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92-101

House subcommittee OKs  
Freedom of Choice Act

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Freedom of Choice Act took its first step toward passage and another showdown between Congress and the president when a House of Representatives subcommittee approved the abortion-rights bill June 18.

The Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights voted 5-3 for final passage along party lines, with the Democratic members favoring the bill. The Freedom of Choice Act, H.R. 25 in the House and S. 25 in the Senate, is expected to be considered soon by both the House Judiciary Committee and Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.

FOCA supporters say the bill will do no more than enact legislatively the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion. Opponents argue it will go beyond Roe and prohibit restrictions such as parental notice for minors now allowed by the court. Both the American Civil Liberties Union, which supports the bill, and the Justice Department, which opposes it, agree with opponents' assessment of FOCA's effect.

"This legislation is the most radical pro-abortion legislation Congress has ever considered," said James A. Smith, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission director of government relations. "FOCA is a federal mandate on every state to require the availability of abortion on demand from conception to birth."

Six amendments offered by Rep. Henry Hyde, R.-Ill., a pro-life leader, failed in the subcommittee. All would have allowed states to require some restrictions. Included were allowances for parental consent for minors, informed consent for women, spousal notification and a ban on abortions based on the sex of the unborn child. Five of the amendments failed by a voice vote. The ban on sex-selection abortions faltered when it could do no better than a 4-4 vote.

"Our assertion that this bill should be called 'the freedom to kill bill' is validated by the subcommittee's action to turn away every amendment which would limit the bill's scope, even the amendment relating to sex-selection abortions," Smith said.

Pro-choice leaders reportedly hope Congress will approve the legislation this summer and force President Bush to veto it, a move they believe may damage his re-election chances entering the fall campaign. The president has said he will veto FOCA. Democratic candidate Bill Clinton and independent Ross Perot both have indicated they will sign it.

Rep. Don Edwards, D.-Cal., chairman of the subcommittee, is chief sponsor of FOCA in the House.

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Book describes 5-year  
struggle of POW, family

By James Dotson

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CLARKESVILLE, Ga. (BP)--As a prisoner of war in Vietnam, Ben Purcell formulated elaborate escape plans as a way of retaining sanity during his five years in solitary confinement -- but two failed efforts made further success unlikely.

So he turned to craftsmanship. Aluminum toothpaste tubes were one of his few raw materials and a favorite project was a miniature communion set.

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The set joined a small bamboo cross in his barren room as symbols of his sustaining faith in Christ.

"Each month I would set the table with a few grains of rice and with a crust of bread and some water," Purcell said in an interview. "Whenever I thought I was being hammered on too much, I would look at the cross and say, 'Someone suffered a lot more than you'll ever have to suffer.'"

Now a retired U.S. Army colonel and operator of a 10-acre Christmas tree farm near Clarkesville, Purcell said it was that faith -- combined with a persistent hope of impending freedom and love of his wife, Anne -- that sustained him during the captivity from 1968 to 1973.

"It's sort of like the Scripture: Faith, hope and love, and the greatest was love. That was the strongest motivating force I had, to survive and come home," Purcell said.

Their stories -- his in the prison camps and hers at home -- are detailed in "Love and Duty," a book released earlier this year by St. Martin's Press.

Purcell, a lifelong Baptist, is an active layman and deacon at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Clarkesville where he made a profession of faith in Christ at age 10.

It was Jan. 30, 1968, when shots fired at a helicopter over Vietnam forced Purcell to experience the war from a new perspective. In a few short minutes, his status changed from that of a lieutenant colonel in a comfortable command position to that of a prisoner of war in a country that did not recognize even the minimum standards of the Geneva Convention.

His capture began a five-year struggle made all the worse because of a fellow prisoner's false statement -- under severe duress -- that Purcell was an important Army general who had been on the cover of Time magazine. He was not that important but he did turn out to be the highest-ranking American officer captured during the war.

The pressure on Purcell grew only worse as he acquired a reputation as a master of escape. In this first attempt, he made it to Hanoi after an ingenious plan that included building a small drill from stiff wire that allowed him to eventually cut a hole in his cell door. After his second escape, camp officials built an additional guard tower with a view directly into his cell 24 hours a day.

A regular feature of his captivity was the interrogation session in which his captors tried to "refirm" his thinking. Rather than outright torture, however, one of the primary motivations was simple: If he would confess to "crimes against the Vietnamese people" they would allow him contact with other Americans. He refused, and he remained alone.

"My mind is made up," he wrote that he told one of his primary interrogators. "I no longer have any fear or anxiety for my welfare. I know who holds the keys to my release from this prison and it isn't you."

But the book is more than a narrative of Purcell's exploits. It also is a tale of how his wife, Anne, struggled with the frustration of being an "MIA (Missing In Action) wife."

"MIA wife. What a horrible category!" she writes in the book. "It's like being in limbo -- maybe a wife, maybe a widow; nothing definite to put my mind at rest."

During most of the period, she and their five children lived in Columbus, Ga., and attended Southside Baptist Church where Anne said she received the essential support of friends.

