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- Religious Liberty Council
- Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

REPORT
from the Capital

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◆ **Religious Liberty Council Luncheon** ◆
Dawson Award winners announced!

Make your plans to attend this year's Religious Liberty Council luncheon on June 25 in Charlotte, N.C. The event will be held during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, and our speaker will be Mercer University President — and former Baptist Joint Committee intern — William D. Underwood.

At this year's luncheon, the Baptist Joint Committee will present the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award to two individuals: speaker William D. Underwood and the Rev. Dr. Gardner Taylor, one of the founders of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

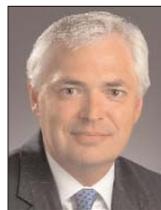
The J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award is the BJC's highest honor, recognizing the contributions of individuals in the area of the free exercise of religion and church-state separation. Underwood has been committed to the cause since his days as an intern and is

a strong voice for religious liberty on the Mercer campus and in the community, and Taylor's work as a preacher and a religious leader during the Civil Rights Movement is well-known throughout the country.

The event is open to the public, but you must have a ticket. Come to fellowship with other Religious Liberty Council members or learn how you can be a member of the RLC.

Tickets are \$40 before June 11 and \$45 after that date. If you cannot make it to Charlotte, you can still be a part by sponsoring a table in honor of your church, favorite college or seminary.

You can purchase tickets online by visiting www.BJCOnline.org/luncheon or calling the offices of the Baptist Joint Committee at (202) 544-4226. If you have any questions, e-mail Kristin Clifton at kclifton@BJCOnline.org.

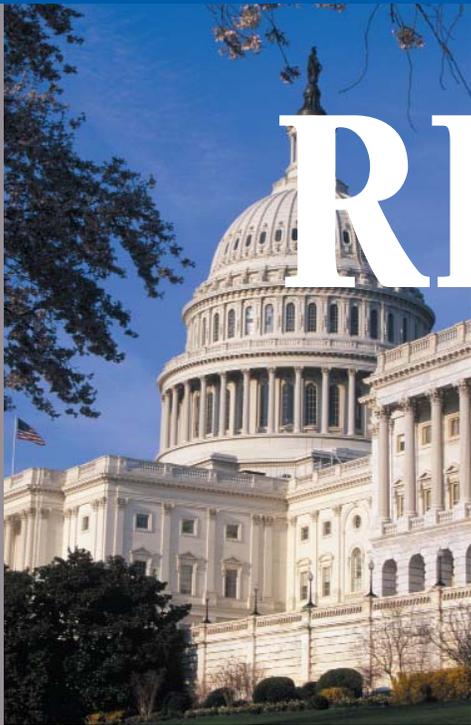


Underwood



Taylor

Save the date!
Religious Liberty Council Luncheon
Friday, June 25
11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Westin Charlotte
Grand Ballroom ABC
Charlotte, N.C.



REPORT from the Capital

Baptists condemn Texas board's vote on textbook standards

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas State Board of Education voted along party lines to place an ideological imprint on history, social studies and economics courses. This comes a year after the board voted to open the door to including creationism in Texas science textbooks.

The effects will be felt beyond the borders of the Lone Star State because Texas is the nation's second-largest distributor of textbooks.

On March 12, the board voted 10-5 to approve a revised set of social studies standards that many textbook publishers across the country use to guide their publication standards. All of the board's Republican members voted in favor of the guidelines, and all of its Democratic members voted against them.

Over the past two months, the board — whose members are chosen by popular election — had scores of contentious votes that resulted in the insertion of more than 100 amendments into a set of standards that a group of professional educators had recommended.

Among the amendments approved was one to excise Thomas Jefferson from a section on how Enlightenment philosophy influenced the founders, replacing him with 13th-century theologian Thomas Aquinas and 16th-century Reformer John Calvin.

The board also rejected an amendment that would have required textbooks to "examine the reasons the Founding Fathers protected religious freedom in America by barring gov-

ernment from promoting or disfavoring any particular religion over all others."

Several of the board's members have argued — both during board meetings and in other public statements — that church-state separation is a myth or an incorrect interpretation of the First Amendment. The first 16



words of that amendment — "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" — are generally described by legal

scholars in two parts: the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. Dating back to Jefferson's time, these two clauses, when taken together, have been interpreted by many as requiring an institutional separation of religion and government.

