



REPORT

from the Capital

BJC directors kick off campaign for Center for Religious Liberty

Emphasizing the need for a prominent “Center for Religious Liberty” on Capitol Hill, directors of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty kicked off a \$5 million capital campaign during their annual meeting Oct. 3-4.

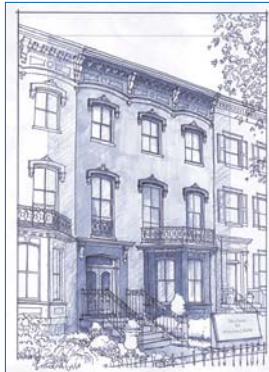
Gathering in Washington, directors formally launched the campaign with an Oct. 3 banquet.

The yearlong campaign is themed “Our Challenge—Their Future: Securing Religious Liberty for Our Children and Grandchildren.” It is designed to mark the organization’s 70th anniversary in 2006.

The project has a goal of raising as much as \$5 million to purchase and renovate a property near the Capitol to serve as the BJC’s offices. The center will also contain research space for visiting scholars, meeting space for the group’s legislative coalition partners and a training center for equipping supporters to relay the BJC’s message of defending religious liberty and church-state separation.

“If we really are serious about the idea of moving to a new level of education and communication, we need to have a spot where we can say, ‘This is the Baptist Center for Religious Liberty,’” said Reginald McDonough, chair of the campaign committee.

For decades, the organization has used a rented office suite on Capitol Hill in the Veterans of Foreign Wars building. Although conveniently located a block from the Capitol and across the street from both the Supreme Court and Senate office buildings, McDonough said the space is expensive and does not provide the BJC with “a front door” or “a face on Main Street.”



BJC officials determined that they could purchase a historic townhouse in the same neighborhood and transform it into the envisioned 5,000-6,000-square-foot center for approximately \$4 million. The \$5 million goal is a “challenge goal,” McDonough said.

Several of the BJC’s peer organizations—such as the American Center for Law and Justice, the Friends Committee on National Legislation and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State—occupy spaces on Capitol Hill similar to the one proposed by the campaign.

Brent Walker, BJC’s executive director, emphasized that the campaign is designed to gather gifts above and beyond the organization’s regular budget.

Board members heard a financial report that showed the organization operating with a much larger reserve fund than four years ago, when the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks caused significant dips in contributions to many nonprofit organizations.

BJC directors adopted a budget of \$1,126,000 for fiscal year 2006—a slight increase over the 2005 budget of \$1,096,100.

The board also welcomed seven new members at the meeting: Curtis Ramsey-Lucas and Steve Case, representing the American Baptist Churches, USA; Kay Shurden and Pam Durso, representing the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; and Bob Beckerle, Bob Stephenson and John Heflin, representing the Religious Liberty Council.

The meeting marked the end of Jeffrey Haggray’s two-year tenure as the board’s chairman. Haggray is executive director/minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and a member of Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in Washington.

The directors elected a slate of four officers. Chair Mark Wiggs is an attorney in Jackson, Miss., where he is a member of Northminster Baptist Church. Vice Chair Dwight Jessup is a retired professor at Taylor University in Upland, Ind. Secretary Glen Howie is an attorney and pastor of Mowata Baptist Church in Eunice, La. Treasurer Valoria Cheek is president of the American Baptist Extension Corporation in Valley Forge, Pa.

—Robert Marus, ABP, and staff reports

Newsletter of the Baptist Joint Committee

Vol. 60 No. 9

October 2005

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House allows religious discrimination in reauthorizing Head Start program

The House of Representatives has voted to allow religious social-service providers using federal money to discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion.

The Sept. 22 move was the latest in a series of House floor fights over expanding government grants to religious social service providers.

House members voted 220-196 to amend the Head Start early childhood education program bill to explicitly allow employment discrimination by religious providers.

"This is a blatant attack on civil rights, and this sanctions discrimination ... discrimination paid for by U.S. tax dollars," said Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn.

