



REPORT from the Capital

Challenges continue for pulpit endorsements, clergy housing credits

Groups across the ideological spectrum are calling for changes to federal tax rules that affect religious groups and ministers.

A commission of religious leaders sent a report Aug. 14 to Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, with recommendations, including a call to remove the ban on pulpit endorsements.

Since 1954, the Internal Revenue Service has prohibited tax-exempt groups, such as churches, from political activism on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate for political office, but those groups are allowed to speak out on issues.

The report came from the Commission on Accountability and Policy for Religious Organizations, which grew out of Grassley's probe of ministry finances and makes recommendations for greater transparency and reform.

"The IRS guidelines are very vague, so ministers and nonprofit leaders are afraid of the (appropriate) line," said Michael Batts, the independent commission's chairman. "We think it can be fixed without creating a monster of unintended consequences."

In the report, the commission recommended that members of the clergy should be able to say "whatever they believe is appropriate" from the pulpit without fear of IRS reprisal.

The report also suggests, however, that churches should not be able to spend additional funds for political communication. Although some have advocated that churches' tax-deductible funds should be able to be disbursed for political purposes, the commission says that the current policy should remain.

The nonprofit Alliance Defending Freedom began a "Pulpit Freedom Sunday" program in 2008, asking churches to challenge the IRS rule by openly engaging in pulpit politicking and sending proof of violations to the IRS. In 2012, 1,600 churches participated, but none of them have heard from the IRS, according to ADF.

While some want the pulpit politicking ban removed, others are pressing for stricter regulations. Also in August, a federal judge ruled that the Freedom From Religion Foundation,

a nonprofit group for atheists and agnostics, may continue its lawsuit over whether the IRS in fact enforces the ban.

Wisconsin-based FFRF filed a lawsuit after the 2012 elections, arguing that a lack of IRS enforcement was unfair. The IRS filed a motion to dismiss the case, saying the plaintiff taxpayers do not have standing to sue.

On Aug. 19, U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman in Wisconsin denied the motion, writing that FFRF "has standing to seek an order requiring the IRS to treat religious organizations no more favorably than it treats the Foundation."

Observers found the judge's decision significant because similar attempts in the past have failed. For instance, groups have tried to sue over the Catholic Church's involvement in anti-abortion activism. "It is a tactic that's been used before, but without success," said Lloyd Hitoshi Mayer, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame. "I can't see it going anywhere."

Meanwhile, FFRF is continuing its fight against the IRS parsonage exemption for clergy, which allows a "minister of the gospel" to claim part of his or her salary as a tax-free allowance for housing.

FFRF Co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor and her husband, also employed by FFRF, both receive a housing allowance from the organization. But, they say they cannot claim it as tax-free income since they are not clergy. They want the exemption abolished.

In a brief filed by the Justice Department, the government argued that the family could qualify for the tax exemption.

"Non-theistic beliefs, including atheism, may qualify as 'religious' beliefs in various contexts because they pertain to religion and fulfill a similar role in a person's life," according to the brief.

The FFRF filed a brief opposing the government's position. Gaylor told *USA Today* the government's stance misses the point. She has not claimed the exemption, and she does not know if she would accept one if she qualified.

—politicking information from Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service; other contributions from BJC staff

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Lawsuit fights display of Ten Commandments in Okla.

The executive director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking removal of a Ten Commandments monument on the state Capitol grounds in Oklahoma City.

Bruce Prescott, an ordained Baptist minister and member of NorthHaven Church in Norman, Okla., joined three other Oklahoma taxpayers in the lawsuit filed Aug. 19 by the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma in Oklahoma County District Court.

The Oklahoma Capitol Preservation Commission oversaw placement of the monument on the north side of the building in 2012. It was placed by legislation in 2009 and paid for with \$10,000 donated and raised privately by Rep. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow. Ritze is a Southern Baptist deacon and Sunday school teacher at Arrow Heights Baptist Church and House sponsor of the bill.

Prescott complained to the Oklahoma ACLU last year after viewing the monument on trips to the Capitol, including three visits among Baptists involved with the New Baptist Covenant movement to discuss statewide opposition to payday lending.

Prescott said as a Baptist minister, he is not

opposed to displaying the Ten Commandments on private property or at religious institutions, but it is improper on the grounds of the state Capitol where people of various faiths and no faith go to exercise their rights as citizens.

The lawsuit claims the monument, which includes both an English translation of the Commandments and religious symbols from Christianity and Judaism, “conveys an explicit religious message that supports and endorses the faiths and creeds of some churches and sects” while derogating other faiths not consistent with its message.