"The wise architects of our republic designed twin pillars — the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause — to buttress religious liberty and uphold the wall of separation between church and state," said J. Brent Walker, the Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee. "Our Constitution enshrined the vision of Jefferson and [James] Madison instead of the theocratic experiment of the Puritans. Texas students — and all students — need to understand our country's heritage and how the separation of church and state provides true religious liberty for all in this country."

An official of the Baptist General Convention of Texas's Christian Life Commission — which, among other

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On the Web

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State updates

As many state legislatures begin to wind down and prepare for recess, the relationship between church and state continues to make news across the country.

Alabama: Student complaint leads to change

A student at a public high school in Alexandria, Ala., questioned the legality of daily prayers over the school's public address system and demanded that the practice stop. After receiving the complaint, the superintendent reminded all schools in the system of the law, and the morning prayers at the high school were discontinued.

Michigan: Mayor faces recall

A new rule adopted by the Sturgis City Commission prevents religious leaders who offer prayers at its meetings from mentioning central figures of faith. According to media reports, the mayor noted an instance when the rule was violated, and now those who view the rule as anti-Christian are mounting a recall effort to remove the mayor from office.

Tennessee: Lawsuit filed over forcing a Baptist to work on Sundays

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed a lawsuit against a Lowe's Home Center in Tennessee because it refused to let a Baptist employee off work on Sundays. The man requested a religious accommodation because of his sincere belief against working on the Sabbath, but he was denied because it might create a hardship on other employees.

Wisconsin: Bill would stop faith-healing exemption

A bill being discussed in the Wisconsin State Assembly would remove the exemption for faith-healing parents from state child abuse laws. The bill's supporters say it will be a way to protect all children equally, but, according to the media, some critics say the bill could lead to religious prejudice.

TEXTBOOKS *continued from page 1*

responsibilities, promotes religious liberty and church-state separation — expressed dismay March 16 that the board rejected the amendment that would have had students examine how religious freedom is protected by the Establishment Clause's prevention of government involvement.

"[I]t's unfortunate that such a basic understanding of the First Amendment was victim to the hyper-politization on the State Board of Education," said Stephen Reeves, the CLC's legislative counsel. "But it just reinforces the need for churches — Baptists and others — to educate their students about how the First Amendment protects religion in this country."

Reeves emphasized "that the First Amendment — both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise [Clause] — protect religion, and do so even when the government tries to favor religion."

Dr. Richard Pierard, a former college history professor, contacted textbook publishers directly to express his concerns, telling them, "These changes will present our children with an inaccurate education on the history and meaning of the separation of religion and government in America."

Pierard, who is a member of the American Historical Association, also sent a formal request to the professional organization, asking them to investigate the matter and invoke harsh sanctions on publishers

who modify the content of their history textbooks to comply with the new guidelines.

Ryan Valentine, deputy director of the Texas Freedom Network, said, "What I've been telling people is the Texas State Board of Education obviously can't remove the First Amendment to the Constitution, but they can do something equally frightening — they can erase it from kids' history classes. And that's what they voted to do last week."

"They're hostile to the very idea of church-state separation," Valentine continued. "But the amendment they rejected didn't use the church-state language ... that's a fairly uncontroversial restatement of the Establishment Clause, and yet they rejected its validity."

Other changes to the curriculum include requiring students to learn about the "Judeo-Christian" influences on the nation's founders and excising references to the Tejanos who fought at the 1836 Battle of the Alamo. The removal of Tejano references caused some of the Democratic members of the board — all of whom are Hispanic or African American — to storm out of the meeting in protest.

"We are adding balance," said board member Don McLeroy, according to *The New York Times*. "History has already been skewed. Academia is skewed too far to the left."

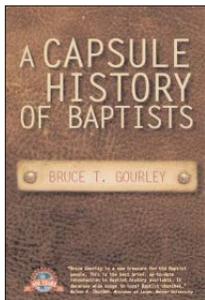
—Associated Baptist Press and Staff Reports

REFLECTIONS

Sabbatical summer reading

Mountains of snow have finally melted, warm temperatures have arrived, and the cherry blossoms are blooming for all they're worth. The arrival of spring in the nation's capital reminds me that soon I'll embark on a sabbatical leave that the Baptist Joint Committee board was kind enough to give me. While I am gone, former BJC colleagues James Dunn, Stan Hastey, Buzz Thomas and Melissa Rogers will write columns in this space. I know you will enjoy hearing from them again. Also, Holly Hollman will be acting executive director and, along with the rest of the staff, the BJC will remain in good hands. I expect to return in September rested and refreshed for the tasks ahead in the upcoming years.

