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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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**News Analysis****98th Congress Enacts Major  
Church-State Legislation**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)—Two major milestones—passage of "equal access" legislation and lifting of a longstanding ban against U.S. diplomatic relations with the Vatican—highlighted the 98th Congress' church-state record.

Apart from these actions, this Congress followed the pattern of recent ones by rejecting numerous controversial proposals on prayer in public schools, tuition tax credits and abortion.

By lopsided margins in both houses, the 98th Congress declared voluntary student religious groups have the same access to before-and-after school meetings as other student-initiated secondary school groups. Through this action, the nation's lawmakers took their first substantive step toward defining the proper role of religion in public schools since the historic 1962-63 school prayer decisions by the Supreme Court.

For two decades following the high court ban on state-written and state-sponsored prayer and Bible reading in public schools, Congress considered dozens of proposals to overturn the decisions. But none of these proposals—ranging from constitutional amendments to court-stripping bills—ever cleared both houses. In fact, before the passage of equal access this year, the only measures to clear were meaningless riders on appropriations bills.

Sponsored by Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, R-Ore., and Reps. Carl D. Perkins, D-Ky., and Don Bonker, D-Wash., the equal access measure drew broad bi-partisan support as well as nearly-uniform backing from the U.S. religious community.

The equal access measure faced earlier competition from President Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment to restore state-sponsored religious exercises in public schools. But the president's proposal, after a lengthy struggle to clear the Senate Judiciary Committee and a two-week floor debate, was soundly rejected by the Republican-controlled Senate. The 56-44 vote was 11 short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage as 18 Republicans joined 26 Democrats in opposing the measure.

Like recent congresses, this one attached riders to the Department of Education's spending bills to bar use of its funds to prevent implementation of programs of voluntary prayer in schools, but these efforts have been purely cosmetic because the language merely keeps the department from an activity it has never pursued.

Late in its first session, the 98th Congress quietly reversed a 117-year ban against U.S. diplomatic ties with the Holy See after Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., attached an amendment to a State Department authorization bill lifting the prohibition. The action occurred without hearings or debate, prompting criticism of the process as well as the action itself.

In efforts to secure Senate confirmation of William A. Wilson as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican as well as funding of the new embassy, administration officials repeatedly insisted the relationship would be with the Vatican city-state rather than with the Roman Catholic Church.

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But administration claims were soon contradicted by Wilson's counterpart, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio Pio Laghi who charged: "Some mistakenly tried to justify the American government's action by implying that it was entering into a diplomatic relationship not with the Roman Catholic Church as such, the Holy See, but rather with the sovereign Vatican City-State." Contrary to administration claims, Laghi asserted in a speech at Catholic University of America that papal diplomacy "rests essentially upon the spiritual sovereignty of the Holy See and not upon dominion over a few acres in the heart of Rome."

A lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the congressional and administration action has been filed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Despite a strongly-worded resolution opposing the Vatican move adopted at the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City, the SBC Executive Committee last month put off a decision on whether to join the suit.

Although the president got his way with Congress on the Vatican ambassador issue, two other Reagan requests--tuition tax credits for parents who send their children to private and parochial schools and a constitutional ban on abortions--were defeated in the Senate.

Near the end of the first session, the Senate easily turned back the president's tuition tax credit proposal, 59-38, and repeated calls by the president to pass the measure during the second session drew no response from the Republican-controlled Senate.

A constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's controversial 1973 abortion ruling came no closer to passage. Sponsored by Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, the measure nearly failed to emerge from the Judiciary Committee and was defeated 49-50 during the first session, thereby falling 17 votes short of the necessary two-thirds.

The Congress did maintain restrictions on federal funding of abortions except to save the mother's life. At one point, the Senate voted to expand the exception to include rape and incest, but the Senate later yielded to the House position which kept the single exception.

Several tax law changes in the 98th Congress had implications for churches and clergy.

A nearly two-year effort to overturn by statute a 1983 Internal Revenue Service ruling that reversed a longstanding policy of allowing clergy to take normal mortgage interest and real estate deductions in addition to receiving a tax-exempt housing allowance ended short of its goal. However, a delay in implementation of the ruling for clergy who owned or had a contract to purchase their residence by Jan. 3, 1983, was enacted as part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 1984. Congressional opponents of the IRS position vowed to continue legislative efforts in the 99th Congress.

