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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Proposal By Gay Task  
Force Sparks Debate

By David Wilkinson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A proposal which would require television and radio broadcasters to consult with leaders of the homosexual community in ascertaining the needs and interests of the station's service area, has sparked a national debate that finds many broadcasters and religious leaders on the same side.

The National Gay Task Force has submitted a petition to the Federal Communications Commission asking that the category, "Organizations of and for the Gay Community," be added to the FCC's "community leader checklist."

The checklist consists of 19 "common socio-economic elements" found in most communities which broadcasters are required to consider in determining the needs and interests of their potential audiences. It also includes such general categories as business, education, agriculture and religion.

A 20th category, entitled "other," is listed, but under current FCC regulations, consultation with leaders of groups within this miscellaneous category is optional.

The FCC's broadcast bureau has recommended that the petition from the gay task force be denied, but it has made an alternate proposal which has complicated the debate and irked many broadcasters and religious leaders.

In its proposal, the broadcast bureau suggests that the "other" category be expanded and that it become a mandatory rather than an optional requirement in the broadcaster's ascertainment process. The proposal says the needs and interests of such groups as the gay task force would have to be ascertained, whether or not they are listed on the checklist, if they represented "a significant element or institution which is readily accessible within the community."

The FCC is expected to act on the proposals sometime next spring.

A Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission executive recently told the FCC that expanding the checklist's "other" category is an unacceptable response to the gay task force petition because the inclusion of any single-issue group in the design to ascertain public interest would significantly skew the research.

William H. Elder III, director of Christian citizenship development for the social concerns agency, said that the same rule ought to apply to all special interest organizations.

"These groups ought to accept the minimal limitation that they have a right to try to persuade government to go in their directions, but that they have no right to require through regulation or legislation that government listen," Elder said. "In the area of public morality and the public airwaves, this distinction is all the more significant. Those who depart from the generally accepted moral standard have a right to try to affect legislation that fosters their interests. They can bring their case to the news media and to the public directly. But the public airwaves should not be forced to reflect their views, for this is to grant undue advantage."

Elder claimed that if a special interest group has influence in a community its views will inevitably have a significant impact on public opinion as a whole and will appear in a broadcaster's research within the 19 general categories on the current checklist.

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He also voiced strong opposition to the National Gay Task Force petition, pointing out that the Southern Baptist Convention "has repeatedly resolved to oppose any efforts which would seek to legitimize or normalize homosexuality or which would have that effect."

"Requiring a license applicant to consult with proponents of homosexuality," he added, "would be a highly unacceptable step in that direction."

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Hope To Get Distinguished  
Communications Award

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Comedian Bob Hope will be guest of honor and receive the Distinguished Communications Medal during the 10th Annual Abe Lincoln Awards program March 1. The awards, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, will be held in Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth.

The Abe Lincoln Awards, created by the commission, honors broadcasters across the nation for their achievements in advancing the quality of life in America and helping the industry enrich its service to the public.

The Distinguished Communications Medal honors persons who have made unusual contributions to this country and is given only when a worthy recipient is determined. Eight Abe Lincoln Awards, as well as special service awards, will be presented this year to outstanding broadcasters.

Hope is especially cited for the "continual contributions he has made to his fellowman and his country," said Paul M. Stevens, commission president.

"Bob Hope has emerged on the world scene as unique in his compassion for the American serviceman and in his ability to make the world laugh even in its darkest hours. For four generations his humor and personality have bridged the gap between every segment of American life."

Hope is the first entertainer to receive the medal. Previous recipients include the late Walt Disney, Billy Graham, Lady Bird Johnson and former CBS president Frank Stanton, now president of the American National Red Cross.

Often hailed as "The King of Comedy" and "Mr. Humanitarian," Hope's appearances before benefit audiences, servicemen and heads of state have netted millions of dollars for charitable causes, provided encouragement in war zones and included five command performances before Britain's Royal Family.

Although not widely publicized, Hope's generosity to various organizations and universities is almost a legend. He and wife Dolores initially donated 80 acres of land on which the Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage is located. The medical center is one of the beneficiaries of the Bob Hope Desert Classic, a professional golf tournament which has raised nearly \$7 million in 19 years.

In a recent article Hope said, "My philosophy is, and always has been, that four good laughs a day are the best therapy. Being in front of people makes my juices flow. It's my adrenalin, my high."

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China Recognition Increases  
Need For Prayer, Cauthen Says

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--United States recognition of communist China presents a great prayer challenge to Christians but does not yet indicate any softening of that government's ban on Christian work, Baker J. Cauthen said.

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Cauthen, executive director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and a former missionary to China, said the board stands ready to respond to any indication that the communist government would admit missionaries "and would certainly welcome it if they did."

China was Southern Baptists' first foreign mission field. Work started there in 1846, and the last Southern Baptist missionary left in December 1951. At one point more than half of the denomination's total mission force was in China--210 out of a total 413 missionaries in 1937. The board now has 2,914 missionaries in 94 countries.

