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Supreme Court To Consider
Legality of Hyde Amendment

By Stan Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court will consider the constitutionality of the Hyde amendment forbidding publicly-financed abortions in most cases.

In a brief announcement agreeing to hear three cases involving a Chicago physician, the justices nevertheless reserved the right to decide only the question of whether it has jurisdiction in the case, rather than pronouncing judgment on the Hyde amendment.

For the past several years, Rep. Henry J. Hyde, R-Ill., has enjoyed remarkable success in tying up federal spending bills, especially to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, until Congress agrees to his restrictions.

Until this year, Hyde succeeded in having Congress agree to fund Medicaid abortions only in cases where the life of the mother is at stake, in cases of reported rape or incest, or where long and severe physical damage to the mother would result if an abortion were not performed.

In action this fall, he was successful in getting Congress to eliminate the third exception for the 1980 federal budget.

The practical effect of the Hyde amendment has been the reduction of federally-funded abortions from several hundred thousands a year to a figure estimated between 2,000 and 3,000.

Provided the court chooses not to sidestep the basic issue, the action agreeing to hear the case represents a victory for women's rights advocates who have fought the Hyde restrictions both in Congress and the courts.

While women's rights activists have fought the restrictions, anti-abortionists have strongly supported Hyde's efforts and have interpreted his successes in tying up spending legislation as an indication that they should pursue their ultimate objective of having all abortions banned.

The dispute has polarized the American religious community as perhaps no other in recent memory.

On one side, the anti-abortion forces have been led by the U.S. Catholic bishops, although Catholic activists in the movement point to support from other religious groups, including the Mormons, certain Lutherans, and numerous evangelicals.

The so-called pro-choice forces have marshalled most of the mainline Protestant denominations and have enjoyed the support of several Jewish organizations as well.

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If the high court decides the issue on its merits, it will consider the constitutional question of whether poor women who are denied publicly-financed abortions are denied equal protection of the law as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

The justices will also be asked to determine if the Hyde amendment denies due process of law to indigent women.

Also at stake is the question of whether state legislatures, in this instance Illinois', may further restrict Medicaid payment for abortions only to cases where the life of the mother is at stake.

No date has been set for oral arguments and no decision is expected before next spring.

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Hughes Defends
Washington Politicians

By Rex Hammock

Baptist Press
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INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (BP)--Former U.S. Senator Harold E. Hughes, D-Iowa, lashed out at comments by columnist Jack Anderson during a national conference on abuse of alcohol here.

Hughes, speaking at the same conference, admitted that he was angry about Anderson's portrayal the previous night of a large number of governmental officials as drunken, boisterous politicians.

"Sure we have had our failures," retorted Hughes, a self-proclaimed "recovered" alcoholic. "But there is no greater percentage of drunks in government than any corporation in America. They are just more visible."

Hughes declared there is "another side to the story" about Washington.

He told the audience of representatives of 40 religious bodies that "God is also at work in Washington."

He described the prayer groups and Bible studies meeting now in all branches of the government. "There are men and women in Washington searching for the will of God for their lives and for this country," he said.

Hughes objected to Anderson's failure to finish the stories of some of the politicians with drinking problems whom he mentioned. "Wilbur Mills, whom Anderson alluded to, is now traveling around the country trying to help other alcoholics. He is saying 'Yes I'm a drunk,' but God has healed me."

Turning to the Iranian situation, Hughes called for restraint by the American people in attitudes toward punitive military action against Iran. "For people who proclaim peace, we sure have a war-like attitude," he said. "If you took a survey, I think you would find that a majority of Americans would like to go to war without thinking of the consequences of what this would mean."

"War," he declared, "is the symbol of the failure of man--of everything evil."

"The real battles for the world," he said, "are being fought in the heavens. And spiritual warfare is fought through prayer."

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Abstinence Prevents
Alcoholism, Valentine Says

By Robert O'Brien

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (BP)--Foy Valentine delivered "a clarion call for total abstinence from alcohol" at a National Conference of Religious and Lay Leaders on the Impact of Alcohol and Other Drugs here.

Valentine, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, spoke to more than 200 religious and lay leaders representing 40 different denominations and religious groups. Their views ranged from abstinence to responsible moderation as a method of dealing with alcohol problems.

"I believe alcohol abuse can best be prevented by abstinence from alcohol," Valentine declared of a problem all conference participants recognized as probably the nation's number one public health problem.

"Abstinence from alcohol prevents alcohol problems, just as lung cancer can best be prevented by abstinence from cigarettes," he said. "I believe that abstinence is the only live option for churches which expect to deal successfully and effectively with the alcohol problem."

Valentine, who holds a doctorate in Christian ethics, said "the notion of 'responsible drinking' is a misnomer. In this culture, in these times, all drinking is irresponsible."

As for "social drinking," which Valentine also labeled a misnomer, he said, "In this culture at this time all drinking of alcohol is 'anti-social drinking.'"

Valentine told his listeners he has no ambivalence about alcohol. "I believe that what this country needs is not to spend ever-escalating tax dollars to talk about alcoholism and to have programs for alcoholics--even though I believe we should help people recover from problem drinking and alcoholism. What this country and the church both need is to engage in an effective program of preventing alcohol consumption."

