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October 25, 1985

85-132

House Panel Hears  
 About Rural Hunger

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)—Only five days before a group of Southern Baptists were to go into Appalachian hollows to investigate domestic hunger firsthand, a House committee heard testimony on rural hunger and poverty in America.

Appalachian residents and hunger experts painted a poignant picture of life in that 13-state region for members of the House Select Committee on Hunger Oct. 22.

A single mother of four recalled the odyssey that led her from her childhood home in rural Tennessee to Florida with its promise of a better life and finally back to her beloved Appalachian mountains.

Letta Casey and two of her children now live in a small house on an acre of mountainside ground in Roses Creek Hollow, Tenn. She and 13-year-old Henry Lee and nine-year-old J.J. tend a garden to supplement their monthly \$153 food stamp allotment.

"During August, if we hadn't had our garden we would have starved—not just been hungry, but starved," Casey testified. "With our garden and food stamps we manage pretty well most months. What really saddens me is to think of the people who only draw food stamps for a living."

Casey described how her neighbors, most of whom have no transportation, are forced to shop at small rural groceries, which have to pay more—and therefore charge more—for their merchandise than large in-town supermarkets.

Climbing rent and utility expenses also siphon food money away from many of her neighbors' budgets, Casey continued. She added, however, since her house has no electricity or running water, she doesn't "have to waste money on those bills."

Casey recalled how happy she was when school began this year because she knew her boys then would have at least two hot meals a day.

Another witness urged the panel not to "just look at Letta and see how bad she has it, but see how strong she and her children are."

Teri Vautrin, who lives in Dungannon, Va., movingly told of the strength and pride of the Appalachian people.

"There is a strength you get from growing up in Appalachia," Vautrin testified. "Of all the things that my mommy and daddy gave their babies it was that anybody in America can succeed with hard work and determination. That anybody could get an education. I always believed in the justness of this land because my mommy and daddy did and taught us to."

Vautrin and her husband are both students, working to gain educations so to better provide for their family. Since both receive federal educational assistance in the form of Pell Grants, they have lost their eligibility for food stamps.

"On one hand, the government tells us, 'OK, you are in poverty, we will help you get trained for a job, to get an education.' Then they turn around and take food from our children because we accept this help.

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"My daddy said anybody could get an education. What he didn't know, and what we don't understand, is why that education hurts. Don't force us to decide between food in our babies' mouths and food for thought."

Vautrin, as well as Casey, stressed the need for jobs in Appalachia. Those jobs could give the Appalachian people a chance to develop long-term solutions rather than continuing to depend on federal handouts, both women testified.

America has a problem of hunger and a problem with hunger, testified Robert A. Couto, director of Vanderbilt University's Center for Health Service. The problem of hunger stems from the lack of a definition of hunger and few and inadequate measures of it, he explained. The second problem comes from hunger's being an anomaly in a country known for its great wealth, he added.

Couto, widely recognized as one of the nation's leading authorities on Appalachian social, economic and health issues, headed a 1983 survey conducted in four central Appalachian communities.

That survey found hunger to be a function of income rather than family makeup or characteristics. Hunger was found in homes headed by males as well as females, in homes of working poor as well as welfare poor and in homes of whites as well as blacks.

Couto offered several solutions, of which providing employment at decent wages led the list. He also suggested a new program, based on a Head Start model, that would utilize community residents and organizations to meet the needs of low-income families through services and education.

"To ignore the hunger of some of our citizens because the many are satisfied is to starve the sensitivity that distinguishes us as humans and the concern that distinguishes us as Americans," Couto testified. "Without that sensitivity and concern, it is not our bodies that go hungry but our souls."

The House panel also heard about the variety of health problems caused by hunger. Jesse Walker, a physician who has worked in the Clear Fork, Tenn., area since 1958, testified about those problems as well as "overly complicated" government regulations in food and health assistance programs.

Jane Threatt, president of In Our Own Way, described her organization's plan to send representatives from more than 30 national organizations and agencies, including the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, into three communities in late October to take a closer look at hunger in Appalachia. Through this Appalachian project, Threatt testified, projects and programs will be developed between grassroots people and resource holders to help alleviate hunger.

"When I think of hunger, I think first of Appalachia—not because the hunger and devastation are greater in Appalachia, but because they are closer," Threatt stated. "It seems to me that as we reach out to the suffering countries of Africa, we must look through the window of Appalachia."

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Southern Baptists Join  
In Appalachian Project

By Kathy Palen

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Southern Baptists' interest in helping alleviate hunger in Appalachia was evidenced by the presence of four representatives from Southern Baptist agencies and institutions at a recent House hearing.

In addition, WMU leaders from several state conventions participated, through funds supplied by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, in a project designed to provide an up-close look at hunger in Appalachia.

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The project, which was sponsored by the Washington-based, non-profit organization of In Our Own Way, sent representatives of organizations and agencies from across the country into three Appalachian communities to visit with rural Appalachian women about the problem of hunger. The project, which took place in late October, concluded with a session in Knoxville, Tenn., during which project participants and Appalachian residents worked to develop solutions to the hunger problem.

Nathan Porter, domestic hunger consultant for the Home Mission Board, has assisted with the Home Mission Board's participation in the Appalachian project. He also was present during the hearing before the House Select Committee on Hunger Oct. 22.

"I think the fact that the representative from the Department of Agriculture and all of his aides left without even listening to the testimonies of the women from Appalachia or the other witnesses says something about the way some government officials view this problem of hunger," Porter stated following the hearing.