Along with two spiritual retreats, several trips and other diversions, I plan to get a lot of good reading done. (There is that pesky stack of books in my home study that I seem to never get around to!) Three books authored by personal friends recently came across my desk and will be among the ones I tackle. Let me tell you about them so they can be a part of your summertime reading for enjoyment as well as for your edification. I have handled each of them — one on Baptist history, one on religion and politics and one on church and state — enough to give you a preview.



Bruce Gourley, *A Capsule History of Baptists, Baptist History and Heritage Society: Atlanta, 2010.*

Bruce Gourley, recently tapped as the new director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, has done all Baptists a signal service in writing this history of Baptists upon the completion of our fourth century together. It is a “capsule” history, not a comprehensive retelling of the Baptist story.

It is more of a guide book in which Bruce sketches the “general contours of the first 400 years of Baptist life and thought.” He quite appropriately writes of the pervasive central theme of freedom in Baptist life. Bruce also chronicles the founding, development and influence of the BJC over the past seven and a half decades as it further advances the tradition of freedom in Baptist life. This book will be useful for lay readers as well as Baptist history scholars and will serve as a helpful resource for group studies in churches and denominations.

Shaun A. Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960, Oxford Press: New York, 2009.*

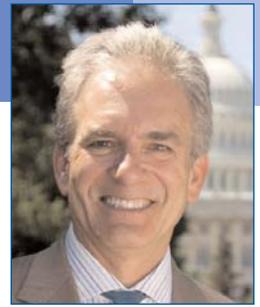
Shaun Casey, a visiting fellow at the Center for American Progress and an ethics professor at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., has written

a fascinating account of the religion issue that infected the 1960 campaign. Specifically, he describes how John F. Kennedy grappled with the staunch opposition to his presidential candidacy among many Baptists and others because of his Catholicism. He describes the historic Kennedy address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in which he affirmed the separation of church and state and sought to dispel allegations that he would be a puppet of the Pope. Of interest to many readers of this publication, Shaun retells the story of an August 1960 meeting between Kennedy and one of my predecessors at the BJC, C. Emmanuel Carlson, in which Kennedy and Carlson hammered out the following statement: “A frank renunciation by all churches of political power as a means of religious ends would greatly improve the political climate and would seem to be a legitimate request by both political parties.” As the fall elections approach, we would all do well to remember and learn from this chapter in our nation’s history where we sought to negotiate the difficult issue of religion and politics and the constitutional provision banning a religious test for public office.

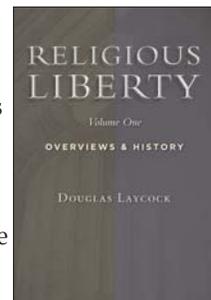
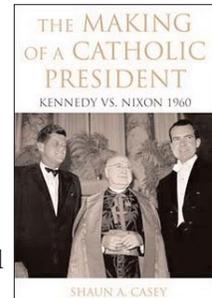
Douglas Laycock, *Religious Liberty, Vol. 1: Overviews & History, Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 2010.*

Doug Laycock is one of the leading experts on the First Amendment and the two religion clauses in particular. He has written voluminously over the past 30 years on religious liberty and church-state issues. This hefty paperback volume (864 pages!) collects many of Doug’s writings of a more general nature dealing with history and his overarching observations about religious liberty and the way in which the U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the two religion clauses. This volume contains various genre of writings, including academic law review articles (although they are always quite readable), popular journal pieces, book reviews and even a *USA Today* op-ed piece or two. This volume will suffice as a desk book of sorts, a ready reference to Doug’s literary corpus without a lot of searching, as well as a smorgasbord of interesting pieces to dip into from time to time. Eerdmans Publishing Company is assembling three more volumes of Laycock’s writings dealing with the Free Exercise Clause, Religious Liberty Legislation, and Free Speech and the Establishment Clause. Serious students of church and state and those who care about religious liberty will want to get their own copy of this multi-volume work.

I hope I have whetted your appetite for what I promise will be a feast. See you in September.



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director



An inside look at

International Religious Freedom



The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) soon will release its annual report on the state of religious freedom around the world. **Knox Thames**, a Baptist, is currently the director of policy and research at USCIRF. Before this year's report is released, Thames answered some questions for readers of *Report from the Capital* about the work of USCIRF and how the United States promotes religious freedom at the international level.

When was USCIRF created, and how does our country promote religious freedom internationally?

