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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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84-18

'Unique Ways' To Finance
 ACTS Launch Approved

By Dan Martin

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission have authorized "unique ways" to provide the financing necessary if the American Christian Television System (ACTS) goes on the air in May.

In order to get ACTS on the air, RTVC President Jimmy R. Allen has been seeking "unique ways" of "raising the capital needed," which is not available through regular channels of denominational support.

"Simply put," said one RTVC source, "we don't have the money to get it (ACTS) on the air, and we're scrambling around trying to find the way."

During their January meeting, trustees approved preliminary plans to provide three elements essential to the network: a network operations center, a satellite transmitting facility (uplink) and receiving dishes for television stations and cable systems.

Trustees also approved changes in a fourth essential: the rental agreement for one of 24 transponders on Spacenet I, a satellite to be launched by GTE Spacenet Corp.

The items--necessary if the network is to go on the air in May--would have cost an estimated \$3.5 million, which neither the RTVC nor ACTS has.

The operations center, which creates the broadcast signal to send to the uplink, was projected to cost between \$800,000 and \$1 million. The uplink, which receives the signal and sends it to the satellite, was expected to cost a like amount, and receiving dishes--primarily for use in "new work areas for Southern Baptists"--were estimated at \$1.5 million.

Allen told trustees "denominational programs" such as the unified plan of finance, the Cooperative Program, "simply are not equipped" to begin new things, and explained ACTS, which is expected to be carried on some 1,000 cable systems and reach 30 to 40 million people by the end of the first year, will be very big even at the beginning.

Luke E. Williams, RTVC executive vice president, explained ACTS planners "have known all along" the items were necessary and the "money would have to come from somewhere" other than Cooperative Program allocations.

During their meeting, trustees approved a plan whereby they will lease equipment necessary for the operations center, okayed a proposal to obtain the uplink time through a complicated arrangement with a group of Dallas investors and endorsed a renegotiated contract with GTE Spacenet Corp., which will provide reduced rental on the transponder as well as \$1.5 million to purchase receiving dishes.

Trustees voted to lease equipment for the operations center from Sussex Corp. of Great Neck, N.Y., at a cost of about \$22,500 per month for five years. At the expiration of the lease period, the RTVC can buy the equipment at "very favorable rates," Williams said.

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"We have had it in our minds from the time we got into this (ACTS) that this money would not come from Cooperative Program funds; that it was money we would have to raise," Williams said, adding funds to pay the first year's lease--\$270,000--currently are "in hand."

Trustees authorized Allen to execute the uplink plan, under which the RTVC will provide land it currently owns, as well as a building, to a group of Dallas investors who will provide a microwave tower, dishes and electronics equipment.

The plan, Allen said, will result in "almost zero cost," to the RTVC to send its signal to the satellite. The investors who are forming DFW Uplink, Inc., will sell transmitting services to other satellite customers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

The proposal for DFW Uplink, Inc., was presented to trustees by Ralph Tacker, a Dallas builder and developer, who worked as a full-time Mission Service Corps volunteer with the RTVC in 1982-83 as chairman of the agency's advisory committee to low power television stations.

Williams said Tacker and a "group of interested and friendly Baptist laypersons" were in the process of forming DFW Uplink, Inc., in early February. Tacker, Williams said, "has finished his service but is still on call for certain things."

The third action authorized Allen to renegotiate RTVC's current contract with GTE Spacenet Corp., which called for lease payments of \$175,000 per month. The new contract, to which GTE Spacenet has already agreed, reduces the payments to \$138,300 per month.

In the renegotiated arrangement, GTE Spacenet will provide \$1.5 million over the next year with which RTVC will purchase "approximately 150 receiving dishes at an estimated \$10,000 each" for use on the ACTS network, Williams said.

All of the cable TV systems and television stations that will carry ACTS will need receivers to get the signal from the satellite. In most areas, groups of Southern Baptist churches will purchase the dishes.

In areas such as the Northeastern United States, where Southern Baptist work is not strong, the RTVC will purchase receiver dishes, guaranteeing ACTS will be carried on some of the nation's largest cable systems, even though Southern Baptist support is minimal.

Williams added the yearly lease of \$1,659,600 will be offset by a previously announced plan of requesting participating churches to pay 10 cents per resident member per month.

