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Study Urges Retention of North Carolina Hospital

ASHEBORO, N.C. (BP)--North Carolina Baptists will be asked at their annual meeting in Winston-Salem next month to reaffirm their commitment to the healing ministry and retain North Carolina Baptist Hospital as a vital part of the convention's work.

Retention of the hospital is the first of six recommendations made by a special committee of the convention after a year's study of the relationship between the hospital and convention.

The committee's report was unveiled at the fall meeting of the convention's General Board at Camp Mundo Vista, the state woman's camp, near here.

Other recommendations in the report asked for a new medical center board for the Winston-Salem hospital, designation of the Mother's Day Offering taken each year for the hospital to be used for charity care only, the hospital to match the offering with like value in hospital services, a new effort to communicate the hospital program to North Carolina Baptists, and full departmental status for the hospital's school of pastoral care.

The Winston-Salem hospital operates in cooperation with the Bowman Gray School of Medicine at Wake Forest University, and has developed through the years into an academic medical center.

About six years ago, the hospital started a \$17 million expansion program that has skyrocketed into a \$42 million program because of increased construction costs. The hospital has repeatedly asked the convention for authorization for loans to continue the construction program, and has begun new policies, including closing of its school of nursing and charity care policies that have undermined support of the hospital by Baptist churches. The study committee was to review these matters and make recommendations.

The report quashed speculation that North Carolina Baptists would follow the lead of some Baptist groups and get out of the hospital business, and lessened the likelihood of controversy at the state convention over the hospital relationship.

Still scheduled at the convention, which meets in Winston-Salem Nov. 13-15, are two controversial constitutional amendments, both dealing with baptism policies.

One of the amendments was defeated by the convention last year, even though it got 53.5 per cent of the vote falling short of the necessary two-thirds majority. It would restrict messengers to the convention to those coming from churches which have only immersed members.

A few Southern Baptist churches in North Carolina accept members from other denominations without rebaptism. The amendment is designed to bar messengers from such churches.

The other amendment would require that only immersed members of local Baptist churches be messengers to the convention.

In other actions, the General Board of the convention approved a record \$8.5 million Cooperative Program budget for recommendation to the convention for approval. The budget calls for an increase of \$500,000 over the 1972 schedule.

High Court Hears Case on Disparity of School Funds

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--Religious, education and civil liberties groups lined up against public officials in more than 30 states before the U.S. Supreme Court here in an effort to overthrow public school financing by means of property taxes.

In the case, San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, the U.S. District Court for the western district of Texas held that it is unconstitutional for Texas to base its method of school financing primarily on the local property tax.

This discriminates against poor children on the basis of wealth and denies them "the equal protection of the laws," the Texas court declared.

Texas public officials appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. More than 30 other states filed briefs to support the position of the State of Texas.

On the other side, on behalf of the poor children in the Edgewood School District in Bexar County (San Antonio) a brief was filed by the National Council of Churches, American Civil Liberties Union, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, National Coalition of American Nuns, National Catholic Conference for International Justice, Southwest Council of LaRaza, United Ministries in Public Education, and the Scholarship, Education and Defense Fund for Racial Equality.

In addition to these, the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People filed briefs asking the Supreme Court to uphold the Texas district court decision.

The Rodriguez case arose out of the disparity in school financing in two San Antonio school districts. The Edgewood District, with a large concentration of Mexican-Americans, produced only \$26 per pupil in 1967-68 as compared to \$333 in the wealthy Alamo Heights district.

State and federal contributions failed to level out the gross differences. Total revenues per pupil--state, local and federal--were \$356 in Edgewood and \$594 in Alamo Heights.

This disparity exists in spite of the fact that the tax rate in Edgewood is higher than the rate in Alamo heights. In other words, a poor district cannot produce as much money for education as a wealthy district, even if its tax rate is higher.

This, according to the poor parents in the Edgewood district, results in educational discrimination against their children because of wealth (or the lack of wealth).

State or federal courts in five other states--California, Arizona, New Jersey, Minnesota and Kansas--have handed down decisions similar to that of the Texas district court. Now, however, for the first time the issue has reached the U.S. Supreme Court.

A decision here will have dramatic effect on the bases for school financing throughout the United States.

Historically in the United States, public schools have been financed primarily by local property taxes. These funds have been supplemented by state and federal money, but even this has not equalized school expenditures in all parts of the country and for all school districts.

University of Texas Law Professor Charles Allen Wright argued before the Supreme Court in behalf of the state of Texas. He said that if the Texas district court decision is allowed to stand it would "impose a constitutional straitjacket on the public schools of the states."

Wright argued that the San Antonio decision "equates money with equality." Research by educators and social scientists, he said, has so far failed to provide conclusive proof of this connection.

On the other hand, Arthur Goochman, arguing on behalf of the poor living in the Edgewood District, said that they are unable to move into one of the nearby wealthier school districts and are unable to pay more taxes for schools. Therefore, this locks the poor into an inferior school system that is imposed on them by the state method of financing education, he said.

Chief Justice Warren Burger asked Goochman to compare the rights that people have to fire, police and health protection with education as a state function.

Goochman replied that education "is related to every right we have." However, he asserted that this right is protected by the Bill of Rights in ways that rights to police protection, public health and food are not.

The brief by nine religious and civil rights bodies pointed out that "the racial discrimination issue...lies at the very core of this case." They charged that wealth determined the quality of education in Texas, thereby discriminating against school districts containing large percentages of Mexican-American children, in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

They further noted that Texas' minority population was concentrated in school districts with low assessed valuation, which could not raise enough revenue through local property taxes, "to begin to match the educational offerings in the rich, white districts."

Further, they argued: "Nor is this accidental. At the time the present school district lines were being drawn, Texas courts were enforcing deed restrictions that barred Mexican-Americans from all but the poorest neighborhoods."

The three education associations in their brief rejected the two major arguments of the state of Texas (1) that money does not really have an effect upon the quality of education a child receives and (2) that the present system of school financing is necessary to local control of the schools.

The educators quoted from the report of the President's Commission on School Finance that said: "What is clear is that when parents, with the means to do so, choose their children's schools, the ones they select, whether public or private, usually cost more to operate than the ones they reject."

The educators further pointed out that the funding a school receives usually determines the options available--the type of facilities, the experience-level of teachers, whether there will be such programs as vocational guidance, laboratory science, foreign languages, and the quality of supporting personnel to aid the teachers.

The brief also asserted that Texas, if it wishes to assure local control of education, can do so without discriminating on the basis of wealth.

The state of Hawaii is the only one of the 50 states that does not base its school financing on the property tax. Hawaii finances all the public schools in the states.

Both the public officials and the educators involved in the Rodriguez case acknowledged that an educational revolution may take place in the United States if the Supreme Court upholds the Texas district court decision.



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