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February 27, 1986

86-26

House Subcommittee Holds
 Educational Voucher Hearing

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)—Sitting before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee, Secretary of Education William Bennett spent four hours defending his proposed educational voucher plan.

Bennett and three Department of Education aides answered a battery of questions posed by members of the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education during a Feb. 26 hearing.

The Equity and Choice Act of 1985 (TEACH), if passed by Congress and signed by the president, would allow parents of educationally disadvantaged children to obtain vouchers that could be "spent" at the school—public or private—of the parents' choice.

In his testimony before the subcommittee, Bennett emphasized the importance of parental choice in the educational arena. By permitting parents to choose the best available schools for their children, the proposed voucher program would improve Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, he said.

Chapter 1 provides for federal funds to be sent to public schools that furnish educational services for children who are economically and educationally disadvantaged.

"The administration has proposed this legislation because we believe that our less-wealthy and less-privileged citizens have the same hopes for their children that other parents have," Bennett said. "We believe that it is not enough to allocate large sums of money in their behalf. They need the opportunity to choose the right programs for their children."

Both Republican and Democratic members of the subcommittee, however, challenged Bennett as to the proposal's real merits.

Rep. Augustus F. Hawkins, D-Calif., questioned whether the proposal actually would provide a meaningful choice. Hawkins, chairman of the subcommittee as well as the overall House Committee on Education and Labor, pointed out the average voucher would be worth about \$610, while the average private school tuition is \$890.

Bennett responded by noting while a voucher might not meet the tuition at some private schools, it would be better than nothing and would "go a long way to reaching \$890."

The subcommittee's ranking Republican, Rep. William F. Goodling of Pennsylvania, countered with his concern that the plan might be "teasing the poor." While agreeing a voucher would provide a "better chance than nothing" for parents of Chapter 1 students to afford private schools, Goodling asserted in reality it would still be "no chance at all."

Another concern to which Bennett responded was the constitutionality of the proposed bill. He acknowledged some critics, including Hawkins, contend that using a voucher at a religiously affiliated school would violate the principle of separation of church and state.

Before introducing the voucher proposal in mid-November, Bennett repeatedly vowed to find a way around last summer's Supreme Court decision that held unconstitutional New York City's program of sending public school employees into private schools to provide Chapter 1 services.

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"We should remember that Congress currently requires that Chapter 1 services be provided on an equitable basis to educationally disadvantaged children attending private schools, including those enrolled in religiously affiliated schools," Bennett said. "And we should remember that our proposal gives aid to parents--not schools. This arrangement is similar to the one upheld by the Supreme Court in Mueller v. Allen, where Minnesota allowed parents a tax deduction to help cover private or public school education."

According to an Education and Labor Committee staff report, however, vouchers would not be comparable to tuition tax credits or existing constitutional methods of aiding private school students. "A tax credit is 'redeemed' by the parent and ultimately ends up in the parent's pocket," the report stated. "The voucher funds would be redeemed by the private school and ultimately end up in that school's coffers."

Rep. Harris W. Fawell, R-Ill., questioned the proposal's method of allowing vouchers to be used to pay for general tuition rather than limiting their use to the purchase of compensatory educational services.

Under the administration's plan, a voucher could be used for compensatory services, for tuition or for a combination of compensatory services and tuition, at a parent's option.

Bennett responded Chapter 1 services are to help students "get up to speed," and some schools can meet that goal through general education programs.

Fawell, as well as other subcommittee members, also expressed concern about the possibility that the proposal would allow unfair competition between public and private schools. The voucher proposal would not place the same requirements--including a number of civil rights regulations--on private schools receiving Chapter 1 funds as it would on similar public schools.

"Public schools are on the frontline of democracy," said Fawell. "They have so many requirements. Yet none of these responsibilities will affect private schools."

Goodling, a former high school principal, echoed that sentiment, asking, "Why shouldn't the rules and regulations be exactly the same?"

Rep. Dale E. Kildee, D-Mich., criticized the Reagan administration for never asking for Chapter 1 support prior to introducing the voucher proposal. "The president has never asked for any support for Chapter 1," Kildee said. "In fact, he has asked for cuts in the program. Shall we invite more schools to the education table when we are providing less food?"

Bennett answered, however, "the bottom line is how much children are learning, not how much the federal government is spending."

Legislation on the educational voucher plan has been introduced into the House (H.R. 3821) by Rep. Pat Swindall, R-Ga., and into the Senate (S. 1876) by Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah.

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SBC Will Be Renewed,
Moore Tells Seminarians

Baptist Press
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Winfred Moore believes the Southern Baptist Convention will emerge from its current controversy with a renewed spirit of cooperation.

Moore, SBC first vice president and pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, was "Pastor of the Day" at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., in late February. He spoke during chapel and in seminary classes while on campus.

"Young people, it is a conviction of my heart that when you get out of seminary there's going to be a Southern Baptist Convention, operating institutions like this one, agencies that send missionaries around the world," he said.

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"There's going to be a convention praying for you, working with you, sending you wherever God has called you to go. Don't give up on it for one minute," said Moore, a member of the SBC Peace Committee.

"We're going to come out of all of this stronger than we've ever been before--stronger in the faith, stronger in spirit, stronger in our cooperativeness, one with the other," he stressed.

Basing his chapel sermon on Luke 9:57-62, Moore urged seminarians to commit themselves fully to Jesus Christ and to his church. "This is what we need for the church in this hour--not people who are connected to the church, but people who are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and his church," Moore said.