"It will take about 1,800 churches with an average of 750 members to make it (the system) work. We see it as something very do-able," Williams added.

According to RTVC officials, Spacenet I will be launched April 12. It will be carried into space by a French Ariane rocket from French Guiana, South America.

After checking out the uplink and other equipment, ACTS will begin transmitting in May. A formal kickoff of the new network is scheduled for the opening night session of the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City, Mo., June 12.

In connection with the April 12 launch of Spacenet, the RTVC is planning dinner rallies across the country to promote ACTS.

A live satellite broadcast will be sent over Holiday Inn's Hi-Net Communications system. Viewing stations will be set up in more than 50 Holiday Inns across the country where interested persons will be invited to preview ACTS programs and be challenged to support the effort financially.

The meeting is a part of Phase II Launch of the development program, under the direction of Billy Barber, vice president of development services.

Baptists Oppose Vatican Move;
Helms Pledges To Delay Vote

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--With Southern Baptist officials joining a broad range of religious and civil liberties groups protesting what they described as a rush by the Senate to confirm William A. Wilson as ambassador to the Vatican, a Foreign Relations Committee member has pledged to put the brakes on the process, at least temporarily.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., announced at Wilson's confirmation hearing before the Subcommittee on European Affairs he would ask Foreign Relations Committee chairman Charles Percy, R-Ill., to delay an expected Feb. 7 vote by the full committee on the nomination.

Helm's action would put off a vote at least until Feb. 21, the next business session of the full committee. Helms indicated he would consider putting an additional hold on the nomination beyond that date if the perception persists that issues involved in the dispute over sending an ambassador to the Vatican have not been adequately aired.

Helm's announcement came as Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. and Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs Executive Director James M. Dunn joined representatives of virtually every U.S. Protestant group in presenting a unified front against full diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

In addition to the religious groups, the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State also testified against the action.

Helms had been listed in September by Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., as a co-sponsor of his legislation passed by the Senate as a rider to a State Department authorization bill which lifted an 1867 ban against funding of diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

However, during his remarks at the hearing, Helms declared he had never supported establishment of full diplomatic ties with the Vatican. On Jan. 26, Lugar removed Helms' name from the list of co-sponsors of the legislation.

Draper told the panel chaired by Lugar there "are probably few issues on which Southern Baptists are so unified as this one," saying they are "disturbed that a particular church will have a special relationship with our government, that a representative from one denomination will have access to the President in a way that no other religious body does."

The Euless, Texas, pastor said Southern Baptists are also "disturbed by the divisive effect this action will have in the country by favoring one religious body over all others."

The SBC president expressed further concern that reversal of the 116-year-old policy against U.S. diplomatic ties with the Vatican had reached the confirmation stage of sending an ambassador to the Holy See and "to this point, no congressional panel has asked to hear from the public on the desirability or even constitutionality of such a move."

Draper cited numerous Southern Baptist Convention and state Baptist convention actions opposing the move.

"I hope the virtually unanimous Baptist opposition to diplomatic relations with the Roman Catholic Church will not go unnoticed by this Committee, and I urge you to postpone confirming any ambassador to the Vatican until there have been full hearings on the constitutionality and necessity of any such move," he concluded.

Dunn underscored Draper's concern over the fast pace of congressional action on the Vatican issue. The Senate, Dunn charged, "has behaved in a manner unworthy of its sacred trust in its hurry to appoint an ambassador to the Pope."

The Baptist Joint Committee chief executive said the move to establish official relations with a church not only violates separation of church and state mandated by the First Amendment but would be a "burdensome albatross" on American missionaries overseas by raising the possibility that such workers are agents of the U.S. government.

Another Southern Baptist minister, Robert L. Maddox, newly elected head of Americans United, declared the move would violate the no establishment clause of the First Amendment because the Holy See is a religious entity.

While one Catholic organization representative testified in favor of an ambassador to the Vatican, Maddox and ACLU witness John W. Swomley highlighted concerns expressed by other Catholic leaders that the proposed diplomatic ties could be used by U.S. administrations to influence positions of the U.S. Catholic bishops.

Others opposing an ambassador to the Vatican were Robert P. Dugan Jr. of the National Association of Evangelicals, Bert Beach of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Gaston Cogdell of the Church of Christ and Dean Kelley of the National Council of Churches.

