The high court agreed with the Bush administration it should be able to prosecute California patients who have used medicinal marijuana they have grown or been given under a state law permitting such utilization of the federally banned substance.

Congress had a "rational basis for believing that failure to regulate the intrastate manufacture and possession of marijuana would leave a gaping hole" in the federal law regulating marijuana and other illegal drugs, Associate Justice John Paul Stevens wrote for the court.

Opponents of the liberalization of the country's anti-drug laws hailed the opinion.

"Everyone who is concerned about the epidemic of drug abuse afflicting our culture, with the horrendous toll in human life and suffering left in its wake, should be relieved that the Supreme Court understands that the regulation of illicit drugs in the end must be a federal issue," said Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "There must be a 50-state-wide standard, not a patchwork quilt of various exceptions in differing states. Marijuana is extremely addictive and is virtually 100 percent a gateway drug to even more harmful illicit and illegal drugs."

The decision impacts not only California but nine other states that have approved the medical use of marijuana. They are Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington.

The laws that clashed in the case were a 1970 federal statute, the Controlled Substances Act, which bars the use of marijuana and other illegal drugs, and the Compassionate Use Act, a measure approved by California voters in a 1996 referendum that permits medical marijuana use with the recommendation of a doctor.

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Progress made in anti-trafficking effort, State reports

The campaign to combat sex trafficking and other forms of forced servitude globally is advancing, according to the U.S. State Department.

The State Department's fifth annual Trafficking in Persons report, which was released June 3, provides an analysis of the efforts by 150 countries to deal with an issue that involves prostitution and child sex tourism, as well as forced labor and coercive military service. The problem is widespread—an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders yearly, and that does not include millions who are traded within their own country.

"Shining through this global tragedy are many rays of hope," said Ambassador John Miller, senior advisor on trafficking in persons. "[G]overnments around the globe are awakening to this issue and taking action to end this form of modern-day slavery."

New anti-trafficking measures were enacted in 39 countries last year, and there were more than 3,000 convictions worldwide related to trafficking, according to the report, which covers from April 2004 to March 2005.

The report includes a classification by "tiers" of countries' compliance with the 2000 federal, anti-trafficking law. There are 14 countries on Tier

3, which is reserved for governments that do not comply with the minimum standards of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act and are not making notable efforts to do so. They are Bolivia, Burma, Cambodia, Cuba, Ecuador, Jamaica, Kuwait, North Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Togo, the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.

Barrett Duke, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's vice president for public policy and research, called the report "an extremely useful tool."

"If anyone wants to know just how much a country cares about modern-day slavery, he just needs to look at the tier rankings in the report," said Duke, who encouraged individuals and businesses to consider the rankings when making purchasing and commerce decisions. "I pray that we Southern Baptists will find ways to work with the [State Department's] trafficking office to help end the disgrace of human trafficking in our own country and around the world."

The trafficking report may be accessed on the State Department's website at www.state.gov/g/tip.

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Ban on abortions in military hospitals stands

The House of Representatives has turned back an effort to remove the ban on most abortions in overseas U.S. military hospitals.

The House voted 233-194 against an amendment that would have permitted abortions for all reasons in medical facilities operated by the armed services in foreign countries. There are exceptions to the ban that permit abortions in cases in which the mother's life is threatened and in which pregnancy results from rape or incest.

Thirty Democrats joined with 203 Republicans to defeat the amendment May 25. The representatives who voted for the measure consisted of 171 Democrats, 22 Republicans and an independent.

The vote kept intact a policy that has been in effect most of the time since 1988, when it was first instituted under President Reagan. President Clinton rescinded the rule quickly after he took office in 1993, but Congress restored it in 1996.

Rep. Susan Davis, D.-Calif, attempted to change the policy with an amendment to a Department of Defense authorization bill for next year.

The House gave final approval to the Defense authorization act in a 390-39 vote.

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Senate vote on Bolton delayed

John Bolton, the President's nominee as United Nations ambassador, continues to await a confirmation vote.

That vote may take place early the week of June 13-17, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist said June 9, according to *The Washington Post*. Senate Democrats, who blocked a confirmation vote May 26, plan to continue the effort by means of a filibuster, *The Post* reported.

Three Democrats joined 53 Republicans in voting to end debate and bring Bolton's nomination up for a vote in May, but they fell short of the minimum of 60 required to shut down a filibuster.

Democrats said they used the delaying strategy in order to gain information on Bolton the White House has refused to release, *The Post* reported.

Bolton's nomination has drawn opposition from most Senate Democrats, but conservatives welcomed the move, agreeing with the nominee's strong stance for the spread of democracy and for U.N. reform.

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