Porter referred to the departure from the hearing room of Robert E. Leard, the Agriculture Department's administrator of food and nutrition service. Leard left following his testimony despite House Select Committee on Hunger Chairman Mickey Leland's invitation that he stay to listen to poor women from Appalachia tell their stories.

Leland, D-Texas, seemed to echo Porter's concerns throughout the hearing.

"Today we are immersed in debate on implementing sophisticated space warfare," declared Leland. "What good will it do us to have a sophisticated defense system when those it is designed to protect are living in want and unable to develop their own potential? We must commit the political will toward eradicating poverty of this degree. It is the duty of this Congress to hear and work on behalf of all individuals."

Rep. Carl C. Perkins, D-Ky., also voiced his frustrations over the growing plight of hunger in Appalachia.

"It seems like a large part of this country wants to turn their backs on the problem," he said. "There are people who seem to think it's the Appalachian people's fault—that if they were good for something they wouldn't be in this situation."

In addition to Porter, other Southern Baptist representatives attending the hearing were Robert Parham, director of hunger concerns for the Christian Life Commission, Richard L. Hoffman, vice-president for academic affairs at Mars Hill College and James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

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Trustees Praise Southwestern's  
Academic Excellence

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary praised the school's "academic excellence" during their semi-annual meeting Oct. 21-23.

That theme echoed through chapel addresses, dedications, meetings with faculty and staff and the annual president's report.

"The strength of this seminary is the excellence of its academic leadership," said Drew J. Gunnells Jr., chairman of the board's academic affairs committee. Gunnells spoke in chapel Oct. 22 in observance of Higher Education Week.

"On this holy hill there is a commitment to carrying out the Great Commission with academic excellence," he said. "We have a high estimation of what God wants us to do. We didn't get to be the largest academic institution in theological education by accident," Gunnells said.

Gunnells assured students trustees pay careful attention to selecting and maintaining the best faculty possible. He noted they look at prospective teachers' "commitment to Christ," "academic excellence," and "track record in a local church."

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"No one is brought to this seminary who does not practice what he preaches," he said.

Gunnells recognized members of the academic council, headed by President Russell H. Dilday Jr., whom Gunnells called "the leader of our times."

Other academic recognitions came during a faculty luncheon with trustees.

Three faculty representatives gave testimonies about their teaching experiences at Southwestern.

"I've found that teaching is not all talking--it's listening," said Truett Myers, an adjunct instructor in the communications department.

"Students have a lot to say. In listening, I've felt a renewal of my own commitment," said Myers, who was an associate producer at the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission before coming to Southwestern in 1979.

"I wouldn't trade jobs with anybody," said William Reynolds, associate professor of church music, who came to Southwestern in 1980.

Reynolds noted a great sense of family pride in his relationship with Southwestern. His uncle, I.E. Reynolds, founded the school of church music and drew rough sketches for Cowden Hall, the building that houses the school.

"I enjoy helping students see our heritage of music in the Southern Baptist Convention," said Reynolds, who led the Baptist Sunday School Board's music department for 25 years.

"When I came to Southwestern this fall it was something special," said James Heflin, who began his teaching duties as assistant professor of preaching in September.

He said his first thoughts were, "It cannot be true" and "I cannot do it."

"I almost turned down the opportunity" to come to Southwestern, said Heflin, who formerly taught at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He said the warmth of faculty members, some who were his teachers, convinced him to come.

"Southwestern, above all else, is a place of learning," Dilday said at the luncheon. "The goal of this education is to help men and women become good ministers of Jesus Christ, related to the local church."

At a dinner later in the evening, Dilday presented his seventh annual president's report to trustees.

"This is really a report about important people," he said. "It reflects--as in 77 other years--the remarkable blessings of God. Its pages give evidence of answered prayer, visions fulfilled and supernatural miracles," Dilday said.

Among highlights of the academic year 1984-85 are:

- Enrollment of 5,086 students, the most in any theological school in the world;
- Conferring of 967 degrees, the largest number ever in an academic year;
- Launching of the chair of prayer and spiritual formations;
- Adoption of Upward 90, the \$50 million strategic plan for 1985-1990;

--Expansion of the Lucille Freeman Glasscock World Missions and Evangelism Center, which was dedicated during the trustee meeting.

O.M. Cates, Retired Georgia  
Evangelism Secretary, Dies

ROME, Ga. (BP)—O.M. Cates, former evangelism secretary for the Georgia Baptist Convention, died Oct. 23 after a series of three heart attacks. He was 67.

Cates had been director of Georgia Baptists' evangelism efforts for almost two decades, from 1963 to 1983 when he retired.

A native of Tifton, Ga., Cates was a graduate of University of Georgia, Athens, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Cates was a member of the board of directors for the SBC Foreign Mission Board for eight years.

He had been pastor of Venice Baptist Church, Venice, La., before returning to Georgia churches in Sale City, Tennile and Macon.

Before entering the ministry in 1948, he taught agriculture at two Georgia high schools, was a high school principal in Sale City and was district manager of the Cotton Producers Association.

He was survived by two sons, Robert M. Cates of Rome and John M. Cates of Charlotte, N.C., a daughter, Mrs. Kay Peterson of Marietta, and three grandchildren. The family requested that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Cates Fund for world hunger through the Georgia Baptist Foundation.

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