After the hearing, Dunn urged Baptists to contact their elected representatives. "We've never had a more clear cut challenge to the principle of separation of church and state," he said. "Only if hundreds of thousands of citizens phone and write their Senators and Congressmen will we have a chance to stop this flagrant violation."

Further consideration of the Vatican issue is scheduled Feb. 9 when a House of Representatives appropriations subcommittee will consider the State Department's request to reprogram fiscal 1984 funds to pay for the new Vatican relations. In addition to considering the reprogramming request, the committee is expected to hear from the Baptist Joint Committee and other groups opposed to the establishment of formal diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Washington bureau of Baptist Press

Helms Says Baptists, Others
Can Affect Vatican Outcome

By Larry Chesser

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The fate of William A. Wilson's nomination as ambassador to the Vatican may depend on what Southern Baptists and other groups opposed to the action do in the next few weeks, Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., told Baptist Press.

Helms, a Southern Baptist, announced his plans to slow down the Senate confirmation process during a hearing where representatives of U.S. Protestant denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, charged the Vatican issue was moving on a fast track in the Senate without opportunity for public input.

Prior to Helms' announcement he would ask Foreign Relations Committee chairman Charles H. Percy, R-Ill. for a delay, a full committee vote on the nomination was expected Feb. 7. On Jan. 30, Senate majority leader Howard H. Baker Jr., R-Tenn., told colleagues he hoped the Senate would conclude Wilson's confirmation before a Feb. 10 recess.

Helms told Baptist Press he agreed with Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. and other witnesses from the religious community who criticized the swift congressional action to reverse the nation's 116-year-old policy against diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

Draper and the other witnesses "had a good point," Helms told Baptist Press. He added while he agrees with opponents of sending an ambassador to the Vatican, he emphasized he has no quarrels with Wilson.

His action, Helms said, has already resulted in calls from the White House urging him not to delay the confirmation. But Helms insisted it was "a mistake" for the administration to make the nomination and there is "no urgency" to speed the matter through the Senate without hearing from opponents of the move.

In September the Senate passed an amendment to a State Department authorization bill sponsored by Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind. repealing an 1867 ban on diplomatic ties to the Vatican. The House of Representatives took no action on the Lugar language. But it remained in the final bill after being accepted by a House-Senate conference committee.

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Opponents of the action have a point, Helms said, in protesting the way the issue was handled. Although he repeatedly emphasized he is in no way critical of Lugar's handling of the situation, Helms said he and other senators were unaware the repeal had occurred.

"I didn't know anything about it," Helms said, adding he was chairing a hearing of the Senate Agriculture Committee when the vote took place.

"It's embarrassing," he added, noting several senators probably have been asked by their constituents where they were when Lugar's amendment cleared without opposition.

Citing busy schedules as the reason some measures pass without much notice, Helms said the event is an "example of how we ought not to conduct Senate business."

Helms said he had been listed as an original co-sponsor of Lugar's legislation due to a staff mistake. Lugar withdrew Helms' name from the co-sponsor list Jan. 26.

The "bottom line," Helms said, is "I am going to try to give them (opponents of full diplomatic ties with the Vatican) enough time" to have their constituency contact elected officials.

If Baptists and other opponents communicate their views well, Helms suggested, members of the Senate may approach the confirmation vote saying, "Bill Wilson's a great guy, but..."

It "depends on the work" that opponents do in the interim, he concluded.

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ACTS Awarded Honolulu
Station In FCC Lottery

Baptist Press
2/3/84

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The American Christian Television System (ACTS) has been selected through another government lottery for a low-power television station in Honolulu.

ACTS had filed for a low-power station on channel 50 in Honolulu. Because there were two other applicants for the station the Federal Communications Commission used a computer-assisted random selection procedure to choose the winner Jan. 27.

The FCC will now grant ACTS a construction permit for the Honolulu station, although anyone who objects to the lottery decision has 15 days to ask the FCC to reconsider. Once the construction permit is granted, ACTS has one year in which to build the station.

Previous decisions have awarded ACTS construction permits in Anchorage, Alaska, and Brownwood, Texas. ACTS also has been given permission to build low-power stations in Tyler, Texas, and Paragould, Ark.

ACTS has applied for more than 130 low-power TV stations in 35 states. The network will begin next May delivering family Christian entertainment daily through TV stations and cable television systems nationwide. The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission is developing the network and programming.

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