Prescott and fellow plaintiff Jim Huff, a member at First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, also object to “co-option of their religious traditions, resulting in a cheapening and degradation of their shared faith.”

“To argue that the monument merely commemorates something historical rather than religious is a slap in the face to the many Oklahomans, like myself, who incorporate the Ten Commandments into our religious practice,” Prescott said in a press release.

—Bob Allen, *Associated Baptist Press*

Update: Anti-Sharia laws across the country

A federal judge has struck down Oklahoma’s constitutional amendment that would have prohibited judges in the state from considering Sharia law.

The amendment was approved by about 70 percent of Oklahoma voters on November 2, 2010, but the American Civil Liberties Union and the Council on American-Islamic Relations sued to block the amendment, arguing it violated separation of church and state and discriminated against Muslims.

A U.S. District Court judge agreed and issued a temporary injunction against the amendment. That decision was upheld in 2011 by a federal appeals court that returned the case to the judge, who made the final ruling

Aug. 15.

“It is our hope that, in finding this anti-Islam law unconstitutional, lawmakers in other states will think twice before proposing anti-Muslim laws of their own,” said Gadeir Abbas, a CAIR staff attorney and counsel for the plaintiffs.

The amendment struck down specifically mentioned Sharia, and it is different from anti-Sharia laws adopted over the last few years by state legislators in Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, South Dakota, Tennessee and Oklahoma.

While these laws do not mention Sharia, but “foreign law,” their backers have stated Sharia was their target. Those laws have not been challenged in court, although Muslim civil rights activists say they may still try.

North Carolina became the seventh state to prohibit its judges from considering Islamic law Aug. 25. Legislators passed a bill this spring, and Gov. Pat McCrory allowed the bill to become law without formally signing it, even though he called the law “unnecessary.” The North Carolina ban is limited to family law; bans in other states are broader, applying to commercial law, contract law and other types of laws.

In Missouri, Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed an anti-foreign law bill in June. The state Senate voted to override the veto Sept. 11, but the override attempt failed in the House by one vote, according to media reports.

—Omar Sacirbey, *Religion News Service with BJC staff reports*

REFLECTIONS

Public schools are not religion-free zones

For the past 50 years, much of our church-state jurisprudence has been informed by how we treat religion in the public schools. Simply put, our effort always has been to say “yes” to voluntary expressions of religion by students; but, at the same time, say “no” to official, school-sponsored religious exercises. Although we continue sometimes to struggle to find the appropriate balance, we have made dramatic improvements.

The start of a new school year provides an opportunity to review the many ways religion can properly be exercised, studied and otherwise included on public school campuses in ways that naturally arise in our very religious — and religiously diverse — country, while keeping school officials out of the business of promoting a particular religion or even religion in general.

Here are reminders of a few ways this can be done.

- Students may pray — alone or in a group, silently or even out loud — as long as it is voluntary, non-disruptive and respectful of the rights of other students not to participate. This would include vocal “See You at the Pole” prayer events before classes start and silent prayers after math tests begin.
- Students may form and lead religious clubs in secondary schools if other non-curriculum related groups are allowed. Outside adults may not lead or regularly attend club meetings, and teachers may be present only to monitor the meetings.
- Students may display and communicate religious messages — on their clothing and orally — in the same way other messages are allowed. Generally, they may wear religious garb, such as yarmulkes and head scarves, as well.
- Students may distribute religious material and literature, under the same rules as other material may be distributed. This right is subject to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions, such as requiring material to be placed on a table rather than being handed out.
- Students may speak to and even try to persuade other students on religious topics, including inviting them to participate in religious services and events. But, such speech and invitations cannot be allowed to turn into religious harassment. A “no thanks” must end the con-

versation.

- Students are allowed to include religious themes and ideas in their schoolwork and homework assignments, as long as those religious references are germane to the assignment.
- Students may be taught *about* religion where the topic naturally arises in the curriculum. The teaching should be academic, not devotional, and have an expressed educational goal in mind. In other words, schools may *expose* students to religious views but may not *impose* any particular view.
- A religious holiday may serve as an occasion to teach about that particular religion, but it is not to be celebrated as a religious event. Along the same lines, religious music may be played or sung and sacred artwork observed and appreciated as long as there is an educational goal in mind.
- Students may (and sometimes must) be excused from lessons that are objectionable based on religious convictions if the school does not have a sufficiently compelling interest in requiring all students to attend and participate.
- Teachers and other school personnel may meet with one another for Bible study, prayer and other religious discussions, as long as such gatherings are voluntary and outside the classroom (in the teachers’ lounge, for example) during lunch breaks or other free time.

