



## **BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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81-155

### House Clears Extension Of Voting Rights Act

**WASHINGTON (BP)**--The U.S. House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly to extend indefinitely the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

By a 389-24 vote, the House cleared the extension, including a controversial provision which requires nine states--mostly from the South--and sections of 13 others to obtain Justice Department approval before making election law changes.

The House-approved bill, however, provides new bailout standards for the affected states and jurisdictions beginning Aug. 6, 1984. At that time, states and other jurisdictions can be exempted from the pre-clearance requirements by demonstrating to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia that they have avoided any voting discrimination during the previous 10 years.

Once exemption from the pre-clearance provision is granted, the D.C. District Court would retain jurisdiction for the next 10 years during which the exemption could be revoked if new voting rights violations occurred.

While smaller jurisdictions such as cities and townships could seek exemption under the House bill even if the states or counties of which they are a part do not qualify, states or counties could not be exempted unless the smaller jurisdictions within them meet the nondiscrimination standards. Minor violations which are quickly corrected would not bar a state or other jurisdiction from qualifying.

The only provision in the new bill with an expiration date is the bilingual election requirement which was extended until 1992.

Action in the Senate is unlikely before early next year when the Judiciary Committee is expected to begin hearings.

During earlier House hearings, Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission Executive Director Foy Valentine urged extension of the act which he said "has served our nation well."

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Hunger, Families Top  
Social Issues of 80s

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**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)**--Efforts to strengthen families and alleviate world hunger are the most important social issues of the 1980s, according to a survey of Southern Baptist churches involved in social action and social ministries.

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Other pressing social issues facing churches and communities in the coming decade are divorce, parent-child relations, economics, problems related to aging, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty and peace, according to the pastors surveyed.

Nearly three-fourths of the pastors ranked marital difficulties and divorce as the most serious problems in their churches. Half indicated parent-child relationships and economic concerns also are serious problems.

Raymond E. Higgins II, who correlates Christian social action and Christian social ministries for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Christian Social Ministries Department of the SBC Home Mission Board, conducted the survey among 54 pastors, the majority of whom are from churches with 1,500 or more members in downtown areas of large cities.

"The survey is a consciousness raising tool for Southern Baptists to become more involved in meeting community needs through social ministry and social action in their churches," Higgins said.

"In light of Reagan Administration cuts in social programs, the survey also gives some perspectives on what kinds of programs churches are already involved in, and reveals what programs are most likely to be needed," he added.

A majority of the pastors indicated their churches are involved primarily in social ministry and to a lesser degree in social action. A little more than a fourth of the churches said they are involved about equally in social action and social ministry.

"This means that our churches are more involved in ministering to individuals who are hurting than in correcting problems which are causing the hurt," Higgins said.

The pastors said their churches are currently ministering to the hospitalized, the aging, youth, the homebound, the hungry, singles, the poor, divorced persons and one-parent families.

A majority of the churches said they offer counseling, recreational activities, food centers and transportation services for the elderly and handicapped.

According to the survey, half of the churches coordinate their programs with other Southern Baptist churches. Some churches coordinate their programs with other denominations or organizations in their communities.

More than 83 percent of the pastors said preaching is an important factor in raising awareness about Christian social action and social ministry.

There is a wide divergence in the way the pastors said they choose social issues on which to preach. The pastors indicated they make their choices based on the significance of the issue in the Bible, the significance of the issue among persons in the community, the significance they personally place on the issue, the significance of the issue among the members of their own churches and the significance of the issue in the mass media.

About half of the pastors say Southern Baptist churches will be more involved in social action and social ministry in the 1980s. A fourth indicated the same level of involvement, while 16.7 percent said churches will be less involved.

O'Hair Dealt Double Defeat  
As High Court Opens Term

By Stan Hasteley

WASHINGTON (BP)—Atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair sustained two separate losses as the U.S. Supreme Court refused to disturb lower court rulings upholding the legality of invocations at city council meetings and of Christian and Jewish holiday displays in the rotunda of a state capitol.

The rulings were among the first handed down by the court as it began its 1981-82 term on the first Monday of October.

O'Hair challenged the custom of opening each meeting of the Austin, Texas, city council with prayer and the practice of displaying a nativity scene and a Jewish menorah in the Texas state capitol, also in Austin.

She and her younger son, Jon, brought suit against the city of Austin and state of Texas in the two actions. She lost her cases in the federal district court and appeals to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

At the nation's high court, all justices agreed to deny the appeals, except for senior member William J. Brennan Jr., who indicated he voted to hear the challenge to nativity scenes and menorahs at the capitol.

In addition to the O'Hair rejections, the court also took action in the following religion-related cases:

--Left standing a Nebraska Supreme Court holding that church-related schools must comply with minimum state standards for teachers. A Nebraska law requiring all school teachers to have at least a baccalaureate degree is reasonably related to the state's "compelling interest" in the quality of education, the lower court ruled earlier. The challenge to the law was brought by Faith Baptist Church, Louisville, Neb., an independent congregation.