In 1998, Congress passed a landmark piece of legislation, the International Religious Freedom Act (commonly known as IRFA), which established the promotion and protection of religious freedom for people of all faiths as a foreign policy priority for the United States. In addition, the law established the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), where I work. USCIRF is an independent U.S. government commission that monitors religious freedom worldwide and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress. The Commission is led by nine private sector commissioners who are appointed by both the White House and Congress. IRFA also established a special office within the State Department — the Office of International Religious Freedom — which is lead by an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

How does the USCIRF operate?

IRFA set Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the standard for our monitoring, which states “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Therefore, USCIRF’s focus is to review the conduct of governments and evaluate their religious freedom conditions through the lens of this universal standard, not American practice. We also serve as a watchdog over U.S. efforts to promote religious freedom abroad. We publish our findings in an annual report, which includes policy recommendations for U.S. foreign policy. Each report is released on or before May 1.

One of the major roles of the Commission is recommending countries that the State Department should designate as “Countries of Particular Concern,” or “CPCs.” These are countries that engage in or tolerate systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom. Congress created this status to give teeth to IRFA, so when the State Department designates a country as a CPC, the U.S. government is authorized to take a range of actions, up to and including sanctions. Countries currently designated by the State Department as CPCs are: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan. USCIRF agrees with these designations, but has concluded five others also meet the statutory threshold: Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

The Commission also conducts fact finding missions. I recently returned from a Commission trip to Egypt. While in Cairo, Commissioners and USCIRF staff participated in a variety of meetings. Our first was with the U.S. ambassador to Egypt, where we discussed the state of current U.S. and Egyptian relations and encouraged increased U.S. engagement on religious freedom promotion and protection. We also met with Egyptian government officials and raised concerns about recent violence against Coptic Christians, as well as problems facing other minority religious communities. In addition, our delegation met with various religious leaders and a wide-range of human rights and civil society activists to hear firsthand about the challenges they face. We will use our findings to develop our report on that country.

Why is religious freedom important?

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right that protects the rights of individuals and communities of believers to meet together for worship, teaching, and sharing of their faith. Also, religious freedom often serves as the “canary in the coal mine” for other human rights. In many situations, religious freedom is the first right to be taken away by a repressive government, and what follows is often the elimination of the freedom of assembly, association, and press. Restrictions typically are also placed on minorities, women, or dissenting members of the majority faith.

Religious freedom increasingly matters from a national security perspective, as we have seen a direct correlation between the repression of religious rights and the expansion of violent extremism. A case in point is Pakistan. Over the past 40 years, as religious freedom protections receded through changes in Pakistani law and policies, we have observed a concurrent rise in violent extremism. In Pakistan, the lack of religious freedom fosters extremism and instability, which result in a range of human rights violations and limitations on the growth of a democratic society. Protecting religious freedom can therefore be an effective counter-extremism tool and should be a central component of our “smart power” approach to foreign policy.

USCIRF works to raise these issues with the Administration and Congress. We work closely with congressional offices on both sides of the aisle to ensure that freedom of religion becomes a more integral part of U.S. policy. One issue I have observed is a shift in the use of terminology by the President and Secretary of State away from referring to “religious freedom” and instead using the term “freedom of worship.” There is a difference that could have policy implications, as freedom of *religion* encompasses the right to worship, but also includes the right to teach religious beliefs and share religious views. Focusing only on *worship* leaves out these other important components of the right, so I hope this is nothing more than just speechwriters trying to make good prose.

How do religious freedom issues play out at the international level?

There are efforts underway at the international level that attempt to limit the freedoms of religion and expression. For example, a bloc of nations has been working to advance the problematic idea of “defamation of religions” through repeated passage of nonbinding resolutions at the United Nations. Although touted as a solution to the very real problems of religious persecution and discrimination, these UN resolutions instead attempt to provide international legitimacy for existing blasphemy laws or to otherwise ban criticism of a religion. It threatens to weaken the fundamental understanding of human rights, and this concept calls for legal obligations on limiting speech and justifies wide restrictions on the freedom of religion. In our view, religious intolerance and discrimination can best be fought through efforts to encourage respect for individual human rights rather than national prohibitions or international legal norms that purport to stop criticism or “defamation” of religions.

What can Baptists do to promote religious freedom internationally?

