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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 8, 1978

78-71

1978: Is This the Year
For Tuition Tax Credits?

By Carol Franklin

WASHINGTON (BP)--Despite determined opposition and serious constitutional questions, this could be the year for tuition tax credits. Support for such legislation appears almost unbeatable in Congress at this time.

The House of Representatives has sent the most recent message that it reads the public mood as favoring tuition tax credits and it intends to satisfy the public regardless of administration opposition or heavy lobbying by the public school interests.

The House Budget Committee recommended strongly against adoption of any provision for tuition tax credits in the budget resolution for 1979. That recommendation met a head-on challenge when the resolution reached the floor for debate. By a 227 to 136 vote, the House voted to make room in the budget for \$635 million in tuition tax credits. That amendment, introduced by U. S. Rep. Thomas A. Luken, D.-Ohio, replaced an earlier amendment by Rep. Lawrence Coughlin, R.-Penn., calling for \$500 million in tuition tax credits.

Consideration of a similar budget resolution earlier in the Senate produced a similar result by default. The Senate budget panel had left room in its proposal for tuition tax credits. Opponents in that body chose not to fight the issue in this round.

This budget resolution is not binding. It serves as an advisory for legislation in the next few months. A final budget resolution in September will be binding. The new fiscal year will begin October 1.

A staffer on the House Budget Committee commented that the vote in the House might not indicate how a final vote would go. "It was a cheap vote in favor of tuition tax credits," he said. "Now a representative can go home and say 'I voted for it' but still change his vote when the actual legislation comes up later."

In the past, the Senate has approved tuition tax credit legislation six times. In February of this year, the Senate Finance Committee approved a bill (H.R. 3946, the so-called Packwood-Moynihan Bill) which would provide a tax credit of 50 percent to a \$250 maximum for college students and postsecondary vocational students effective Aug. 1, 1978. In 1980, the Senate version would increase to a \$500 maximum. The eligibility would expand to include elementary and secondary students. Graduate and part-time students would be added in 1981. This bill would make the credit refundable.

The House has given a cool reception to the idea of tuition tax credits in past years. However, last fall 311 representatives voted to include such credits in the final budget resolution for 1978. The necessary legislation to implement that vote was not passed.

In this session of the 95th Congress, more than half the members of the House have indicated support for some form of education tax credit. Rep. Al Ullman, D.-Ore., chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means, opposes tuition tax credits but agreed to hold hearings and vote out a bill because of the strong sentiment in the House. The bill voted out was considerably watered down from earlier proposals. H. R. 12050 would provide a credit of 25 percent to a maximum of \$100 for college students, postsecondary vocational students and half-time students effective Aug. 1, 1978. In 1979, the maximum would increase to \$150 and to \$250 in 1980. The House version makes the credit non-refundable.

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Amendments on the House floor are expected which would restore the credit to 50 percent and include parents of nonpublic elementary and secondary school children. An alternate proposal is also expected which would substitute tax deferral for the tax credit.

The popularity of tuition tax credits seems to stem from two factors--a taxpayer reaction to the high cost of everything and growing disenchantment with public schools.

At a pro-tuition tax credit rally held at Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, about 50 Catholic supporters of the legislation gathered to protest the "anti-Catholic bigotry" which supposedly motivates opponents of the credits and to attack President Carter's alleged failure to keep his campaign promise to find constitutional means of aiding the parents of private school children.

Opponents of the tuition tax credits have sounded the alarm charging that such credits would do irreparable harm to the public school system, which has contributed to the unity of our nation, and would also violate the First Amendment to the Constitution, which provides for separation of church and state.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, charges, "Serious constitutional questions would be raised by such legislation in view of major decisions made by the U. S. Supreme Court during the present decade outlawing public funds for parochial schools."

President Carter has strongly opposed tuition tax credits. He has said that he probably would veto any such legislation and is pushing for expanded education loan programs for middle income families instead.

Congressional strategy is not yet clear. If proponents really mean to pass tuition tax credits, they will probably attach an amendment to a veto-proof bill. However, if they are merely seeking political points at home they may pass a "clean" bill which the president can veto, leaving them free to claim to have done all they could for the folks back home.

Failing a presidential veto, or if Congress overrides a veto, opponents are depending on the Supreme Court to rule against tuition tax credits in any legal challenge.

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Parimutuels Put Out To
Pasture By Texas Voters

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5/8/78

DALLAS (BP)--Texas voters put parimutuel horsetrack gambling out to pasture for the ninth time in 25 years, on the same day a national TV audience saw anxious bettors watch Affirmed and jockey Steve Cauthen win the 104th running of the Kentucky Derby in Louisville.

Democratic primary voters defeated the issue 657,338 to 602,011 (with 246 of 254 counties reporting), while voters in the Republican primary defeated it 49,766 to 48,987. Victory over parimutuels came by a 52.2 percent margin in the Democratic primary, and a 50.4 margin in the Republican primary, in which all votes are in. The combined margin against parimutuels was 52.1 percent.

The Anti-Crime Council of Texas, leading law enforcement officials, and a coalition of religious groups, in which the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas played a major role, led the fight against parimutuels.