Eventually she became a vocal advocate for the POW/MIA cause, even to the point of the entire family going to the Paris peace talks to plead for the release of prisoners. By that time, she had received confirmation of Purcell's POW status.

In March 1973 the long wait ended, the couple was reunited and Purcell went on to complete seven more years of military service before retiring in 1980 as a colonel. His last assignment was as a professor of military science at North Georgia College in Dahlonega where he and Anne met as students in 1949.

Their lectures have been a source of inspiration for many over the years and Purcell said they had always planned to write a book about their experiences. But it wasn't until they were approached by a literary agent in 1985 they began work on the project.

They originally signed with a secular publisher but the deal fell through when the publisher said it had "too much religion in it" and wanted to focus more on the military aspects.

Purcell refused.

"It's our story and it's got to be told the way we experienced it," he said he told the publisher. In January 1991, however, St. Martin's Press, also a secular publisher, showed an interest and the book was published.

"The reason they liked it so well was because of Anne's story and the faith that is in the book. So we felt all the time it was an instrument God would use in his own way and in his own time," Purcell said.

The book is now scheduled to be condensed in the December issue of Readers' Digest and an article based on the book also is expected to run in Guideposts magazine next year.

Purcell hopes he will have an opportunity to revisit Vietnam, the camps where he was held and the site in the jungle where he was captured as part of a planned television documentary funded by an independent consortium.

If things go as planned, he also will be able to meet many of his captors.

"It would be a method of healing, where veterans from all sides would meet on the battlefield and shake hands, instead of shooting at each other," he said.

His daughter Joy -- now an anchor/reporter for television station WJBF (Channel 6) in Augusta, Ga. -- also would go along as part of the production crew.

What will he say if he is able to meet his former captors? He said he would enjoy meeting some of the interrogators who spoke English, to be able to discuss the period with the perspective of time. He said he came to understand that soldiers on both sides were just playing their parts in a larger struggle, which gave them a common bond in many ways during one of the most difficult periods of their lives.

To the other guards who don't speak English, he said, "I'd just shake their hand and give them a smile."

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Brotherhood president  
undergoes bypass surgery

By Steve Barber

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--James D. Williams, president of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, underwent quadruple arterial bypass surgery June 19 at Baptist Memorial Hospital East in Memphis.

Doctors for Williams, 57, called the operation a success and expect full recovery after a recuperation period of four to six weeks. Before the surgery, they assured Williams the heart muscle itself is in good condition and his overall physical health is excellent.

The four-hour procedure repaired blockages near Williams' heart revealed by an angiogram June 17. The difficulty was first detected by physicians during Williams' annual physical examination two weeks earlier.

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In a statement released June 17 to the Brotherhood Commission staff, Williams said, "I am very grateful that my medical difficulties were detected early, that my heart is healthy and through the grace of God and the skills of physicians this problem will be corrected. Jo and I certainly covet your prayers through these days of surgery, healing and recovery."

Williams added the work of the Brotherhood Commission would "proceed as planned" during his recovery.

An interim management plan has been established and Williams' commitments for the next four to six weeks have been delegated to the agency's executive staff.

Williams has assigned Mike Day, associate to the president, to work with administrative assistant Grace Atchley in managing the work of the president's office. Day also will coordinate the work of the executive staff in Williams' absence.

Williams has been Brotherhood Commission president since October 1991. He previously was executive vice president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and a teacher and administrator at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Doctors expect Williams to be at Baptist Memorial East several more days before going home to complete his recuperation.

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Campers on Mission holds  
national rally in Illinois

By Ferrell Foster

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LINCOLN, Ill. (BP)--Motor homes and travel trailers blanketed the Logan County fairgrounds here for the annual national rally of Campers on Mission.

The assortment of recreational vehicles came from 19 states and Canada -- 251 units in all, with 511 participants, for the June 16-18 rally hosted this year by Illinois and Indiana.

Campers on Mission is a "national fellowship of Christian campers who believe in sharing their faith wherever they may be," said Carl Reagan, a Mission Service Corps volunteer assigned by the Home Mission Board as national COM specialist. The group is sponsored by the HMB and the Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department but is open to any Christian.

Retired people made up a large portion of those attending the rally but there were younger adults, teen-agers and children as well.

Folding lawn chairs provided seating in one of the fairgrounds' metal buildings and the campers identified their home states with name badges, caps and vests. Relaxed conversation and laughter were plentiful.

Campers on Mission is becoming more "diversified," Reagan said. Besides those with big recreational vehicles, COM includes tent campers, backpackers and motorcyclists. Some rally attendees even stayed in a nearby hotel.

What the people have in common are an enjoyment of Christian fellowship and a desire to meet the needs of people, Reagan said.

In Illinois, the 85 COM families primarily do construction work for smaller churches and Illinois Baptist State Association facilities, said Leonard Knabel, president of COM's Illinois chapter.

Elsewhere, groups are involved in ministries at campgrounds, racetracks, fairs and beaches, Reagan stated.

Reagan stresses the group's efforts in "marketplace evangelism" and his license plate reads "AS WE GO."

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At the end of the rally almost half the participants congregated near the podium for a commissioning prayer. After the rally they were heading to various missions projects in Alaska, North and South Dakota, Utah, Montana, Oklahoma and elsewhere.