Get engaged. Baptists can have an impact in moving our government to take action on religious freedom concerns. Write your member of Congress and urge him or her to push for greater government action to promote religious freedom. Congress represents the best way for Baptists to engage Washington on the issue, as Representatives and Senators are generally very responsive to constituent requests. Writing the President and the Secretary of State can also be useful. President Barack Obama spoke about the importance of religious freedom in his June 2009 speech in Cairo focusing on America’s relationship with Muslim communities. This was noteworthy, and the Administration needs to appoint an ambassador on religious freedom to fulfill the issues raised in the speech. Baptists can also write to various foreign countries’ ambassadors to the United States, urging the ambassador to ask his or her government to improve respect for religious freedom. All these efforts, while seemingly small, can make a difference, especially if coordinated with other churches and groups who are also interested in religious freedom.

Knox Thames has worked on religious freedom issues for the past 10 years with the Congress, at the U.S. Department of State and at USCIRF. He was the lead author and initiator of International Religious Freedom Advocacy: A Guide to Organizations, Law, and NGOs, a groundbreaking book on religious freedom published by Baylor University Press. Thames is the recipient of awards from the State Department and the International Religious Liberty Association.





James Gibson
Staff Counsel

A reasonable location for graduation

One of the more intriguing concepts taught in law school is the hypothetical “reasonable person.” This mythical individual — who always acts properly, regardless of context — is a means of analyzing liability and other legal issues. The reasonable person does not remove the safety guard from a lawn mower when there are numerous, easily readable, large-print warnings not to do so. The reasonable person does not juggle butcher knives. The reasonable person does not believe that a carbolic smoke ball will cure the common cold.

The reasonable person also shows up in Establishment Clause jurisprudence. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that government entities cannot take actions that a reasonable person would interpret as an endorsement of religion. In this area, however, it is not always clear what a reasonable person would perceive. In recent years, a number of controversies — and some lawsuits — have risen in communities where public school graduations (as opposed to voluntary, non-school sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies) are held in religious venues, such as Christian churches.

Although having graduation exercises in a religious venue is commonplace in some communities — particularly in rural areas where a local church is the only place large enough to hold the crowd — it can sometimes place persons of faith, or no faith, in a difficult position. Recently, a Muslim high school student in New Jersey objected to his high school graduation taking place in a Christian church because entering a non-Islamic house of worship was anathema to his faith. Similar tenets would apply to graduates who are Jehovah’s Witnesses. Reasonable minds can disagree; most likely for every Christian who would not be offended by attending graduation in a mosque, there is one who would be.

With reasonability in the eye of the beholder, what authority is there to guide the well-intentioned reasonable person? Unfortunately, very little. Although the Supreme Court has ruled on a number of cases involving graduation prayer, it has never heard a case on holding public school graduations in religious venues. A handful of federal trial and appellate courts have considered the issue, but no decision created a settled principle of law for these cases.

Lacking clear guidance from the courts, with only the Supreme Court’s general admonition that government shall not endorse or appear to

endorse religion as a guide, where is the line of demarcation in these cases? The President’s Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships recently grappled with a similar issue: whether religious organizations that receive government grants to carry out secular social services should be allowed to do so in rooms that contain religious art, Scripture, messages or symbols. After spirited debate, the Council ultimately voted to recommend that the president institute what is, essentially, a “reasonability standard”: that is, a religious service provider is not required to remove or cover up the accoutrements of faith, but is encouraged to do so whenever feasible if its beneficiaries object.

These concepts are equally applicable and administrable in the public school graduation setting. Our reasonable person would undoubtedly concede that although most graduations scheduled for religious venues are not veiled attempts to proselytize, graduation ceremonies should be held in a non-religious venue whenever possible. When a religious venue is the most suitable option, measures should be taken to ensure that there is no implicit or explicit linkage between the civic event and the host religious venue. For example, a church should not have to cover up its stained glass windows — our reasonable person would surely balk at the prospect of rising graduates and others having to fumble about in semi-darkness. Nor does the religious venue need to remove a mounted cross or other religious imagery from the walls of the room being used. But easily achieved and painlessly reversed accommodations, such as covering up items or temporarily removing portable religious objects or texts and storing them elsewhere, should be made.

In any case, when a religious venue is to be the site of a public school graduation, it is incumbent upon school administrators and religious leaders to find a way to be good neighbors without unduly associating church and state. The school should not place unreasonable demands on its religious host, and the host should not take advantage of a community need to further its religious mission. There is always the potential for conflict when religious venues and public ceremonies — or vice versa — intersect, but as is the case in other areas of church-state relations, education and the willingness to be reasonable can go a long way toward avoiding controversy.

