



VOICE OF REASON

Summer 1984

The Newsletter of Americans for Religious Liberty

No. 13

"Equal Access," School Prayer Bounce Back

On July 24, President Reagan attacked the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives for bottling up proposals for student religious meetings and prayer in public schools. On the same day, a Federal appeals court ruled that religious meetings held during school hours are unconstitutional. On July 25, the House passed legislation to permit religious groups to meet. On July 26, it approved a school prayer measure. On July 27, thankfully, it was not in session.

There are two stories to this strange Capitol Hill activity. One is the legislation itself. The other is the motivation behind the legislation.

Passed by the Senate in late June, the "equal access" bill was signed into law by President Reagan on August 11. The act states that if a secondary school allows, "one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time," it must allow all groups to meet. The gatherings must be voluntary and student initiated, and can be held only, "before actual classroom instruction begins or after actual classroom instruction ends."

While the language of the law is a dramatic improvement, from the church-state separation point of view, over an

"equal access" bill the House rejected in May (see our Spring 1984 newsletter), it is far from innocuous. Sectarian worship services and doctrinal instruction will be permitted in the classroom meetings, and nonschool laypersons or clergy, although they may not "regularly" attend, will be allowed to participate in the activities.

Furthermore, as ARL assistant director Maury Abraham explained in the *Washington Post*, "School boards, teachers and parents will have no say as to who uses the classrooms. Exit local control, enter proselytism, prayer, beads and incense." In addition to being bad public policy, Abraham pointed out, the law undermines separation of church and state: "The Framers of the Constitution recognized by writing the First Amendment that religious expression is unique, that while it often prescribes absolute values it always belongs to the realm of the individual free conscience. When governments ignore the unique character of religion, the free expression of religion—especially for those whose beliefs are in the minority—is endangered. In this case, a religious gathering is only demeaned when it must conform its activities to those permitted to [secular clubs]."

Introduced only hours after the vote on "equal access," the prayer proposal was

brought up as an amendment to a noncontroversial education bill. It reads: "No State or local educational agency shall deny individuals in public schools the opportunity to participate in moments of silent prayer. Neither the United States nor any State or local educational agency shall require any person to participate in prayer or influence the form or content of any prayer in such public schools."

The amendment's ambiguous wording caused lawmakers to disagree about its meaning. Some felt that it merely codified the status quo. Individual voluntary prayer that is not structured by the government has always been and continues to be permitted in schools. Others, like Rep. Don Edwards (D-CA), the leading opponent in the House to "equal access" legislation, felt it would do more. "Nothing in the language prevents organized prayer," he said. The measure would invite school officials to "direct, control and supervise school children in prayer."

A similar education bill, less the prayer provision, has passed the Senate. In September its backers will probably try to get a Senate-House conference committee to agree on the prayer amendment, and if the conference report is approved by both Houses, the president will likely sign it into law.

In any case, the limits of school involvement in silent prayer will soon be made more definite. The Supreme Court is scheduled to rule on an Alabama law which permits schools to set aside daily "moments of silence" for prayer or meditation. Twenty-one other states have similar statutes. ARL has joined in an *amicus curiae* brief in opposition to the law.

If the religion-in-schools legislation is murky, the motivation for it is clear. It is political. And for the fainthearted, for those who either do not wear their religion on their sleeve or who cannot stand to encounter those who do, they had better go into hibernation through November 6.

After the votes on the religious meetings

Editorial

Religion and Politics

This election year has seen more entanglement of religion and politics than any in American history. And many Americans are understandably confused by it all.

Jerry Falwell and other media preachers of moral majoritarian bent are actively supporting the reelection of Ronald Reagan and are conducting voter registration campaigns, often through local churches.

President Reagan, to a far greater extent than any president in history, has entangled

religion and politics by vigorously seeking constitutional amendments to authorize government regimented prayer in public schools and to outlaw abortion, by pushing for massive federal aid for sectarian private schools through tuition tax credits and vouchers, and by breaking two centuries of precedent by establishing formal diplomatic relations with one church. The delegates to his party's convention supported his positions and even went so far as to declare that

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judicial appointments should have to pass a litmus test of their views on abortion.

In his prayer breakfast address at the Republican Convention in Dallas, Mr. Reagan deliberately made the erroneous charge that "our children are not allowed voluntary prayer" and insisted that the defenders of religious liberty and church-state separation are "intolerant of religion."