These are just a few of the many ways in which it is abundantly clear that God has **not** been kicked out of the public schools. But let’s not abuse our freedom. We always need to be mindful of the importance of modeling good behavior and responsible citizenship. This includes not insisting upon governmental help, like using a school-controlled microphone to pray or to proselytize. It also means allowing students to participate in school-sponsored activities without being subjected to other students’ religion, even when it is arguably personal student speech. As is the case in many other contexts, what we have the right to do is not always the right thing to do.

Please visit the Baptist Joint Committee website at www.BJConline.org for more information on religion in the public schools. Click on “public schools” on the left side of the home page or look for this article online, which will link to several helpful resources.



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

“The start of a new school year provides an opportunity to review the many ways religion can properly be exercised, studied and otherwise included on public school campuses ... ”

Ethicist Shaun Casey to oversee religious engagement for U.S. State Department

Amid persistent criticism that the U.S. marginalizes religion and religious people in its foreign policy, Secretary of State John Kerry tapped ethicist and campaign adviser Shaun Casey Aug. 7 to lead the State Department's new Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives.

Casey is a professor of Christian ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington and advised President Obama's campaign and other Democrats on outreach to religious voters.

Kerry praised Casey as someone who understands how the U.S. can engage religious communities around the world to foster peace and development.

"In a world where people of all faiths are migrating and mingling like never before," Kerry said, "we ignore the global impact of religion at our peril."

Casey said he and Kerry have long shared a view about the role of religion in the world, that it neither "poisons everything" nor can "save and solve everything."

"You knew that the reality was somewhere in between," Casey said, addressing Kerry under the chandeliers of one of the State Department's most opulent halls.

Casey, who will take a temporary leave from Wesley to assume his State Department post, said he hopes to "build strong relationships with religious actors abroad to collaborate on a variety of fronts, from conflict prevention and mitigation, to promoting human rights, to fostering development."

A small but vociferous group of religious advo-

cates — including scholars and clergy — have long pushed the U.S. to take a more robust stand in defending the rights of religious minorities abroad.

"I would put this under the rubric of wait-and-see," said retired Ambassador Randolph Bell, who runs the First Freedom Center, a Virginia-based religious freedom watchdog group.

While the best policy directly and emphatically insists on religious freedom abroad, Bell said, "if this can lead to an increase in the salience of these rights, let's give it a chance."

Knox Thames, director of policy and research at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) — an independent watchdog panel chartered by Congress — sounded more hopeful.

"It's a positive and timely step that should increase the State Department's ability to effectively engage religious actors, as issues of religion and state are more relevant than ever" after the Arab Spring, Thames said.

"Hopefully, this office can help position the U.S. to convey our values and the importance of religious freedom during this time of global transition."

The State Department has an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, currently Suzan Johnson Cook, although critics have said she and her predecessors have been sidelined in the department's vast bureaucracy.

USCIRF has repeatedly taken the State Department to task for going soft against foreign governments that restrict religious freedom and refuse to protect vulnerable religious minorities.

Since 2001, the White House has had a similar office — currently called the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships — which has been headed by a succession of directors with strong religious credentials.

The current head of the White House office, Melissa Rogers, former general counsel to the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, welcomed Casey as a public servant who understands the "potential for religious communities to spark both positive and negative movements."

Casey, the author of *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*, was named by Religion News Service in 2006 as one of a dozen Democrats who were helping the party make inroads among religious voters.

—Lauren Markoe, *Religion News Service*



Dr. Shaun Casey, selected by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to lead the U.S. Department of State's new Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, delivers remarks at the Department in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 7, 2013. [State Department photo/ Public Domain]

Mass. Supreme Court weighs challenge to Pledge of Allegiance

Justices of Massachusetts' highest court examined the nature of the Pledge of Allegiance Sept. 4 as they heard a challenge from atheists who want the pledge banned in schools statewide.

At issue is whether the pledge — and its reference to “one nation under God” — violates the equal rights amendment in the state's constitution, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of creed.

Attorney David Niose, representing anonymous atheist parents, told justices that atheist children “are denied meaningful participation in this patriotic exercise” because the language refers to God.

“Children every morning are pledging their national unity and loyalty in an indoctrinating format, in a way that that validates God belief as truly patriotic and actually invalidates atheism,” said Niose, president of the American Humanist Association.