But Rep. Mark Green, R-Wis., said religious providers wanting to participate in Head Start "should not have to surrender their religious character merely because they choose to try to help out. ... The government should not say to them, 'If you want to help out, I'm sorry, you're going to have to deny much of your religious character.'"

The program—initially established in 1965 as a way to provide additional educational opportunities to poor children—has always been open to faith-based providers.

Since 1972, federal law has barred Head Start providers from discriminating in their hiring practices on the basis of religion. Supporters of President Bush's "faith-based initiative" to expand government support for religious charities have asserted such language in the Head Start authorizing documents discriminates against churches and other potential providers who hire people only of their own faith.

The House Education Committee approved the reauthorization bill, known as the "School Readiness Act of 2005," on a bipartisan vote of 48-0 in May. It included no alteration of the 1972 employment-discrimination ban.

But two Republican congressmen—Rep. John Boehner of Ohio and Rep. Charles Boustany of La.—responded to pressure from the White House by offering the amendment on the House floor.

The philosophy behind the amendment is a central part of President Bush's push to expand the government's ability to provide social services through religious and other providers. As supporters of the initiative see it, religious groups should not be excluded from federal funding just because they choose to hire their own co-religionists, even if it is to provide secular services.

"The issue here is a simple one. In the 1964 Civil Rights Act, religious groups were granted exemptions ... so they can hire people only of their own faith," said Boehner.

Opponents said the amendment stirred needless controversy—and its aim is simply unfair. "It destroys the bipartisan goodwill of the negotiated bill that was voted unanimously out of committee, and it does it by adding the most contentious part of the faith-based initiative," said Holly Hollman, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. "No one should be denied a federally funded job because of their religion."

The final bill passed on a 231-184 vote. It is H.R. 2123. It now goes to the Senate, where its employment-discrimination provision is likely to face stiff opposition.

—ABP



'Smoking gun' unveiled in intelligent design trial

Authors of a textbook critical of evolution replaced the word "creationism" with "intelligent design" in 1987, soon after the U.S. Supreme Court barred the teaching of creation science in public schools, a researcher of the history of intelligent design testified in federal court Oct. 5.

After the ruling, authors deleted more than 250 references to "creationism" and the "creator" from draft versions of the book, "Of Pandas and People," and replaced them with "intelligent design" and "intelligent designer," said Barbara Forrest, philosophy professor at Southeastern Louisiana University and author of the book "Creationism's Trojan Horse—The Wedge of Intelligent Design."

"The substitution was made throughout" the book, Forrest said.

Gesturing to a chart on a courtroom screen, she said a computer word search showed how creationism and similar words were eliminated from the "Pandas" text after the Supreme Court ruling.

"You just saw the smoking gun," Nick Matzke, spokesman for the National Center of Science Education, said in an interview after hearing Forrest's testimony. "This proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that intelligent design is creationism."

The book is mentioned as a reference in a four-paragraph state-

ment read to ninth-grade science students in the Dover (Pa.) Area School District. The statement and the reasons why the school board approved it last fall are central to the legal dispute in U.S. Middle District Court in Harrisburg.

Lawyers for the Thomas More Law Center, a nonprofit Christian law firm representing the district, repeatedly objected to Forrest's credentials, saying she has no background in science.

Judge John E. Jones III allowed her to testify as an expert witness and said the defense could object to any questions it deemed to be outside her realm of expertise.

Proponents of intelligent design believe the universe and humans are too complex to be explained through evolution and therefore must be the work of an unspecified intelligent designer.

Opponents say the statement, which refers students to "Pandas" and intelligent design as an alternative to evolution, injects religion into the high school science curriculum. Supporters of intelligent design say the statement represents a minor curriculum change that does not result in less instruction on evolution.

—RNS

REFLECTIONS



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

A window of opportunity for charitable contributions

Fall is my favorite season of the year. The 90 days following the autumnal equinox bring us many delights that other seasons do not. After a long hot summer, what is more refreshing than that first morning with a nip in the air and, a little later, frost on the pumpkin? The best and most exciting baseball is often played in October. The blazing colors in the trees, at least in the mid-Atlantic regions around Washington, D.C., are candy for the eyes. You don't have to be a school child or a teacher to sense the fresh start that a new school year offers. And, perhaps more important this year than in other years, fall brings the end of hurricane season.