Early in 1983, Congress made wholesale changes in the Social Security system, sharply raising rates paid by self-employed persons, including clergy who by law participate in the nation's retirement system as self-employed workers.

The 1983 reform package also for the first time mandated Social Security participation for non-ministerial church employees. But the next year, Congress voted to permit churches who opposed such participation for "religious reasons" to make a one-time, irrevocable decision not to pay into the system on behalf of their employees. Employees of churches taking this election must then participate as self-employed persons.

Another provision of the Deficit Reduction Act passed this year makes it more difficult for IRS to investigate and audit churches.

During both sessions, the 98th Congress held the line on non-profit postal rates, rejecting Reagan administration requests to slash the subsidy which reimburses the Postal Service for reduced rates charged a variety of non-profit mailers.

In other actions, the 98th Congress:

--Designated the first Monday in January as a national holiday in honor of black civil rights leader and Baptist preacher Martin Luther King Jr. The new holiday observance will begin in 1986.

--Killed the Civil Rights Act of 1984 when the Senate rejected the measure, despite a lopsided 375-37 passage in the House and 63 co-sponsors in the Senate. Reaching the Senate floor during the closing days of the second session, the measure was designed to overturn the Supreme Court's 1984 ruling in the Grove City College case that only the particular program or activity of an institution receiving federal funds, rather than the entire institution, is subject to federal anti-discrimination laws.

--Decisively passed a new drunken driving law which rewards states which go along with its recommended drinking age of 21 while punishing those that do not with loss of up to 10 percent of their federal highway funds.

--Approved tougher new warnings for cigarette packages and advertisements.

--Passed a \$158.1 million child abuse prevention program.

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Daughter's Death Teaches Couple  
'Our God Can See Past Today'

By Bonita Sparrow

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Greta Smith was beautiful. She was 17, the youngest of three daughters, just two weeks out of high school with the whole world shining ahead of her.

And when she died in an automobile accident, Fritz and Shirley Smith of Tyler, Texas, reacted as parents have always reacted to such obscenity with shock and raw grief.

Nine years later there are still tears but they have learned to live with their pain. "We are not the first parents to lose a child," they say and they have spent the long days since then telling others in similar circumstances how God shields and gives grace in such times.

"The pain is always there," Shirley told Jimmy R. Allen when she and Fritz appeared recently on "Life Today," which Allen hosts on the ACTS network. "But even though Greta was killed, our child is not lost. We know exactly where she is. She's safe and we'll see her again."

A nurse was the first to arrive at the scene of the accident and pulled Greta's body from the wreckage.

"She said when she pulled Greta out of the car there were absolutely no vital signs at all," Shirley related. "Then she said, 'I thought she was the most beautiful child I had ever seen. Her face was just glowing.' Later, another friend told me they had seen Greta in church the day before and her face was glowing then. I felt it was because she was so near to the light of the world that it already had begun to show."

After the Smith's first reaction to the news, the Holy Spirit "came and just surrounded us with his mantle to comfort us, to keep us from going under," said Shirley. "We had walked with other people through such a tragedy but we never thought we would have to go through it."

They buried their daughter, and part of their hearts, on Wednesday. On Sunday they were in their places in church. At the end of the service they met each other at the altar.

"I just couldn't handle it," said Shirley, "and I had to give it to God to help us if we were going to be able to sing unto him."

God accepted their pain. Fritz (president of the Fritz Smith Evangelism Association, Inc., in Tyler, Texas) went into a crusade the next day. Less than two weeks later, at the end of the crusade, he was able to share publicly how God had helped them survive.

"We were still in the first stages of dealing with the grief," Shirley said. "But it helped us to let people know God had given us strength to take the next step and he would do the same thing for them. God is bound by his promises to supply the grace we need for every circumstance."

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It is still not easy to deal with the constant sense of loss. "But the tears are for us," reminded Shirley. "She's safe."

The Smiths have learned from the tragedy. "I've developed a confidence in the Lord that I never had before because he helped take this terrible thing and use it for good," said Shirley. "God reveals to us gradually the things we will need and the different ways he reveals them are precious to me." Some needs are met in the form of a hug from a church friend. Some others come from conversation.

