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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3808 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

September 29, 1993

93-164

WASHINGTON -- Senate supports 'Hyde,' hands 'bitter' defeat to pro-choicers.
KENYA -- Violence in Somalia forces evacuation of Baptist workers.
HONDURAS -- Baptists rally to provide Central American flood relief.
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Senate supports 'Hyde,' hands
'bitter' defeat to pro-choicers By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
9/29/93

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Abortion advocates suffered another major loss recently, this time in the U.S. Senate, in a year in which they had hoped to reverse all of the federal government's pro-life policies.

On Sept. 28, the Senate voted 59-40 to uphold the Hyde Amendment, which has prohibited Medicaid funding of most abortions since its enactment in 1976. The House of Representatives had approved the amendment by the surprising margin of 85 votes in June.

Although President Bill Clinton called for removal of the Hyde Amendment in his budget, he is not expected to veto the spending bill to which it is attached.

"The passage of the Hyde Amendment is a significant and encouraging victory for the pro-life movement in America," said Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Multitudes of babies' lives will be saved as a consequence of this vote.

"The passage of the Hyde Amendment illustrates the continuing strength of the pro-life movement in the Congress, but it is disturbing to know that 40 senators voted for the alternative, which was federal funding for abortion on demand."

In a prepared statement, Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion Rights Action League, called the vote a "bitter disappointment.

"The Hyde Amendment is about discrimination -- against women and against the poor," Michelman said. "No politician has the right to decide which women can have abortions and which women cannot."

Short of a dramatic development, it appears abortion advocates also will not see adoption of the Freedom of Choice Act this year. FOCA, which would overturn nearly all state restrictions on abortion, has stalled in both the Senate and House.

Senators voting in favor of the Hyde Amendment included not only pro-life advocates but pro-choicers who oppose requiring taxpayer funding of abortion. There were 38 Republicans and 21 Democrats who voted to retain the amendment. The margin had been expected to be much closer.

Some pro-lifers said the vote signaled the Clinton administration should remove abortion from the basic benefits in its health care reform plan or prepare for defeat. Some pro-choicers, however, contended some members of Congress who supported the Hyde Amendment would support a health care plan including abortion services.

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Land called the Senate vote a "meaningless victory if abortion is included in the services provided in the president's health reform plan. So, I would advise pro-life supporters to be encouraged by this victory but to understand that it is but one battle in a long war to protect unborn babies in America."

The Congressional Budget Office had estimated repeal of the amendment would mean the "federal government would probably fund between 325,000 to 675,000 abortions a year."

This year's version of the Hyde Amendment, named after Rep. Henry Hyde, R.-Ill., allowed exceptions not only for abortion to save the life of the mother but in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. From 1981 to this year, the amendment allowed abortion to be paid for only when the mother's life was threatened. Medicaid paid for about 300,000 abortions a year prior to the amendment's initial passage in 1976. In 1990, Medicaid funded only 69 abortions under the stricter Hyde guidelines.

In floor debate, Sen. Mark Hatfield, R.-Ore., expressed the feelings of pro-lifers who opposed expanding the exceptions to include rape and incest but voted for the amendment in the face of "political realities," including a pro-choice president.

"(I) am not comfortable voting for an amendment which allows federal funding for any abortion unless the life of the mother is in danger," said Hatfield, a Southern Baptist. "But voting for some restriction on taxpayer-funded abortions is better than no restrictions at all."

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Violence in Somalia forces
evacuation of Baptist workers By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
9/29/93

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--Southern Baptist relief workers in Somalia have evacuated because of escalating violence.

Four Southern Baptist workers left the capital, Mogadishu, in late September. They were helping feed 48,000 people in Mogadishu and surrounding villages. The feeding operations continue under Somali supervision.

The evacuated workers may be assigned temporarily to other relief operations that deliver aid to Somali refugees in bordering countries, the coordinator of the Baptist relief work said in a telephone interview.

"Just because Mogadishu shuts down for awhile doesn't stop us from working in other places," said the coordinator, who asked not to be identified by name for his own safety. "We'll be back in Somalia. We were in Somalia before the United Nation peacekeeping troops came in and we plan to be there when the troops leave."

Six Southern Baptist volunteers work full time in Somali relief projects in Somalia and neighboring countries. A number of Southern Baptist missionaries in Africa also rotate in and out on 30-day stints. So far, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has sent \$1.3 million in hunger relief to Somalia.

In May, prior to attacks on U.N. peacekeeping troops, Baptists were operating relief projects in 27 Somali villages. But the renewed violence forced them to limit their work to eight villages.

Since June, when U.N. commanders ordered the arrest of Somalia warlord Mohammed Farrah Aideed, 56 peacekeeping troops have died in fighting in Mogadishu -- including seven Americans. The U.S. State Department has advised all American citizens to leave Mogadishu. Associated Press reporters pulled out of Mogadishu Sept. 24, following an early withdrawal of Cable News Network, which saw five of its Somali workers killed in an attack.