Yes, for a lot of reasons autumn is a wonderful time of year. For nonprofit organizations such as the Baptist Joint Committee, it is the time for a big fundraising push to make sure we finish the year in the black with revenues at least equaling budget and expenses coming in somewhere behind. The challenges this year will be hefty for many charities. Experts tell us that a large portion of Americans' disposable charitable contributions has already been given to help remedy the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and properly so. The needs are enormous, almost unfathomable, and all of us should do our part to help with the recovery effort.

Ironically—although some might say fittingly—legislation passed by Congress to address the devastation in the Gulf Coast region contains provisions that will aid *all* Section 501(c)(3) charities, such as churches and other religious organizations like the Baptist Joint Committee, along with secular nonprofits.

In September, Congress passed the Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act of 2005 (KETRA). This law provides incentives for charitable giving of large gifts through the end of the year to qualified public charities, even ones not directly supporting hurricane relief.

For those who itemize their deductions, KETRA takes away the 50 percent cap of adjusted gross income (AGI) for charitable deductions. Taxpayers in high income brackets are also exempted from the usual 3 percent reduction in allowable deductions for charitable contributions. In order to qualify, the gifts must be in the form of cash or its equivalent and be made before December 31, 2005. Finally, and of special interest to many of our supporters who are of retirement age, because the AGI cap is lifted and the 3 percent reduction removed, individuals with untaxed wealth in retirement plans, such as 401(k)s

or IRAs, can withdraw from those accounts and make large gifts without untoward tax consequences that could result without these changes under KETRA. In short, there is a dollar for dollar charitable deduction to the full extent of the charitable contribution.

What a window of opportunity this is. These gifts can be made and deductions taken under KETRA only through the end of 2005. While many of us are urging Congress to pass legislation that will liberalize the deductibility rules permanently, we have so far been unsuccessful. Now is the time.

One Baptist Joint Committee supporter has already taken advantage of KETRA.

Richard Ice—a longtime board member representing the American Baptist Churches, USA, and serving as chair of the BJC Endowment Committee—is graciously donating \$100,000 to BJC endowment and capital efforts. Dick has been eager to do this for several years but was reluctant

to bear the tax burden at the hand of Uncle Sam if he were to withdraw this amount from his retirement plan and give it away. Now, however, his gift to the Baptist Joint Committee is fully deductible. The BJC endowment will increase by about 10 percent as a result of this generosity made possible by Dick's commitment and the KETRA provisions. (A quick caveat: It's always advisable, particularly in major gifts and under a new law, to consult with your accountant, tax advisor or other financial professional to ensure the gift is made in a way that maximizes the benefit to you. While most states with income taxes follow the federal provisions, you should check to make sure your state allows this special provision in order to avoid a surprise at that level.)

I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to give to the BJC endowment, our 70th Anniversary Capital Campaign, and our annual budget needs. In fact, regular subscribers to this publication will be receiving a fundraising letter shortly. Of course, you can always donate online on our Web site, www.BJConline.org.

Yes, for me, fall is a wonderful time of year—a chance for a fresh start and an opportunity for exciting possibilities. I hope you will take advantage of this unexpected relief from a substantial tax burden and make a generous gift to help ensure religious liberty for your children and grandchildren.



Richard Ice

In September, Congress passed the Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act of 2005. This law provides incentives for charitable giving of large gifts through the end of the year to qualified public charities, even ones not directly supporting hurricane relief.

Psalm 146:3

“Put Not Your Trust In Princes”

By The Rev. Dr. Wallace Charles Smith

Remarks given at the Capital Campaign Launch Dinner

October 3, 2005

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Prophetic Imagination*, says that the Psalms were originally the liberation songs of Israel. They were the freedom hymns that celebrated how the God of their emancipation brought them from hard bondage in a cruel Egypt into the milk and honey of freedom land. In these songs, they expressed their gratefulness and gratitude to the God who had passed over their first born on the night that the eldest of Egypt perished. They praised God for the pillar of cloud that led them through the wilderness by day and the pillar of fire that lit their paths in the lightless midnights. They exhaled, glorified and magnified the Sovereign Lord who breathed an east wind that could draw the Red Sea back like a curtain at theater time. God was the reason they praised.