"We must find a commitment that is not half-hearted to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that it doesn't make any difference where he sends us or what the task is to which he calls us. (We need) a commitment that says, 'Lord, I'm ready. Send me. I'll go.'"

Moore reminded seminarians God does not accept substitutes for obedience to him. "The first requirement of God upon you and me is that we be obedient to what we do understand of what the Word of God says to us," he insisted. "There's no substitute."

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Tift College To Merge
With Mercer University

By Jack U. Harwell

Baptist Press
2/27/86

MACON (BP)—Tift College will merge with Mercer University as of June 1 and become Tift College of Mercer University.

The merger is subject to approval of the Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee, which meets in Atlanta March 11.

The historic merger agreement was announced at a press conference in Macon, Ga., Feb. 21 by R. Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer, and O. Suthern Sims Jr., president of Tift.

Boards of trustees of Tift and Mercer met that same day to recommend the merger, which has been under discussion for several months with Godsey, Sims and Georgia Baptist Convention leaders.

Tift, which was chartered 1849, will continue to operate on its 60-acre site in Forsyth. All faculty members will be offered one-year contracts by Mercer.

Current on-campus enrollment at Tift is 205 students. In addition, the Forsyth school enrolls 310 students in its off-campus centers.

"This brings to culmination an idea first proposed by the Tift trustees in 1897 when the college, then known as Monroe College, offered the institute to Mercer as the "women's branch" of Mercer. Again in 1982, Tift approached Mercer concerning merger," Sims noted.

"It is obvious that enrollment in the women's college will remain small and that the present stable financial condition of the college is not permanent," he added. "An affiliation with Mercer will assist its student enrollment and give financial stability and assurance of preserving the nature and purpose of the institution."

"Mercer University values the heritage and history of Tift College," Godsey said. "We believe merger of these two institutions will strengthen the university and will assure the continuing identity of Tift in the context of Baptist higher education."

The Tift campus has 17 building, plus nine other buildings on 175 acres of adjacent property in Forsyth. Replacement value of the buildings is estimated at \$17.8 million.

The college has \$6.2 million in endowment and a current budget of \$3.7 million. Tift is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

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As part of the merger agreement, if approved by Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee in March, current Tift students will be accepted as students of Tift College of Mercer University.

The 9,200 alumni of Tift will be accepted as alumni of Mercer.

The merger will mean that Mercer will contain 10 schools as of June 1--the liberal arts colleges in Macon and Atlanta; schools of business and economics in both cities; engineering, medical and law schools in Macon; the pharmacy and nursing schools in Atlanta and Tift in Forsyth.

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Unstable World Conditions
Sending Refugees To U.S.A.

By Joe Westbury

Baptist Press
2/27/86

MIAMI (BP)--Ethnic and language groups not presently in the United States will become a part of the American scene if world conditions fail to stabilize, participants at a Southern Baptist language missions conference were told.

The new breed of immigrant and the American ethnic will provide Christians with a challenge heretofore unimagined, speakers told nearly 200 Baptist language missions leaders from throughout the nation.

"The refugees you see on your late-night newscast could well be candidates for resettlement in your community," said Nicholas Van Praag, public information officer for the United Nations high commissioner for refugees.

Nearly 60 million refugees have been displaced since the end of World War II, double the number for the 50 years prior, Van Praag said. One million refugees have been resettled from Southeast Asia since the fall of Saigon in 1975, with 700,000 of those finding their way to the United States, he added.

Van Praag, who gave a global perspective to the refugee discussion, said only four nations--the United States, France, Canada and Australia--are involved seriously in refugee resettlement.

Oscar Romo, director of the language missions division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board which sponsored the conference, said an estimated 30 percent of the persons born in Third World countries between now and the year 2000 eventually will migrate to America.

"The Central America crisis is already impacting our nation," Romo said. "The Hong Kong Treaty of 1997 is bringing thousands to our shores. And the continuing turmoil following the Philippine election will impact us as will other world crises."

Churches need to see ethnics in their communities as the unique individuals they are and seek to minister to their needs, Romo added. He then identified seven categories which churches could use readily to identify ethnics and begin a ministry to meet their needs:

Nuclear Ethnics--people who immigrated to or were born in the United States, yet who live in an isolated setting from the mainstream of English-speaking American life.

Ethnic Americans--people who identify themselves with a language-culture group, migrated to the United States and are American citizens. Often they refer to their country of origin as their home.

American Ethnics--people who identify themselves with a language-culture group and were born, raised and educated in the United States. They are bilingual and bicultural and are capable of living in two worlds simultaneously; yet they are proud of their heritage.

Culturally-Aware Ethnics--people who identify with a language-culture group when it is convenient and beneficial.

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Alienated Ethnics--people whose visibility identifies them as ethnic, yet their relationship with their ethnic heritage and language is nonexistent.

Amalgamated Ethnics--people who constantly are in search of their heritage and, thus, are uncomfortable in whichever setting they find themselves at the moment.

Typical Americans--people whose wide spectrum of experience reflects the fact that America is comprised of diverse cultures.

Gerald Palmer, vice president for missions at the Home Mission Board, called for more ethnic diversity on the leadership level of the denomination.

"Differences in culture must not disenfranchise persons from associational, state and agency leadership positions," Palmer said. "Most of our leadership meetings are not representative of the ethnic diversity of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The denomination must continue to channel its massive power into new missions ventures to reach all people, regardless of their cultural heritage, Palmer warned. A fragmentation of that power could be disastrous, he said.

"With a failure to use power appropriately, as in the tragedy of the space shuttle, the debris of Southern Baptists could be scattered across the nation and the world," he added.



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