Pledge advocates hit back. No one has to say the pledge, they noted, citing a court ruling that confirms the pledge must always be voluntary. What's more, they said, reference to “one nation under God” does not necessarily affirm theistic belief.

“It's not an affirmation of religion?” asked Associate Justice Barbara Lenk.

“It's a statement of our political philosophy,” answered Geoffrey Bok, attorney for the defendants. “It's the founding thing upon which our country was founded. Our rights did not come from the king or the czar or the queen. They come from something higher.”

Oral arguments took just 35 minutes. The case pits plaintiffs against Acton, Mass., schools and the regional district. The schools won a lower court ruling and continue to defend the pledge with support from the state.

The case also marks a new front in atheists' long battle to remove “one nation under God” from the start of children's school days. Prior efforts failed as federal courts ruled the pledge doesn't violate a constitutional ban on state-sanctioned religion and is an act of patriotism, not religious observance.

Now challengers are taking a new tack by arguing the pledge violates Massachusetts' equal rights amendment, which provides that “all people are born free and equal,” and that equality cannot

be abridged by “sex, race, color, creed or national origin.”

Pledge advocates say they expect to prevail, but add that a loss would likely galvanize pledge opponents to bring similar suits in other states' courts.

Observers meanwhile see an uphill battle for pledge opponents. “The challenge for the plaintiffs is in showing that they're being coerced to do something that creates this separate status,” said Greg Kalscheur, a Jesuit priest and expert in church-state law at Boston College Law School. “Participation [in the pledge] is voluntary. Nobody can actually be forced to participate. So I think it's a challenging argument to make and to sustain.”

Proceedings took place in a setting where public references to God have a long history. The courthouse is named for John Adams, the Founding Father who wrote numerous explicit references to God into the Massachusetts constitution in 1780. When a court officer called the session to order, he shouted, “God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!” — a phrase picked up moments later by Chief Justice Roderick Ireland.

“Would your client say that is inappropriate language?” Ireland asked Niose, referring to the court officer's words.

“It can't be compared to a daily, 13-year indoctrination,” Niose answered, “when children are, every day when they go to school, instilled with this idea that we are one nation under God and true patriots can stand up and say that.”

The court's seven justices took turns pushing both sides to unpack how a patriotic observance does or does not violate the state's equal rights amendment.

Outside, opponents of the pledge outnumbered supporters. About two dozen applauded Niose on the courthouse steps. Among them was Andrew Hall, a local atheist and father who said his eight- and 11-year-old children face pressure to say the entire pledge, even though it's supposed to be voluntary.

“There is coercion involved,” Hall said. “It creates two different classes of kids ... If other kids see my children not say ‘under God’ under the pledge, that creates a certain amount of stigma.”

A decision in the case is expected within five months.

—G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Religion News Service*

BJC announces essay scholarship contest winners

An essay debunking the myth that the United States was founded as a “Christian nation” is the winner of the 2013 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, sponsored by the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee.

This year's essay topic asked students to examine religious diversity in America and evaluate claims made about the country's founding. More than 430 high school juniors and seniors from 46 states — as well

as students from China and Sweden — submitted entries.

The grand prize winner is Christian Belanger of Wallingford, Pa. His essay, titled “Christianity and the Founding Fathers: Exploring America's Purported Religious Origins,” examined the Constitution and the archival writings of the Founding Fathers to come to his conclusion. The essay also explored the dangers of misinterpreting the country's religious origin.

As the grand prize winner, Belanger receives a \$2,000 scholarship and a trip to Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Baptist Joint Committee board meeting in October. The son of Gitte and Kenneth Belanger, he is a 2013 graduate of Strath Haven High School and attends the University of Chicago.

Kourtney Kostecki of St. Peters, Mo., earned the second place prize of a \$1,000 scholarship for her essay,

ESSAY CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

A legal look at local government prayer

In November, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, a case in which two citizens successfully challenged an upstate New York town council's practice of opening official meetings with prayers by local clergy. Controversies over local government prayer continue brewing across the country, sparking heated debate and sometimes legal action. Does legislative prayer violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment? As with many religious liberty issues, that question is more complicated than it seems.

The Court has directly addressed legislative prayer only once, in *Marsh v. Chambers*, a 1983 case that upheld the Nebraska legislature's practice of opening official sessions with prayers offered by the same paid legislative chaplain over a period of 16 years. *Marsh* thus carved out a narrow exception to the general Establishment Clause prohibition on government-sponsored religious exercises. This constitutional anomaly has often confounded lower courts and legal scholars in their attempts to reconcile *Marsh* with traditional religious liberty principles, especially in settings outside state legislatures and Congress.