But Dr. Brueggemann goes on to say that during the monarchy, the kings became jealous of these freedom songs and chose to mandate some of the singers to develop tunes that minimized the power of God and maximized the power and might of the monarchy. These songs were for the purpose of establishing the kings as the true saviors of Israel and not God. That devotions of the citizens should be expressed through politics, not praise, and that gratitude ought to be to the one who sits in the palace and looks out, not to the one who from glory sits high and looks low. When this happened, the kings were attempting to take away Israel's reason for praise. Dr. Brueggemann says the issue for Israel was doxology, with or without reason.

The cry for religious liberty came out of the time when the kings of the middle ages wanted to ensure that the state was honored as its citizens' true savior. Church leaders were out of step with the sentiments of the 100th Psalm, "Know ye that the Lord is God. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture." Warrior popes conquered and devastated the lands with the same fury and violence as any secular king. And, where the church was the strongest was where the heads of state governed church affairs with an iron, unyielding fist. Crusaders could pillage and plunder in the name of Christ. Families might be decimated, and women and children brutalized by those carrying the swords in one hand and Bibles in the other.

The colonial era of the middle and late Renaissance periods saw the complete theft of African, Asian and American lands from indigenous people with conquistadores replacing Crusaders. What did not change over the centuries was the way colonizers, like crusaders, con-

tinued to blur the lines between church and state. As one African said, "When the Europeans came, they had the Bible; we had the land. By the time they left, we had the Bibles, and they had the lands."

Yet, throughout all this painful and tortured history, there were always remnants of people who believed, as Dr. Walter Shurden described it, in one of religion's five fragile liberties, separation of church and state. Almost from the time of Constantine and the co-optation of religion by the state, there were breakaway groups that believed God never intended the church to be controlled and restricted by the government. Early Baptists, led by Smyth and Helwys, left England and established worship houses on the continent so they could be free from the domination of the state. Baptists were scorned and jailed; many died for the belief that they had the right to live and die worshipping God without intervention of any earthly king or sovereign.

The courageous beliefs of these breakaway Baptists played a key role in the establishment of many of the fundamental principles of the United States Constitution. The fortitude and unyielding resolve of people like Roger Williams saw to it that the basic document of our governing principles, the Constitution, would have built into it an Establishment Clause that forbids the creation of a government-sponsored religion, as was the



The Rev. Dr. Wallace Charles Smith

case in many European countries.

But from the time that wall of separation between church and state was instituted, groups from the right and left have tried to chip away at it. The first challenge came in 1947 with *Everson v. Board of Education* where, in a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that parents could be reimbursed for the expenses they incurred in busing their children to parochial schools. In that case Justice Black wrote that the wall of separation between church and state was not so inviolable as to overrule the states' interests in getting children to and from schools safely. That ruling made clear, as did subsequent decisions, that the wall of separation was not as much a solid demarcation as it was a porous and shifting barrier.

The porous and shifting nature of that barrier has been more and more exploited by the disregard it receives from the conservative right and the sacrosanct nature it experiences from the liberal left. However, the greatest danger of recent years is its manipulation by the forces of the right. Faith-based initiatives, Christian prayer in

schools and invocations at football games are all subtle ways that the message goes out: this is a Christian nation. When it comes to pre-game prayers, Moslems, Jews, Sikhs or Hindus need not apply. Worse yet is the way the conservative administrations paint themselves as the saviors of the faith. Ron and Nancy can consult their psychic friends all week and maintain their status as champions of the faith as long as they are perceived as on the side of those poking holes in the Establishment Clause. Even more egregious, the permission the president gets to spend \$150 billion on the military and \$15 billion for aid and development to poor countries; and, did we pray before we decided to destroy somebody? The American people have shown a willingness to allow presidents to build democracies where people don't want them, steal resources from those who can't afford it and bomb places inhabited by those who can't defend against it, as long as we pray before we push the bomb release button.