“[W]hen a religious venue is to be the site of a public school graduation, it is incumbent . . . to find a way to be good neighbors without unduly associating church and state.”

Federal court says pledge is constitutional, dismisses challenge to "In God We Trust" on currency

The Pledge of Allegiance, with its inclusion of the words "under God," is constitutional, a federal appeals court ruled on March 11, reversing a previous ruling.

The 2-1 ruling answers a challenge by California atheist Michael Newdow, who argued that the use of the pledge in a California school district — where children of atheists had to listen to others recite it — violated the First Amendment's clause prohibiting the establishment of religion.

The "students are being coerced to participate in a patriotic exercise, not a religious exercise," the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled. "The Pledge is not a prayer and its recitation is not a religious exercise."

In 2002, the 9th Circuit Court ruled that the use of the words "under God" in the pledge violated the Constitution. The current court called that decision "erroneous." The Supreme Court later dismissed the earlier Newdow suit, sidestepping the church-state issues by finding he did not have standing to sue.

"The 9th Circuit today failed to uphold the basic principle found within the first ten words of the Bill of Rights ... that the government is required to show equal respect to the lawful religious views of all individuals," Newdow said.

Kevin J. "Seamus" Hasson, founder and president of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, who argued for the school district, said the court "finally stood up" for the Pledge of Allegiance.

In a scathing and lengthy dissent, Judge Stephen Reinhardt said the words "under God" have an "undeniably religious purpose" and "we have failed in our constitutional duty as a court."

In a separate decision issued on the same day, the 9th Circuit dismissed Newdow's challenge to the words "In God We Trust" on U.S. currency.

— Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

Senate votes down D.C. school voucher program, BJC weighs in

On March 16, the U.S. Senate voted against continued funding for a school voucher program in Washington, D.C., effectively bringing the program to an end.

The 55-42 vote defeated a measure proposed by Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I — Conn., that would have re-opened the voucher program to new students.

Funding will continue for students currently in the voucher program, allowing them to stay in their current schools until they graduate high school. No new students, however, will be admitted for the 2010-2011 school year.

Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director Brent Walker and General Counsel Holly Hollman wrote letters to members of the Senate explaining the BJC's concerns about using public dollars to fund private schools, which include parochial schools. The BJC sent a letter to every

U.S. Senator — except the measure's sponsor — on March 4 when the measure was first making its way toward a vote.

The letters acknowledged that parochial schools serve a valuable function, but "religious teaching should be funded by voluntary contributions, not through taxation." The letters also pointed out that vouchers may bring "unintended consequences for religious schools accepting the government money" because what the government funds, the government regulates.

"Vouchers violate the religious liberty rights of all taxpayers — rights that are protected by the 'no establishment' principles of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Vouchers open the door to excessive government entanglement with religion through burdensome government regulation and oversight," according to the letters.

Five days prior to the Senate vote, the BJC sent another round of letters to a select group of senators whose votes on the D.C. school voucher program were undecided. Those letters re-emphasized the BJC's position and urged each senator to vote down the program.

— Staff Reports

Supreme Court to weigh limits of Kansas church's speech



WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court agreed on March 8 to decide whether the father of a fallen soldier can sue religious protesters for picketing at his son's funeral with signs that read "Thank God for dead soldiers."

The case will test the boundaries of the Constitution by weighing whether extreme speech that inflicts emotional pain — especially at sensitive venues such as memorials — should be protected by the First Amendment.

Members of Westboro Baptist Church, led by pastor and founder Fred Phelps in Topeka, Kan., have protested at military funerals to express their belief that America is being punished for tolerance of homosexuality.

Westboro protesters traveled to Westminster, Md., to picket at the funeral of Marine Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder, who was killed in combat in Iraq on March 3, 2006.

They marched around the outskirts of St. John's Catholic Church and the cemetery with signs that read "God Hates the USA" and other inflammatory slogans. After the funeral, Phelps also posted material on his Web site against the fallen Marine, saying his father had "taught Matthew to defy his creator" and "raised him for the devil."

Snyder's father sued Phelps for invasion of privacy and for intentionally inflicting emotional distress. Snyder received \$10.9 million in damages but a judge modified the jury's amount to \$5 million. The decision was reversed last September by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The court threw out the verdict on the basis of the First Amendment's protection of free speech.

— Kimberlee Hauss, Religion News Service