The *Marsh* Court relied heavily on the longstanding tradition of official prayers in Congress. It noted that the First Congress authorized the appointment of paid chaplains three days before it approved the First Amendment. The Court took this as evidence that the Founders did not consider opening legislative sessions with prayer by paid chaplains to violate the Establishment Clause. While the Court observed that historical practices, standing alone, cannot justify modern constitutional violations, it concluded that "the practice of opening legislative sessions with prayer has become part of the fabric of our society [and] ... it is simply a tolerable acknowledgement of beliefs widely held among the people of this country."

Although *Marsh* said nothing of prayer at the local government level, it did identify some limits on legislative prayer generally, holding that prayer opportunities may not be "exploited to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other, faith or belief." The Court also observed that the Nebraska legislative chaplain's prayers at issue in *Marsh* were typically "nonsectarian," reflecting Judeo-Christian values and "the American civil religion," indicating that the practice had not been misused to favor one religion or denomination over others.

The Baptist Joint Committee has long warned of the dangers of legislative prayer in any government setting and advocated using moments of silence in lieu of such prayer. Unique characteristics of local governments distinguish them from state legislatures and Congress in ways that make official prayer especially problematic

at the local level. Most obviously, local governments do not share the long, uniform history of legislative prayer in Congress that was given such weight in *Marsh* (a feature which has itself been the subject of much debate). Moreover, prayers in Congress historically have been offered for and at the behest of legislators themselves — not the citizenry at large.

In Congress, neither legislators nor citizens are required to be present when the chaplain offers prayers. By contrast, citizens often must appear at local government meetings for any number of reasons: to petition public officials directly, to offer

public comment on matters of community import, to receive recognition for civic achievements or even to fulfill school curriculum requirements. Simply put, citizens interact more directly with, and with a greater expectation of immediate impact upon, local government officials than they do with state legislators or Members of Congress. Meaningful participation in the political process should never be conditioned upon willingness to take part in a religious exercise.

Prayers at government meetings are not immune from careful constitutional scrutiny, contrary to the sweeping claims of some legislative prayer supporters. Prayers recited during official government meetings are government-sponsored speech, even if voiced by visiting clergy. In *Greece*, for example, the town council decided a prayer would be offered, selected the prayer-givers and delegated its podium to the speaker. Under these circumstances, the prayer-giver represents the town. *Marsh's* pronouncement that legislative prayer cannot be used to advance a particular faith invites certain limitations designed to avoid that result. Yet all too often, local government prayers, including those in *Greece*, overwhelmingly reflect Christian views and sometimes seem more like religious worship than a mere "acknowledgement of beliefs widely held." Even in Congress, guest chaplains are instructed to be mindful that the legislators they are addressing come from many different faith traditions.

Moments of silence, in which citizens may choose to pray (or not pray) according to the dictates of their own consciences, are an appropriate way to solemnize the important work of government while respecting the beliefs of all citizens. It is not the business of government to conduct religious worship or advance religion. Instead, this is our job — one that history counsels is best left to the faithful.

The Baptist Joint Committee will file a friend-of-the-court brief in the case of Town of Greece v. Galloway this month. The "Hollman Report" will return in next month's Report from the Capital.



Written by
Nan Futrell
BJC Staff Counsel

BJC welcomes fall interns

The Baptist Joint Committee is pleased to have two fall semester interns working with our staff in Washington, D.C.

Aaron Simpson of Chapel Hill, N.C., is a 2012 graduate of Appalachian State University, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in cultural anthropology. He is the son of the Rev. Mitch Simpson and Betty Simpson and a member of University Baptist Church in Chapel Hill. After his time with the BJC, Simpson plans on pursuing a career in Washington.

Emily Woodell of Little Rock, Ark., is a 2013 graduate of Hendrix College, where she earned a bachelor of arts degree with majors in philosophy and politics. She is the daughter of Tony Woodell and Peggy Clay and attends Calvary Baptist Church in Little Rock. After working with the BJC, Woodell plans to pursue a law degree.



Simpson



Woodell

Administration takes next steps on faith-based policy reform

In August, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released new guidance advising federal agencies on continuing efforts to implement President Barack Obama's Executive Order 13559, a 2010 directive that clarified some of the appropriate contours of partnerships between the federal government and faith-based social service providers.