The Establishment Clause was placed in the Constitution so private piety would never be the source of public policy. The clause is not anti-God; it is a foil for the irreligious that learned long ago that it is much easier to sell snake oil if you can convince your customers that what you are pedaling is snake oil with God's imprimatur.

The greatest religious danger facing the world is the traveling charlatan politician who sees a frightened, nervous America, in the wake of the World Trade Center and Pentagon bombings, that is only too willing to give up freedom out of fear. Politicians, like the monarchs of Israel, want to subtly wrest doxology away from God and give the reason to praise over to secular governments who have ordained and sacralized themselves. We are here tonight because a Center For Religious Liberty in the heart of the nation's capital is the place from which modern day reformers, like those who sang around the campfires of Israel, can sing to a world too taken by snake oil. Don't put your trust in princes or in men in whom there is no help. They go to the earth and the same day their breath is no more. But happy are those who have the God of Jacob for their help, whose hope is in the Lord their God. It is not kings, but God who made the heavens and the earth. Not kings, but God who executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry and looses the prisoners; not kings, but God who opens the eyes of the blind, raises those who are bowed down, and loves the righteous; not kings, but God who preserves strangers, relieves the fatherless and widows and turns the way of the wicked upside down. It is the Lord who shall reign forever and ever, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord.

The Rev. Dr. Wallace Charles Smith is president of Palmer Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa., and senior minister, Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.

Board of Directors Meeting

October 3-4, 2005
Washington, D.C.



Outgoing BJC Board Chairman Jeffrey Haggray of the Progressive National Baptist Convention addresses the board of directors.



New board member Curtis Ramsey-Lucas of American Baptist Churches, USA, asks a question about diversity.



New officers include Chair Mark Wiggs (left), Religious Liberty Council; Vice Chair Dwight Jessup (right), Baptist General Conference; Secretary Glen Howie, North American Baptist Conference; and Treasurer Valoria Cheek, American Baptist Churches, USA.



Government funding of houses of worship in the wake of tragedy

K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

In the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, houses of worship face enormous challenges responding to the needs of the suffering. These challenges will not be easily or rapidly met. While each of the BJC's supporting member bodies, churches and individuals continues to find meaningful and effective ways to help, we must also continue to stand for our principles.

Some have suggested that the government has the

answer to the challenges facing churches: providing taxpayer money to houses of worship. In response, we prepared guidance to warn houses of worship to beware of the consequences of accepting government funds, particularly at this time of tremendous vulnerability.

The hurricanes revealed what many would expect in the face of tragedy—a generous voluntary outpouring to care for those displaced by the storm. The enormity of the problem led some houses of worship to be transformed into emergency shelters at great expense, depleting financial resources

and adding debt.

Whatever the government's plan to assist those in need and to make up for prior failings, it should not use tragedy to transform church-state relationships that have served both the church and the state well, during good times and bad.

Private Contributions Should Fund Houses of Worship. Private sources of money, such as individuals, churches, denominational bodies, nonprofit organizations and non-governmental relief funds, do not carry the risks of government entanglement. Churches should seek funds from private relief efforts such as the Bush-Clinton Katrina fund, as President Bush noted in his speech from New Orleans.

Houses of worship responded to needs because they are built on God, not government. Those who work in and support your church do so voluntarily, not because they are forced to participate through taxation. Do not let government change your ministry in a way that will diminish its autonomy and prophetic witness.

Religion's role as a prophetic critic is compromised when government claims credit or seeks political gain from its involvement with churches. Houses of worship should call government to account for its actions and inaction, including its response to these storms. Only when religious

entities are voluntarily funded and independent can they do so effectively.

Government Should Not Fund Houses of Worship.

The constitutional separation of church and state protects religious liberty by keeping government out of religion. To respect the voluntary nature of religion, government may not fund pervasively religious organizations or promote religious activities. Government subsidies for religious services will alter the time-honored relationship between religious institutions and government. Houses of worship opened their facilities to evacuees and gave generously according to their particular abilities and religious commitments. Many who are involved in relief efforts share their religion explicitly, with prayer and religious services. To ensure religious liberty for all, the government must not fund such efforts.