Observers noted that Texans apparently responded to nationwide evidence that legalized gambling attracts illegal betting and organized crime and doesn't produce economic benefits proponents have claimed.

That point of view apparently overrode a last ditch effort by pro-gambling forces to make it appear the opposition to gambling was "narrow-based religious moralism" led by only Baptists.

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Flood Waters Damage
Unwed Mothers' Home

By Judy Touchton

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--When water started seeping under the doors at Seller's Baptist Home in New Orleans, no one panicked--not even the home's 25 expectant,unwed mothers, five ready to deliver any minute.

Tom Dobson, assistant director, and the staff worried quietly that in all the excitement one or more of the girls might begin labor pains. But they didn't.

"Instead everyone grabbed mops, bedspreads, linens--anything and everything--and began stuffing them under the doors. But soon the water came in anyway," Dobson reported. "Within just a little while, it was, I'd guess, halfway between my ankles and my knees--about six inches."

Dobson called city services for advice about turning off electricity--a main worry since water was flowing in and out of wall sockets.

Later power went off for over six hours and all phones--except one pay phone on the girls' resident wing--were knocked out. Air conditioners blew motors and the elevator shaft filled with five feet of water.

Since the Seller's Building is in an area of New Orleans technically below sea level, there was no flood insurance.

If the roof had collapsed and water had gotten in that way, it would have been covered, said Paul Adkins of the Home Mission Board Christian Social Ministries department. Now any cost of repairs must come directly from the Home Mission Board, which operates the home.

No other Southern Baptist Home Mission Board properties in New Orleans were damaged according to a Christian Social Ministries spokesman.

Carpet,just placed after a two-year refurbishing project,was soaked by the water. The staff pulled it up, rented a truck and took it to a dry cleaner for possible salvaging at a cost of 45 cents a square foot--trying to beat a quoted price of \$1,500 with no guarantee.

Preliminary estimates for one of the air conditioner motors--again with no guarantee--ran to \$400. The ice machine was broken, but the food in the freezer was not ruined, said director Mary Dan Kuhnle.

Every inch of space had to be disinfected and cleaned, she said, and until the health department certified the kitchen and water system, the girls ate sandwiches.

Bottom file drawers holding records of adoptive parents and maternity files, were saved when staff removed those drawers as water crept in. Little by little, Dobson and the staff got everything that was loose up and off the floor.

The expectant mothers--a full house at 25--were exiled to the second floor for fear of their slipping and falling. "That's not the thing for a pregnant woman to do," Dobson said.

The babies, usually in the nursery, were all at foster homes in the area, director Kuhnle reported, relieved. "It could have been worse," she said. "But as it is, things are still pretty incredible."

Baptists Appeal For Help
To Homeless in New Guinea

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Baptist World Alliance is appealing to its 109 member bodies for \$25,000 in relief assistance to 47,000 homeless people in Irian Jaya, the western half of the island of New Guinea.

Reports say that hundreds of people have been killed through inter-tribal conflict, and that 47,000 persons have been made homeless by a "series of natural and man-made disasters" during the past 18 months.

The BWA telegraphed \$5,000 immediately to its Australian office and hopes to raise another \$20,000 to provide at least three months supplemental food supplies and emergency rehabilitation. Australian Baptists already have sent \$20,000 of relief aid.

John Ellenberger, chairman of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and director of relief efforts in Irian Jaya, said that the relief efforts will major on "making the love of Christ known through the alleviating of physical suffering."

"We will provide emergency food supplements to combat hunger and malnutrition," he said. "We will replace tools which have been lost, with which the people can make gardens and pig fences, cut materials for new homes and re-establish their communities.

"We will provide seed and livestock to re-establish food supply systems and we will attempt to introduce new foods and farming techniques with which the people can improve their nutrition and production levels. We will provide emergency medicines and vaccinations through the numerous small clinics which have been rehabilitated and put into operation."

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Student Challenges
Wake Forest Charter

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5/8/78

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--A freshman at Wake Forest University is challenging the school's charter and the constitution of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina which require that all of Wake Forest's trustees be North Carolina Baptists.

Daniel Peterson, a Southern Presbyterian from Virginia, sought the student representative position on the board of trustees as a write-in candidate, but any votes cast for him were not counted. He did not qualify as a candidate because he was not a Baptist nor a North Carolinian.

Peterson has presented a petition, signed by 1,094 university students, that challenges the requirements and says "the student trustee should be elected according to the precepts of a democracy, to represent the mandate of the majority."

To change the North Carolina Baptist requirement would take a two-thirds majority vote by the Baptist State Convention. The same change was voted down in 1964 by a four to one margin. North Carolina Baptists represent 20 percent of the student enrollment at Wake Forest.

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WMU Program Adds
Elizabeth O'Connor

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ATLANTA (BP)--Elizabeth O'Connor, author and counselor, has been added to the annual meeting program for Woman's Missionary Union, auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention. Mrs. O'Connor, staff member of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., since 1953, will speak June 12 at the Monday morning session of the WMU meeting beginning at 9:30 at the Atlanta Civic Center.

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