Walter Mondale, Geraldine Ferraro, and the Democratic Party have taken the church-state separation side, though they have been silent on diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

Meanwhile, a complex debate has broken out among Catholic Church officials and candidate Geraldine Ferraro and New York Governor Mario Cuomo over the duties of Catholic politicians and voters, with special reference to the abortion issue.

Common sense, the Constitution, and history provide us with a lot of helpful guidance in dealing with these issues.

When government is closely linked with religion, favoring one or some religions over others, as was the case in most of the thirteen British North American colonies and in the countries from which the colonists emigrated, adherents to disfavored religions or to none suffer varying degrees of discrimination, persecution, and civil disability. The church-state problem was so acute that when Americans were fighting to sever the ties with Britain, they also resurrected Roger Williams' idea of separation of church and state. The move to separation led by Jefferson and Madison in Virginia was the model followed sooner or later by all the states, and the separation

principle was written into the Constitution in the "no religious test for public office" clause in Article VI and in the "no establishment" and "free exercise" clauses of the First Amendment.

As the Supreme Court has repeatedly held, the Constitution requires government to be neutral toward our rich diversity of religious traditions, forbids government from meddling with religion or taxing citizens to support it, and erects a wall, however battered it may have become, between church and state. It was the intention of the constitutional framers, as the Supreme Court has reminded us, to prevent political division along religious lines.

Our constitutional tradition of separation of church and state, as historians and religious leaders of all faiths have often stated, has given our country more religious liberty and interfaith harmony than any society has ever known. President Reagan, the moral majoritarians, and many politicians need to be reminded of this truth and warned that the consequences of the policies they seek—government sponsored devotions in schools, tax support for sectarian private schools, denial to women of freedom of conscience on reproduction, and diplomatic ties to one church—can only lead to the weakening of democracy and civil liberties, the splintering of society along creedal lines, and the cancerous growth of bigotry and prejudice.

Curiously, we might note, Mr. Reagan suggested in Dallas that "the children of our country study together all the many religions in our country." This is permitted and is being done in our public schools now. But Mr. Reagan's proposed federal aid for

sectarian schools would lead to children being separated by creed and indoctrinated in specific faiths, while his proposed government sponsored school prayer has nothing to do with the proper academic study of religion.

As for the duties of Catholic politicians, Governor Cuomo and Representative Ferraro are correct in saying that an elected official should not seek to impose his/her church's specific moral views on all citizens. Those church officials who insist that Catholic politicians should do so, or that Catholic voters should take orders from church officials, are wrong, though they have the right to express their views. John Kennedy put the matter correctly 24 years ago when he said that he did not speak for his church, his church did not speak for him, and that he would resign if faced with an irreconcilable conflict between his conscience and his office.

The Jesuit magazine *America* was right in saying recently that lay people are competent in political matters and should weigh all of a candidate's positions when deciding how to vote.

No one suggests that a politician leave moral values at home when he or she takes office. But each politician and voter must decide where applying general moral principles ends and imposing nonconsensus or sectarian moral views begins. The abortion issue is a clear example of this, and those politicians who assume that government may forbid women to choose abortion are aligning themselves with those Chinese politicians who assume that government may compel women to have abortions. Ms. Ferraro and Mr. Cuomo are right in saying that this is an issue to be left to individual conscience.

If a Catholic politician may seek to impose his church's position on abortion, he could do so also with his church's stand on divorce or birth control. And politicians of other faiths could seek to impose their church's views on Sunday observance, blasphemy, creationism, faith healing, etc.

If Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Humanist, and other politicians act on the basis of their shared civic and moral values, we could all take pride in their efforts. But entangling religion with politics and statecraft is a formula for big trouble. Where religions differ one from another, let them compete in the marketplace of ideas for adherents. But let's keep the political process as free as possible of sectarian divisiveness. ■

Voice of Reason is the quarterly newsletter of Americans for Religious Liberty (formerly The Voice of Reason), P.O. Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20906. (Telephone: 301-598-2447). The newsletter is sent to all contributors to ARL.

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Americans for Religious Liberty is a nonprofit public interest educational organization dedicated to preserving the American tradition of religious, intellectual, and personal freedom in a secular democratic state. Membership is open to all who share that purpose. Annual dues are \$15 for individuals, \$20 for families, \$5 for students.