The institutions of government and religion have vital and distinct roles to play in recovery efforts. Religion makes its best contribution by doing the work of religion—providing care and comfort to those who hurt, speaking of hope to those who despair and offering community to those who are lost. Houses of worship threaten to lose their focus when forced to act like an agency of the government. Government should focus on restoring essential services. Government agencies are not competent, nor constitutionally permitted, to provide or pay for religious services.

Use Caution When Cooperating With Government.

There are many non-financial ways government agencies may assist houses of worship, such as by providing information and coordinating efforts between religious and other non-governmental entities. While houses of worship should not receive government money, they can partner with government agencies through separate nonprofit organizations that receive government money.

Many nonprofit organizations, including "religious affiliates" that are set up and run separately from pervasively religious organizations, such as houses of worship, may receive government money and may assist with the efforts of houses of worship. Such organizations offer tax-funded, secular services that do not involve proselytizing, discrimination or religious exercises. The experience of secular nonprofits and religious affiliates that have long received government money to provide social services is a model your congregation should use as it seeks to meet the challenges ahead.

While facing new challenges, we must continue to protect religious liberty for all. For a brochure on this subject, visit our Web site at www.BJConline.org.

"[T]he private fundraising effort led by former Presidents Bush and Clinton has already received pledges of more than \$100 million. ... A portion will ... be sent to local houses of worship, to help reimburse them for the expense of helping others."

—President George W. Bush, New Orleans, September 15, 2005

California court finds Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional—again

A federal judge in California ruled Sept. 14 that teacher-led Pledge of Allegiance exercises are unconstitutional, deciding a case that had been refiled by an atheist whose previous challenge to the term “under God” reached the Supreme Court.

Judge Lawrence K. Karlton of the U.S. District Court in Sacramento came to much the same conclusion as the higher 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals did in 2002 in a decision that was widely criticized.

Observers are already predicting that the pledge case could soon land back at the nation’s highest court, which never issued a definitive ruling on its merits when it heard the case last year.

“The court concludes that it is bound by the 9th Circuit’s previous determination that the school district’s policy with regard to the pledge is an unconstitutional violation of the children’s right to be free from a coercive requirement to affirm God,” Karlton ruled.

The case was brought by Michael Newdow, an atheist whose daughter attends school in the Elk Grove (Calif.) Unified School District, and two other sets of atheist parents with minor children in the same district.

Karlton ruled that Newdow “lacks prudential standing” in the case but found that the other parents did have standing.

The standing issue is what led Newdow to refile the case. In June 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed Newdow’s earlier case, saying that he did not have proper parental standing.

Newdow has joint legal custody with the child’s mother, but the mother has said her daughter is a Christian who has no objection to the pledge.

—RNS

Bush proposes school vouchers for Katrina evacuee families

Just a day after President Bush presented an overview of hurricane recovery efforts for the Gulf Coast, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced that part of the money earmarked for schools would go to subsidizing private school tuition for families evacuated from the region.

Vouchers of up to \$7,500 per student would be available to any evacuee family.

The program would essentially create the nation’s first large-scale federal voucher program. Bush has repeatedly tried to create a nationwide program for vouchers that could be used by parents who want to enroll their children in private or religious schools. But, other than a small federally funded voucher program in the District of Columbia, Bush has been repeatedly rebuffed by Congress.

The Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that the use of government-funded vouchers in religious schools was constitutional. However, polls have shown that such programs remain unpopular in most populations, and many public school advocates and supporters of strong church-state separation oppose the programs.

Some of those groups chastised Bush’s move as political opportunism in the wake of a tragedy. “Federal funding should go to pub-

“The victims of Katrina need our help, and they deserve to be treated with dignity, not treated like guinea pigs in a massive experiment for a dubious education proposal.”