Someone had told Shirley there would not be victory until she could thank God for the experience. Weeks later, while reading a devotional book, that praise came.

"I reached the place where I could honestly thank the Lord for loving her so much he took her out of what he knew she faced in her future that I didn't know," Shirley said. "I have not changed by mind about that. We don't think God caused the accident to happen. We feel he allowed it to happen."

Their tragedy has enabled them to help others. "Just last week we were talking with a woman who had lost a three-year-old daughter," Shirley said. "Greta's last words to me were 'I love you, Mom.' That woman's baby's last words were 'I love you.'" We shared and prayed and cried together and I felt we helped her."

They have advice for others in the same situation. "Stay in the Word," Fritz said. "Trust that the Lord knows what he is doing and that, as Ethel Waters said, 'He don't mak no mistakes.' We have met people who went through this experience 10 years ago and it's still an unfinished agenda with them. We don't know why. We do know God is there."

You don't get angry with God, they said. "You don't blame each other. It's a walk through the valley, and it's dark, but he never lets you go. Gradually you see the light and one day you are in the sunshine."

"It will always hurt," Shirley added. "Pain has its own challenge but you can look for ways to turn that grief experience into a positive one for someone who hasn't been able to cope with a child's death.

"After all," she said softly, "God can see past today."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Radio and Television Commission.

Fire Destroys Baptist  
School In Zimbabwe

Baptist Pr #  
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SANYATI, Zimbabwe (BP)—A late night fire, apparently caused by electrical problems, destroyed the Sanyati Baptist Primary School in Sanyati, Zimbabwe, evicting 563 students and causing \$70,000 in damage.

The students now meet under trees on the Sanyati Baptist mission station, site of the school in north central Zimbabwe.

Despite the students' rescue attempts, the Sept. 23 blaze destroyed furniture, materials and newly received textbooks inside the building.

Started by the Baptist Mission of Zimbabwe in 1953, the school is now operated by th Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe.

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Valentine Stresses Need  
For Action On Women's Issues

By David Wilkinson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Recent studies of the work trends of American women underscore the need for Southern Baptists to respond creatively to issues related to the role of women in society and the church, according to Foy Valentine.

"The 'traditional family'—whether real or imaginary—is gone," said Valentine, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "No longer is the typical family one in which the husband earns the paycheck while the wife stays home and raises the children."

Valentine pointed out economic realities of the last 20 years have changed dramatically the American family:

—Latest figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal white males no longer dominate the work place. Last year for the first time white males comprised less than half the labor force; in 1960 they made up 60 percent. The change reflects the surge of women into the labor market in the past generation.

—As the economy shifts increasingly toward service jobs rather than traditional blue-collar and manual jobs, women are finding more work opportunities than ever. Two-thirds of the jobs added to the economy since 1960 have been filled by women.

—Studies indicate that in families with annual incomes of \$30,000 to \$35,000, more than two-thirds of the wives work; in households with incomes of \$40,000 to \$50,000, more than 70 percent do so. Some economists believe a large percentage of middle-class families have maintained their economic stability in recent years largely because of the entrance of the wife into the work force.

—Professional and vocational standing among working women continues to improve. Nearly 70 percent of women with college degrees work. The working woman today is much more likely to have professional training and skills than was true earlier.

"These trends are significant," Valentine said. "If our churches are to help strengthen families, we must come to grips with the social and economic forces that are changing families."

He pointed out the trend toward more working wives is reflected in changes in the size of families and the age at which couples start their families.

A recent report from the National Center for Health Statistics found a substantial increase in first births to women in their 30s, in contrast to a small decline in first births for women under 30. Between 1981 and 1982 the birth rate increased by 10 percent for women aged 30-34 and by 18 percent for women aged 35-39.

"An apparently increasing number of working wives eventually decide with their husbands not to have children," said Valentine, "but this is not the norm. Most working wives are finding ways to combine marriage, careers and motherhood."

The church, he said, "must help them respond effectively to the challenges of living out their Christian faith in the work world as well as in the home."

Valentine also pleaded for churches to open new doors of service for women.

"Women, just as men, yearn to serve God through the local church and through the denomination," he said. "Having encouraged women to discover ways of using their God-given gifts and talents, we should support them in using those abilities to serve God in the church. God is no respecter of persons."