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News Briefs

Federal Parochial Aid Ruled Unconstitutional

One form of federal aid to sectarian private schools was ruled unconstitutional on July 9 by the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The unanimous ruling, in *Felton v. U.S. Department of Education*, held that remedial instruction may not constitutionally be provided to sectarian schools on their premises, but only "at a neutral site off the premises of the religious school." An appeal by parochial school interests is expected.

This ruling is the first against federal aid to parochial schools. Although federal aid to parochial schools began in 1965, no serious legal challenge was started until 1975, when the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a Pennsylvania state parochial plan modeled after the federal program. The Supreme Court has accepted an appeal from a federal court ruling holding unconstitutional a similar program in Grand Rapids, MI, using state funds.

Creche Unconstitutional

A Christian Nativity scene erected by the city of Birmingham, MI, was ruled unconstitutional by a federal district court on July 24. The court held that it promoted one set of religious beliefs and served no secular purpose. The Michigan creche situation differed from that in Pawtucket, RI, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in March, because the Michigan creche was alone while the Rhode Island creche was part of a large and rather secular holiday display. The suit was brought by the ACLU of Michigan.

On the other hand, a federal appeals court has ordered the town of Scarsdale, NY, to permit a creche to be displayed in a public park.

Illinois Parochial Aid

The Illinois legislature is considering bills, S.B. 1613 and H.B. 2607, to provide \$5.4 million annually to denominational private schools in the form of transportation service. Although Gov. James R. Thompson vetoed similar bills in 1979 and 1981—for budgetary reasons, he said—he is supporting the measure this year.

Illinois supporters of public education and church-state separation are urging concerned Illinois residents to express opposition to the bills to their members of the legislature.

Abortion Rights

Although opponents of freedom of conscience on abortion have failed to initiate a constitutional amendment to outlaw abortion, they have succeeded in getting Congress to halt nearly all Medicaid funding for abortions for poor women. But the trend may be swinging back in the direction of choice. The latest developments:

In June Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-CT) got the Senate Appropriations Committee to amend the Labor/Health and Human Services

Appropriations bill to allow Medicaid funding for abortions for the victims of rape and incest. Opinion polls show that 80% to 88% of Americans believe that abortion should be available to rape and incest victims. The battle in Congress in September will be intense over the Weicker amendment, and both sides of the controversy are urging citizens to contact their senators and representatives.

In other action, Reps. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Patricia Schroeder (D-CO) lost in their attempt in June to restore to federal employees the right to have abortion coverage in their health insurance plans. The same week, though, Rep. Mark Siljander (R-MI) also lost in his attempt to insert anti-abortion language (to define "person" to include fetuses) in the Civil Rights Act of 1984. Meanwhile, Reps. Bill Green (R-NY), Vic Fazio (D-CA), and 54 co-sponsors introduced the Reproductive Health Equity Act, H.R. 5745, to restore abortion benefits under Medicaid and federal employee

health insurance plans. Pro-choice groups expect it will take several years of effort to get the bill enacted.

Creationism-Evolution

In the wake of Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox's March ruling that the state board of education's rule requiring the downplaying of evolution was unconstitutional, the State Textbook Commission held balanced hearings in July and in August adopted biology textbooks generally acceptable to biologists. The textbook adoptions were a long awaited victory over heretofore successful Radical Right censors. Textbook selection in Texas is important to the whole country because the state's large textbook market and state control over textbook adoptions has had a strong, and until now, negative influence on textbook publishing.

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Editorial

Population Politics

Isaac Asimov, science writer and member of the ARL Advisory Board, pointed out recently that, "Population growth at current rates will create a world without hope, gripped by starvation and desperation. It will be worse than a jungle because we have weapons immensely more destructive and vicious than teeth and claws."

Robert S. McNamara, former World Bank president and Secretary of Defense, details the seriousness of the population problem in the Summer 1984 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. McNamara warns that failure to curb high population growth rates in the developing countries will mean political instability, spreading misery, unprecedented poverty, and, ultimately, government coercion to halt the growth.

It was embarrassing and disheartening, then, to see the Reagan administration's delegation to the United Nations World Population Conference in Mexico City in August, headed by ultraconservative ideologue James Buckley and containing no women, treating the population problem as less than critical and seeking to impose its anti-abortion ideology on the rest of the world, apparently to stroke the minority anti-choice lobby in the U.S. and to appeal for sectarian bloc votes. The administration's position, that it will halt U.S. aid to private family planning agencies that are in any way involved with abortion, will probably mean a reduction in birth control services where they are most needed and a consequent increase in less safe, often

illegal abortions. The administration has already sharply increased U.S. aid for the rather unreliable "natural" birth control methods.