Among other things, the Executive Order provided that religious organizations must not engage in "explicitly religious" activity in the course of providing federally funded services, set forth standards aimed at promoting transparency and accountability among both agencies and service providers, and called for greater protection for beneficiaries with objections to service providers' religious affiliations.

The recent OMB memo follows an interagency Working Group Report, published in April 2012, proposing practical guidance and model regulations for agencies as they work to implement these reforms. OMB has instructed relevant agency heads to amend and adopt regulations and guidance consistent with the Executive Order and the Working Group Report recommendations. OMB, working in conjunction with the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, will reconvene the Working Group to develop a plan for uniform, consistent implementation of the Executive Order.

Pursuant to this plan, as required by OMB, agency heads will then submit "agency-specific plans for amending, to the extent permitted by law, all existing policies, guidance documents, and regulations of their respective agencies that have implications for faith-based and other neighborhood organizations and that

require amending to ensure that they are consistent with the fundamental principles set forth in the [Executive Order]."

The OMB guidance is the next step in the regulatory process to implement President Obama's Executive Order regarding faith-based initiatives.

—Nan Futrell

Survey: opposition to school vouchers at record level

Support for school vouchers is falling nationwide and is at a record-level low, according to a poll released Aug. 21.

The annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools found that 70 percent of respondents opposed plans to shift public funding into private and religious schools through voucher plans. The number opposing vouchers is the highest it has been in the 20-year history of this poll. The published report noted that, while Americans oppose vouchers, they do support public charter schools, home schooling and online learning.

The National Coalition for Public Education, which opposes funneling public money to private and religious schools, touted the findings. The Baptist Joint Committee is a longtime member of the NCPE.

"The American people want a well-funded public school system that benefits all, not a patchwork of unaccountable private schools that cater to a few," said Maggie Garrett, co-chair of NCPE.

—BJC staff reports

ESSAY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

titled "Not Foundation, Influence." She examined the religious backgrounds of the Founders and discovered evidence of Christian influence rather than official Christian foundation in American government. The daughter of Karin and Kurt KostECKI, she is a 2013 graduate of St. Joseph's Academy and attends Iowa State University.

The third place winner is Katie Hillery of Placentia, Calif., who receives a \$250 scholarship for her essay titled "Religious Refuge or Christian Country: The Role of Religion in the Founding of the American Republic." She pointed out that the establishment of the United States was unique because it was founded not on religious dogma but religious liberty. Katie is the daughter of Colleen and Matt Hillery, and she is a home-schooled student who will graduate in the spring of 2014.

The winning essays are available on the Baptist Joint Committee website as downloadable Word documents. More information about the top essay will be in next month's *Report from the Capital*.

Details for the 2014 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest are scheduled to be released in the coming months.

—BJC staff reports



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REPORT from the Capital

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WHY WE GIVE

'As the BJC fights for religious liberty, I want my legacy with them to be that of an encourager'

William R. Genet first learned about the Baptist Joint Committee in 1980 while reading about James Dunn (the BJC's executive director at the time) in the Kentucky Baptist state paper. Once he began receiving *Report from the Capital*, he was hooked and started consistently supporting the BJC.



Genet

Genet values the BJC's role in providing a voice for Baptist concerns in the nation's capital. "Early Baptists, such as Roger Williams, Isaac Backus and John Leland, championed separation of church and state. The BJC advocates the same message that these early Baptists

preached," he said.

Genet believes that the BJC is unique because it equally emphasizes the First Amendment's establishment and free exercise clauses. "Some organizations preach that the government should not advance religion and some organizations say that the government should not inhibit religion. The BJC believes that the government should do neither. The government should be neutral," he said.

Genet relies on *Report from the Capital* to keep him informed on the latest issues affecting religious liberty, and he also strives to attend BJC-sponsored events in person, including many of the annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State.

In addition to his annual financial support, Genet has included the BJC in his estate plans. "As the BJC fights for religious liberty, I want my legacy with them to be that of an encourager. I want the BJC to continue championing a belief that I cherish: the Baptist doctrine that church and state should be separate," he said.

What would you like your legacy to be with the BJC? A planned gift is the best way to strengthen the BJC's mission for the future, and it is a powerful way for our committed friends to continue to have a place in our work for many generations. Ensure that our history will always have a future by remembering the BJC in your will.

If you are interested in learning more about making a planned gift to the BJC, please contact Taryn Deaton, director of development, at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226 for more information. If you have already included the BJC in your estate plans, please let us know today.