--Let stand rulings in a pair of church property disputes decided earlier in California. Both cases involved congregations which had seceded from the Protestant Episcopal Church. In one, a state court ruled that after the split the property belonged to the congregation because nothing in its articles of incorporation or in the canons or rules of the national church ceded property rights to the mother body.

But the same court, in a separate action, held that another Episcopal congregation must give back its property to the national body because it was incorporated after the Protestant Episcopal Church enacted a new canon claiming local church property in cases of secession.

--Left standing a Wisconsin ruling that a state resident who donated his farm to Herbert Armstrong's Ambassador College was entitled to declare the deed null and void when he demonstrated to the court's satisfaction that the deed was the product of "undue influence" by church officials.

--Agreed not to review an Illinois court decision that the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas) are not entitled to collect damages or attorneys' fees they sought after the city council of Evanston, Ill., revoked the group's "special use" permit.

--Refused to review a homosexual soldier's court martial conviction for sodomy despite his claim that the Uniform Code of Military Justice's ban on sodomy had religious origins. That fact, two lower federal courts ruled earlier, is insufficient to sustain the soldier's claim that the law amounts to an unconstitutional establishment of religion.

During its first week back on the bench, the high court also heard oral arguments in what may be its most important church-state case of the term.

Attorneys for the University of Missouri--Kansas City and a student religious group known as Cornerstone argued a case that presents a direct conflict between the no establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment.

The university, which in 1972 issued a regulation forbidding any group to conduct religious services on campus, argued that its rule is a legitimate attempt to avoid establishing religion. But the students maintain that the regulation denies them free exercise of their religion.

A decision in the case is not likely before the end of the year at the earliest.

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Legislated Prayer "Ill-Advised,"  
Says Baylor Church-State Expert

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10/8/81

WACO, Texas (BP)—A movement to legislate prayer in the public schools would be in violation of the religion clauses of the First Amendment, according to James E. Wood Jr., director of Baylor University's J. M. Dawson Studies in Church and State.

Calling such legislation "ill-advised" in an editorial in the spring 1981 issue of the Journal of Church and State, Wood said legislating prayer in the public schools, "whether by a state or a municipal government or a public school board, is in harmony with neither authentic religion nor a free society."

Anticipating congressional efforts in the fall of 1981 to authorize or mandate prayer in the public schools, Wood said such "imposition of the authority of the state over religion" is in violation of both the free exercise of religion and the separation of church and state.

Wood said that all too often the general public does not seem to know what the U.S. Supreme Court "has said and has not said" with respect to prayer and Bible reading in the public school.

"The court never ruled against voluntary prayer in the public school or in public buildings," he said. The issue is the intrusion of government into religious affairs, he said.

Wood wrote that most major religious groups believe "that the religious experience of children is not the business of either the government or the public schools... (but) rather, a responsibility and a sacred trust of the family and the church."

The strongest support for the Supreme Court's decisions, Wood declared, have come from the major religious denominations of America, both Christian and Jewish.

He observed that the strongest support for state-sponsored prayers in the public schools comes from "individuals without denominational portfolios, public officials, professional evangelists and independent or nondenominational religious associations and congregations and not from mainline churches or denominations as such."

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He warned that a recent proposal by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), to remove the issue of prayer in the public schools from the jurisdiction of the U.S. Supreme Court and all federal district courts is "dangerous" and could lead to similar measures for other controversial issues such as abortion and busing.

"The entire Bill of Rights could be seriously eroded," he said. "Success of such a move could mean that no part of the Bill of Rights— freedom of speech, press, assembly or the right of petition—would be secure from abridgment by a simple majority vote of the Congress."

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(Wood formerly was executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C.)

The Night The Lights  
Went Out In Lusaka

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LUSAKA, Zambia (BP)—Where was John Maddox when the lights went out?

Maddox, pastor of Wynne Baptist Church, Wynne, Ark., was waiting to preach at Chelston Baptist Church, Lusaka, Zambia, when the church generator quit.

The choir, in the midst of a special number, sang from memory in the darkness, but neither the congregation nor Maddox could see for the message.

Then, Maddox, who was there with a group from Arkansas participating in a stewardship campaign in Zambian Baptist churches, suggested that one of the Southern Baptist missionaries at the service turn his car lights toward the building.

Using the car lights to see the congregation and a small flashlight to see his Bible, Maddox preached his sermon and several persons accepted his invitation to step out of spiritual darkness to make a decision for Christ.

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Now a Christian,  
Man Repays Debt

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—One recent Monday morning a neatly dressed, nervous young man called on T.A. Thacker, pastor of Louisville's Midlane Park Baptist Church.

Twenty-eight years old, he told Thacker he had become a Christian and was rectifying some earlier mistakes in his life. Twelve years ago he had broken into this church and stolen \$16 from the church office, breaking a window in the process.

Now he had come to ask the congregation's forgiveness, and to repay his debt. He did not have much money but would pay back the \$16 plus the cost of the broken window as he was able.

When Thacker related the story to the congregation, they were so impressed they voted to forgive the remaining "debt" and asked the pastor to write the young man a letter of commendation and encouragement.

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