Cauthen urged prayer for the work in Taiwan, where Southern Baptists have had missionaries since 1948, and for Christian people inside mainland China "that they may continue doing what they can for the Lord."

"We also need to pray," he said, "that God may use these recent events to help bring about the reopening of churches in China and permission for resumption of mission work with China's 800 million people."

The Foreign Mission Board leader made his comments after President Jimmy Carter's dramatic announcement Dec. 15 that the United States would open diplomatic relations with communist China in January and give notice to Taiwan that it will end its defense agreements within a year.

LeRoy B. Hogue, chairman of the Southern Baptist missionary organization in Taiwan, telephoned the board Dec. 18 to report that missionaries have had "absolutely no unpleasant experiences" as the result of President Carter's announcement. He told area secretary George H. Hays that mission and convention leaders plan to issue a joint statement "that we expect to continue working together without any kind of break in relationships."

Southern Baptists have 107 missionaries assigned to Taiwan. Six of these are new missionaries scheduled to leave for Taiwan soon after the first of the year. Hogue told Hays that these new personnel should proceed with their plans to fly to Taiwan. He said missionaries have taken no special precautions "because there has been no need for it" in Taipei or other parts of the island.

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Baptists Seek Survival  
Of Only Turkish Church

By Stan Hasteley

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WASHINGTON (BP)--In the wake of an official communication from the government of Turkey that Southern Baptists' only congregation in that country is unauthorized, denominational leaders have protested to both the Turkish ambassador to the United States and the U.S. State Department.

The English-speaking Galatian Baptist Church, located in Ankara since 1966, was described as unauthorized by Turkish officials in early December. The church, which serves mainly Americans but includes other English-speaking Baptists, was led until earlier this year by James F. Leeper, a Southern Baptist missionary. Leeper was expelled from Turkey on September 29, and has been given 20 days of his choosing to return to Ankara to remove his family and belongings.

Until the Turkish communication to the State Department, however, the controversy seemed to center around Leeper, despite the lack of official charges against him. What has become apparent in recent days is that the existence of the congregation itself is at stake.

J. D. Hughey, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Europe and the Middle East, in a letter dated Dec. 14, asked the U.S. State Department to seek official authorization for the congregation by the Turkish government.

Hughey pointed out in his letter to Alan Flanigan, who directs Turkish affairs at the State Department, that the church has repeatedly sought official recognition by Turkish officials, but without success. Hughey did note, however, that in early 1971 the governor of Ankara gave his oral approval for the congregation's existence.

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Leeper, himself, Hughey said, was granted a residence permit in 1977 "on the basis of his being pastor of the church...It is strange that it took the Turkish authorities 12 years to announce that the church is illegal," Hughey said. The residence permit was revoked in 1978.

Hughey told Flanigan that the Foreign Mission Board is "depending on" American officials both in Ankara and Washington to help obtain the necessary permission for the church to continue its operations. He also said, "We are ready to follow whatever procedure may be required" in acquiring official authorization for the congregation's survival.

The letter from Hughey followed by several days a strongly-worded protest to the Turkish ambassador in Washington by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

James E. Wood Jr., the joint committee's executive director, wrote Ambassador Melih Esenbel expressing "profound concern for the present and future status" of the congregation. "We strongly support the right of this English language Baptist church to hold services just as we are similarly committed to the right of other faiths to do so in our respective countries," Wood continued.

Wood indicated that the Baptist Joint Committee was not asking for "special privilege" for Baptists, "nor are we motivated simply out of concern for religious liberty as applied only to Baptists."

The letter asked the ambassador to indicate the "official status of the church and to recognize the "right of the members to the services of a duly ordained Baptist minister."

Wood also expressed "grave concern" over the final decision to expel Leeper despite the intervention of Baptists in the U.S. Wood and Hughey were two of a group of four Baptist leaders invited to the Turkish embassy in Washington two months earlier to confer with Esenbel on the Leeper case.

During that meeting, Esenbel said he understood Leeper had been charged with disseminating "religious propaganda," which, he said, violates Turkish law. He said any effort to influence people to change their religion falls under the umbrella of "religious propaganda."

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Roy Bass Dies  
In Lubbock

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LUBBOCK, Texas (BP)--Roy B. Bass, 60, Texas Baptist lay leader and former mayor of Lubbock, died Dec. 16 of an apparent heart attack while working out with his son at the local YMCA.

A memorial service was conducted Dec. 18, at Second Baptist Church, Lubbock, where Bass was a charter member and a deacon. Burial was in Resthaven Memorial Park, Lubbock.

Bass' wife, Anita, is on the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and is a member of the search committee to recommend a successor for retiring Executive Secretary-Treasurer Porter Routh.

Bass, who earned bachelor of arts and bachelor of law degrees from Baylor University, Waco, Texas, was partner in Bass & Hobbs, Attorneys, Lubbock. He was a trustee of Baylor, a former member of the Texas Baptist executive board, and a member of the advisory council of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

The family asked that memorials go to Baylor University or the building fund of Second Baptist Church, Lubbock.

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