The administration's position flies in the face of a recent Gallup poll showing that Americans favor continued U.S. family planning aid by 61% to 24%. Interesting also is that while the administration is lukewarm toward effective action to solve the population problem, Spain, one of the world's more Catholic countries, called for increased funding of family planning campaigns at the World Population Conference.

The Reagan delegation and that of the Vatican succeeded in getting the conference to declare that abortion "in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning." While abortion is certainly not a preferred method, population experts Stephen D. Mumford and Elton Kessel pointed out in the July 15 issue of the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* that only a combination of contraception and abortion is likely to give the world a chance to bring population growth down to a level consistent with decent living standards, political stability, and the carrying capacity of our environment.

Politicians need to recognize that our planet's resources are mostly finite, that the world cannot feed, shelter, and dispose of the wastes of a large and rapidly expanding population. Sectarian dogmas must not be allowed to stand in the way of democratic, rational solutions to serious inescapable problems. ■

God and Politics

by Charles V. Bergstrom and David Saperstein

One of the most prominent characteristics of the Republican convention was the unprecedented infusion of religion into that political arena. Despite all the attention given to the convention, the most alarming example of recent efforts to "Christianize" America was overlooked. The week prior to the convention, Christian ministers and priests across the state of Texas received a letter from the chairman of Reagan-Bush '84, Sen. Paul Laxalt, addressed: "Dear Christian Leader."

being untrue to their faith if they do not return the Reagan-Bush team to office.

The design is quite clearly a conscious one by Republican strategists. It is part of a broad political program that seeks to impose a religious conformity on the American people by legalizing school prayer, permitting religious figures to evangelize in our public schools and promoting other actions that breach the wall of separation protecting religions from governmental interference and government from religious intrusion. It resonates in the President's

un-Christian, un-Jewish, immoral or sinful. The manipulative character of this letter is reflected in its reducing religious values to abortion and school prayer with no mention of the Biblical injunctions to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, remember the aged, welcome the stranger at the gate, or seek peaceful ways for nations to resolve their differences.

Christians and Jews agree and disagree with each other and among themselves regarding political positions, and that is perfectly proper in our pluralistic society. What is not proper is that religious dogma should be used by political parties or religious organizations as the yardstick for determining the quality of candidates for public office.

To invoke God's authority in behalf of a political candidate and to present one party's agenda as the "Christian" approach is low politics and bad religion. The Reagan-Bush letter reflects an unprecedented effort to mobilize church facilities in support of one particular political party or candidate. While individual religious leaders can endorse candidates, work in their campaigns or even run for office, both the state and the religious communities have drawn the line at religious organizations, churches or synagogues engaging in such activities. The Reagan-Bush campaign has done a terrible disservice to religious freedom, the integrity of the political process and, perhaps most important, to the religious leaders and churches receiving the letter—for if churches implement the letter's appeal

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Rev. Bergstrom is executive director of the Office for Governmental Affairs for the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. Rabbi Saperstein is director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington.

"As leaders under God's authority, we cannot afford to resign ourselves to idle neutrality in an election that will confirm or silence the President who has worked so diligently on your behalf and on behalf of all Americans," the letter said. It spoke of President Reagan's "unwavering commitment to the traditional values which I know you share," and ended with a call on the clergymen receiving the letter to "organize a voter registration drive in your church . . . to help assure that those in your ministry will have a voice in the upcoming elections . . . a voice that will surely help secure the re-election of President Reagan and Vice President Bush."

Accompanying the letter was a flyer with the legend, "Christian Voter Program Information Enclosed," and a photograph of a smiling Ronald Reagan and the headline, "President Reagan Has Been Faithful in His Support of Issues of Concern to Christian Citizens."

This presumptuous attempt to equate party politics with Christianity is deeply offensive. The message—that God is a Republican and that the Christian thing to do is to reelect Ronald Reagan—abuses the political process and alienates Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and other non-Christians, not to mention agnostics, atheists and secularists, among others, telling them that they are something less than full-fledged citizens. As it tells Christians that they are

accusation, made at the prayer breakfast held during the convention, that opponents of school prayer are "intolerant of religion." Church-state separation is not anti-religious; it has helped organized religion achieve a variety, richness and success unknown in any land.