Durwood Tyler of Mariana, Fla., accepted two honors on behalf of his state's chapter -- "chapter of the world" and the state with highest attendance at the rally -- 38 units and 66 people.

Mr. and Mrs. Art Wilkin of Apache Junction, Ariz., traveled the farthest to attend the rally.

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'Activity of God' evidenced  
in Ukraine, Baptists say

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
6/22/92

DALLAS (BP)--Ongoing ministry and missions outreach in the Ukraine by Baptists from Washington and Texas can only be credited to "the activity of God," according to Bob Dixon, executive director of Texas Baptist Men.

In May, Dixon led a six-person assessment team to Lugansk, Ukraine, to explore ways Baptists can minister in the former Soviet republic.

Participating in the eight-day trip were Dixon and his wife, Jean; Wilton Davis of Dallas, past president of TBM, and his wife, Eddy; Mike Jackson, minister of education at First Baptist Church in Alice, Texas; and Gary Hillyard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Beverly Park in Seattle, Wash.

During their stay in Lugansk, the team participated in a citywide evangelistic crusade, witnessed the launching of a student summer missionary program and a televised Bible class, delivered a water purifier and provided funds for the purchase of 30,000 Bibles, Christian educational materials, a car and a van.

At the crusade, held in the Builders Palace -- built by Lenin as headquarters for the Communist Party in the Ukraine -- about 80 percent of the congregation responded to an invitation to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, Dixon recounted.

"Gary Hillyard turned to me and said, 'What do we do?' I told him I didn't know because I had never seen anything like that," Dixon said.

All of those who made a public profession of faith were given a Bible and the vast majority returned an hour and a half before the crusade service the next day -- many walking through pouring rain -- for discipleship training.

The initial Baptist team was followed by a 15-person missions group coordinated by Alan Splawn, pastor of First Baptist Church of Alta Loma, Santa Fe, Texas, June 3-14.

Due to widespread food shortages throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States, many Ukrainians are on the verge of going hungry. Also, many victims from the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown are being treated in Lugansk hospitals that lack modern equipment.

Currently, a \$10,000 X-ray unit donated by First Baptist Church of Center, Texas, and about 1,800 boxes of food valued at \$100,000, purchased by Texas Baptists, are being shipped to the Ukraine for distribution by Baptists in Lugansk.

"In my 25 years of serving Texas Baptists, I have been able to be a part of God's activity and see his mighty work in many ways," Dixon said, "with disaster units sailing over the Gulf of Mexico, a tornado-destroyed town being rebuilt in a single weekend and many other instances. But I have never seen any stronger activity of God than I witnessed the eight days I was in Lugansk."

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Texas Baptist involvement in the Ukraine began last July when Dixon received a call from Hillyard. The Seattle-area pastor told Dixon a couple from the Soviet Union had moved to his community and had been welcomed into the fellowship of the Beverly Park church. In appreciation of the love and support of the congregation, the couple offered the church their seven-bedroom house in the Ukraine, just north of the Black Sea.

With fewer than 100 members in the neighborhood church, Hillyard was unsure how his congregation could use the house as any sort of missions outpost. Henry Blackaby, prayer consultant with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board who was leading a conference in Seattle, suggested to the pastor that he call Dixon.

Dixon said he insisted that God had provided the house as a vehicle of ministry for the Beverly Park church but assured Hillyard, "If Texas Baptist Men can be a partner in whatever God is doing with you in your church, it would be a privilege for us to join him in that kind of activity."

After praying further, Hillyard led his church to accept the house, and he shared the missions opportunity in the Ukraine with an old friend from seminary, Don English. Sensing God's leadership, English agreed to explore the possibility and on Dec. 26, 1991, he and his wife, Nancy, and their two children arrived in Lugansk.

English was invited to teach in the local elementary school and high school, teach two university classes and one class in the nearby medical school.

"He told them he would use the Bible as the textbook and they were more than happy with the arrangement," Dixon said.

Although English is not proficient in the Ukrainian language, seven English-speaking young people whom he led to faith in Christ are serving as his interpreters.

This summer, the seven youth -- ages 18 to 25 -- will receive financial support from TBM as they distribute about 25,000 Bibles in Siberia, working with English and volunteers from two Baptist churches in Lugansk -- one that had been registered and one nonregistered during the years of Soviet communist control.

After Dixon described the work in the Ukraine during a speaking engagement at First Baptist Church of Alta Loma, Santa Fe, Texas, two families at the church -- Joel and Pat Johnson and their three sons and George and Drue Christian and their son -- felt called to respond personally when Dixon described ways in which the Ukraine was opening to the gospel.

The Johnsons and Christians are now living in Lugansk in apartments rented by TBM, serving with the Englishes.

In the months ahead, the Texas Baptist couples may move into two houses in the former Soviet Union that have been made available to Baptists -- one in Br'ansk, Russia, and the other near Birsk, just west of Siberia.

The 200-acre farm in Br'ansk was, during Lenin's reign, a pioneer camp for Soviet youth. Baptists hope to start their own youth camp there as well as build a radio station on the farm's highest hill.