Safety is always a concern for Baptist relief workers, yet it's just one of the factors in directing relief work in Somalia, the coordinator said.

"Security is important and we're very much concerned, but if security is the number one issue, we would never go into places like this," he explained. "We try to work under the philosophy that Christians ... for generations have had to pick up the cross and commit their lives -- even when there's risk.

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"We're certainly doing everything we can to not get people hurt and to be wise and safe. But in the end, if God has called a person to this work, then Southern Baptists have a responsibility to support and send the person."

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Baptists rally to provide
Central American flood relief By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
9/29/93

EL PROGRESO, Honduras (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has sent about \$188,000 to assist victims of flooding caused by recent hurricanes in Honduras and Nicaragua.

About \$163,000 will go to Honduras, where at least 30 people died and about 50,000 were left homeless in floods caused by Hurricane Gert in mid-September. The money will buy food and medical care for flood victims.

Meanwhile, Mississippi and Alabama Baptist Men began operating mobile feeding units Sept. 25 in two of the hardest-hit areas of Honduras. They're preparing hot meals for victims living in emergency shelters in the northern cities of El Progreso and Puerto Cortes. Honduran Baptists also are feeding flood victims through First Baptist Church in San Pedro Sula, the largest city affected by the disaster.

A Mississippi Baptist medical team arrived Sept. 26 to assist near the coastal city of Puerto Cortes, where conditions are ripe for cholera, malaria and dengue fever.

Some of the disaster funds will aid the Miskito Indians living along Honduras' and Nicaragua's Miskito Coast. They got a double dose of flooding, according to Southern Baptist missionary Jim Palmer in Nicaragua. When Gert swept the region in September, they hadn't even started to recover from earlier flooding caused by Hurricane Bret in early August.

In Nicaragua, the earlier disaster left about 70,000 people homeless, said Palmer of Marshall, Texas. Some Miskito villages along the Coco and Rama rivers were destroyed, including several of the eight villages where Baptists work. In some places people have been living temporarily in dugout canoes.

The Miskito people are tied closely to the river, Palmer said. It won't take long for them to rebuild their homes, but the flood also wiped out their crops and livestock.

"Their crops mean daily food. And their livestock is the only way they have of providing any kind of security or savings," Palmer said. "When you wipe those two out, the people are really, really hurting."

But pain isn't anything new for the Miskito people.

Their land along the Coco River saw some of the worst fighting during Nicaragua's 10-year civil war that officially ended in 1990. The Sandinista government evacuated the area during the war, relocating entire villages. Some Miskito people moved across the river into refugee camps in Honduras.

Their latest plight will be a "tremendous blow for them," Palmer said. But he believes they'll bounce back. "They're extremely poor and live under primitive conditions. But they are incredible survivors."

About \$20,000 in Southern Baptist aid will be channeled through CEPAD, an evangelical relief agency in Nicaragua. A plane owned by Grace Aire Medical Foundation, a Christian organization in Corpus Christi, Texas, has helped transport relief supplies. Baptist physician Terry Elder directs Grace Aire.

Another \$5,000 will go for direct assistance to Nicaraguan villages where Miskito Baptists live. Palmer will request more Foreign Mission Board aid after he completes a survey trip to the area.

Some of the \$163,000 going to neighboring Honduras will provide relief among the Miskito people living there. Honduran Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries already have sent food, clothing and supplies to the area, where more than 40 Miskito Baptist congregations worship.

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Baptists were to begin surveying damage in another part of the disaster zone near Cholulteca Sept. 25. At least 110 cases of cholera have been reported there, said missionary Carl Rees of Springfield, Mo. Poisonous snakes moving to higher ground also threaten people in some flooded areas.

Reports of damage are still coming in, but flooding submerged at least one Baptist church, according to missionary Stanley Stamps of Prentiss, Miss. The church, built by a Mississippi Baptist volunteer team, stands on a banana plantation near El Progreso. Stamps' home sustained slight water damage.

Floods also hit Veracruz state in Mexico, where Southern Baptist representatives and Mexican Baptists are assessing damage. Gert ripped off the roofs of at least two Baptist churches in the state, said Southern Baptist representative Larry Gay of Birmingham, Ala. Southern Baptist disaster funds have been sent to the region, where local Baptists responded quickly to people left homeless by the storm.

Gay also anticipates requesting hunger relief funds to help with long-term relief in Veracruz, where farmers lost about 90 percent of their orange harvest.

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EDITORS' NOTE: (BP) photos are available upon request from Missouri Baptist Convention to accompany (BP) story titled "Missouri students clean flood-ravaged St. Louis area," dated 9/27/93.

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