"I believe we ought to put alcohol in our automobile gas tanks, but not down our human esophagi," said Valentine, who declared that alcoholism is a sin.

"I don't intend to offend anyone by saying that I choose to be a total abstainer, and that I choose to preach that the moral thing to do about alcohol is to reject it personally and to pursue what I consider to be the requirements of love and justice in opposing it socially and politically," Valentine declared.

Criticizing current national efforts to combat alcoholism, Valentine declared, "I believe the present qualifying, excusing, sweet-talking, soft-pedaling, pussy-footing approach to alcohol and alcohol problems is religiously hypocritical, morally reprehensible, socially irresponsible and culturally suicidal."

Although he took a firm stand against consumption, Valentine also emphasized that "churches must not neglect ministry as we provide counsel and furnish support systems for alcohol addicts and their families, taking care to bind up the wounds of any bruised and battered victims we find."

He called for churches to take courageous action to combat alcohol problems, declaring, "Church action, related to alcohol problems, is inadequate. Our churches and denominational leaders must be willing to fund aggressive efforts to deal with the alcohol problem and to promote abstinence."

Church Must Heal,
Not Browbeat

By Lillian M. Moir

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (BP)--The church must be a loving, caring, supportive, serving community, if it is to be effective in dealing with the root causes of alcoholism and drug-related problems.

Lucius Walker Jr. of Demarest, N.J., director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, told a national conference on the impact of alcohol and other drugs that the church's role is "not to browbeat but to heal, not rejecting any of God's children no matter their condition in life."

The church, he said, must be inclusive and must not "be silent in the face of exploitation. It must be prophetic, willing to take risks, lose friends, see budgets shrink and even lose jobs." To be less will decrease its ability to deal with the problems addressed, he added.

He called for deep involvement in building "healthy communities" as part of understanding the church's responsibility under God to be at work in the world.

The knowledge explosion produced ill effects as well as healing effects, he said. "We had assumed a war on alcoholism could put the sickness on the run. We have come to the rude awakening that we must face the reality that we are dealing not with root causes but with symptoms."

"The early boom and excitement ended in a whimper and the sobering reality that public policy, will and resources are not committed to the task," Walker declared.

Although the victim of alcoholism receives more humane treatment and less stigma is attached, "we have not lessened the fact that prescription barbituates are being used increasingly. Medical practice seems hopelessly committed to a pharmacological approach to health care," he said.

In the past, alcoholism was "perceived to be a problem of the lower classes, the poor and minority persons. Now we know alcoholism is no respecter of class, race or place. We have become a drug culture," Walker asserted.

"Alcohol and drug abuse has become a far more serious crisis than we realize," he said. "The crisis is exacerbated because we have not faced up to the festering economic, political and social sores which plague and abuse our society, causing substance (drug) abuse and feeding on the problems it breeds," said the former National Council of Churches staff member.

Increasingly therapists and pastors are recognizing the need to treat the whole family, not just the individual, he said. "For therapists, pathology becomes redefined as a structural or functional imbalance in the family. For the pastor, sin or immorality becomes redefined to embrace corporate greed as well as individual need."

He urged the banding together of churches as the only means of having an impact or making a contribution to the lessening of the problems. "We have not addressed the problems which contribute to alcoholism unless we understand that our calling is to participate with God," he said.

Congressman Seeks New Law
To Curb Religious Vandalism

By Stan Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Brooklyn, N.Y., congressman has introduced legislation which would make destruction of churches and synagogues, as well as their contents, a federal crime.

Rep. Stephen J. Solarz, D-N.Y., said he was taking the action because of a recent rash of "suspicious" church and synagogue fires in his district and "an apparent increase" in such incidents elsewhere.

Solarz noted that in one recent act of vandalism against a Brooklyn synagogue, the building was gutted and nine Torah scrolls destroyed by fire. Members of the synagogue buried the scrolls, some of them more than 200 years old and valued at several thousand dollars each, in a public ceremony attended by religious and civic leaders.

Solarz told the gathering that "if it's a federal crime to burn a cross on someone's lawn, then it should be a federal crime to burn a Torah scroll in someone's synagogue. The spirit of freedom of worship is violated unless there are substantial penalties for interfering with a congregation's right to worship without fear."

In a statement announcing introduction of the bill, H.R. 5917, Solarz said that U.S. Justice Department officials have "sidestepped" cases involving such acts of vandalism because they claim that unless they suspect that specific federal laws, such as those dealing with explosives, have been violated, they have no jurisdiction.

The congressman said also that he will seek support for his bill from the nation's religious community "and especially from those denominations with a history of persecution."

He will also ask for support from both liberal and conservative members of Congress under the belief that liberals, "who traditionally support civil rights bills," and conservatives, because it is a "strong anti-crime measure," will be attracted.

Himself a Jew, Solarz pointed out in his statement that many of his constituents were survivors of the Jewish Holocaust and of the pre-World War II "Krystalnacht," an infamous night in which Jewish synagogues and other Jewish-owned property were destroyed by the Nazis.

"Many of these people remember it as if it happened yesterday," he said. "But to see it happen again, here in America, is as unbearably painful as a recurring nightmare."