— Ralph Neas, president of People for the American Way

lic schools in the affected areas, and to schools across the country taking in hurricane evacuees, not toward creating a controversial voucher program for students already enrolled in private schools,” read a statement from Ralph Neas, president of People for the American Way. “The victims of Katrina need our help, and they deserve to be treated with dignity, not treated like guinea pigs in a massive experiment for a dubious education proposal.”

—ABP

Judge says Salvation Army can use faith as factor in hiring

Addressing a key aspect of President Bush’s faith-based initiative, a federal judge has ruled the Salvation Army has the right to hire employees according to its faith principles, even when the charity receives government funding.

“The notion that the Constitution would compel a religious organization contracting with the state to secularize its ranks is untenable in light of the Supreme Court’s recognition that the government may contract with religious organizations for the provision of social services,” said U.S. District Judge Sidney H. Stein in a Sept. 30 opinion issued in New York City.

“Nothing in the Constitution precludes Congress from accommodating the Salvation Army’s residual free exercise interest in selecting and managing its employees with reference to religion.”

The opinion dismisses parts of a case filed against the Salvation Army and New York officials in 2004 by current and former employees of the Army who alleged they were victims of religious discrimination.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, decried the decision, which she said frees churches and temples that have contracts with government agencies to discriminate on the basis of religion.

“We think that it’s profoundly wrong to allow government funds to be used for bigoted hiring practices,” she said.

The court still will consider remaining issues in the case.

—RNS

“We think that it’s profoundly wrong to allow government funds to be used for bigoted hiring practices.”

— Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union

Recent graduates begin internship at BJC

Loren Watt of San Antonio, Texas, and Allen McFarland of Spring, Texas, are serving fall internships at the Baptist Joint Committee.



Lori Watt and Allen McFarland

Watt graduated in May from Southwestern University in Georgetown with a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy and political science. She is the daughter of Tim and Kay Watt of San Antonio and granddaughter of longtime BJC supporters Hardy and Ardelle Clemons of Greenville, S.C.

McFarland is an August graduate of Baylor University in Waco, where he earned a degree in speech communication and minored in criminal justice. He is the son of Keith and Jaclanel McFarland. The McFarlands are members of South Main Baptist Church in Houston.

Baptist Joint Committee
Supporting Bodies

- Alliance of Baptists
- American Baptist Churches USA
- 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

Poll: Religious freedom trails speech freedom as constitutional right

Religious freedom is the most important constitutional right for nearly one-third of Americans, according to a national poll, second only to freedom of speech. Yet half of those surveyed said the notion of separation of church and state has gone too far.

Despite the strong support for religious liberties in the abstract, 50 percent of those polled said separation between religion and the government should be less strictly interpreted or is not necessary at all, and two-thirds support some type of school prayer.

"There exists a striking paradox between how Americans regard two elements related to religious liberty," said Tommy Baer, president of the Virginia-based Council for America's First Freedom, which commissioned the July poll.

"Many citizens apparently make no connection between the right to practice their religion," Baer said, and "keeping matters of faith out of the public domain."

The phone survey of 500 men and 500 women revealed other inconsistencies regarding religious tolerance.

Eighty-one percent of respondents approved of public school teachers reading from sacred texts while examining the role of religion in America.

But reactions about specific texts varied: 81 percent supported reading from the New Testament, while only 68 percent said it was OK to read from the Quran.

"The more complex the issue, the less certain people are about how they feel," said Audrey

Smith, acting director for the Council for America's First Freedom.

Americans were also confused about what religious rights are protected by the Constitution. A significant number of respondents thought door-to-door proselytizing and wearing religious symbols were not protected.

—RNS



REPORT from the Capital

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Report from the Capital (ISSN-0346-0661) is published 10 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee. For subscription information, please contact the Baptist Joint Committee.

Mark your calendars!

Inaugural BJC Shurden Lecture Series

Featured speaker: Rabbi David Saperstein,
Director of Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Mercer University, Macon, Ga., **April 4-5, 2006**

"The Contributions of Baptist Public Figures in America"

Baptist History and Heritage Society Annual Meeting, hosted by the BJC
First Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., **June 1-3, 2006**



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