There is something ugly and frightening about invoking and manipulating theology to advance partisan political ambitions. It is arrogant to assert that one's position on a political issue is the true "Christian" or "Jewish" view and that opposing views are

Resources

Available from ARL, P.O. Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20906.

A Delicate Balance: Church, State, and the Schools, by Martha M. McCarthy. An up-to-date, comprehensive yet concise (178 pp.) summary of Supreme Court and lower court rulings on religion in public education, government aid to religious schools, religious exemptions from public school programs, religious challenges to public school curriculum, and governmental regulation of parochial schools. An excellent basic resource for lawyer and layperson alike. \$6 plus \$1 for postage and handling.

American Freedom and the Radical Right, by ARL co-founder Edward L. Ericson. An

excellent guide to the aims and methods of the movement bent on "piecemeal repeal of the Bill of Rights." \$4.95 plus \$1 for postage and handling.

"Will Religious Liberty Survive the 1980s?" Address by ARL executive director Edd Doerr. 50¢ each includes postage and handling.

Pamphlets

"Tuition Tax Credits: Threat to Religious Liberty and Public Education."

"A New Constitutional Convention: Threat to the Bill of Rights."

"Creationism, Evolution, and the Public Schools."

"Prayer and the Public Schools."

10 for \$1; 75 for \$5. Titles may be mixed.

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and school prayer measures, Rep. Trent Lott (R-MS) stated unequivocally that the Republicans are, "trying to show that what the Democrats said in San Francisco [at their convention], and how they vote, are two different things."

The Democrats, who took positions in support of family values and religion but warned against the intrusion of government in matters of conscience, admitted to feeling the heat of the Republican election-year strategy. By approving the two religious measures, Democrats "can still say we voted for prayer in the schools," said Rep. Tony Coelho of California, chairman of the party's Congressional Campaign Committee.

The undisputed champion of piety in politics, however, is President Ronald Reagan. He has raised the practice to an art form in using religion to justify his positions on school prayer, religious meetings in schools, abortion, and foreign policy. "Religion and politics are necessarily related," he said recently. In neatly separating the profane from the pious he accused those who disagree with him on school

There He Goes Again . . .

President Reagan recently said that, "as a child growing up in Illinois," he didn't "find any problem going to school and listening to different kinds of prayer." The hitch, however, is that there was no audible group prayer allowed in his school.

ACLU of Illinois contacted Reagan's elementary school principal in Dixon, IL., Esther Barton, now retired, who said, "In my memory we never allowed prayer in my school or any other school in the area."

In fact, a 1910 Illinois Supreme Court decision ruled that prayer and Bible reading in public schools were in violation of the state constitution. The court said of even "voluntary" school prayer, "The exclusion of a pupil from . . . part of the school exercises in which the rest of the school joins, separates him from his fellows, puts him in a class by himself, deprives him of his equality with the other pupils, subjects him to a religious stigma and places him at a disadvantage in the school."

prayer of "attacking religion."

As for his regard for pluralism, the president has said, "We have respected every other religion. They're free to practice in our country. . . ." *Other religion? Our country?* Seldom has a major American leader so blatantly presumed that this is a theocracy, a Christian nation.

The impetus for what now seems like ubiquitous religiosity in politics is the five year old movement known as the religious new right. Using the mass media they have

attempted to sway opinion to their political agenda. Although it is not certain how significant their influence is on voters, the president and members of Congress at least perceive the ultraconservatives as powerful. Whether the legislators continue to be intimidated by them is a question that remains to be answered.

This much is sure: The Radical Right will not go away, and given an inch ("equal access" on July 25) it will always take a mile (school prayer on July 26). ■

Con-Con Crisis Deferred

The threat to the Constitution and Bill of Rights of a wide-open national constitutional convention (Con-Con) was deferred on August 27 when the California Supreme Court ruled 6 to 1 to remove an initiative from the November California ballot. The initiative, Proposition 35, was designed to force the state legislature to pass a resolution requesting Congress to call a national constitutional convention by threatening to cut off the members' pay. Failing that, the

initiative itself was to have been sent to Congress in lieu of a legislative resolution.

If two more state legislatures pass resolutions calling for a Con-Con (34 are needed), Congress would have no choice but to do so. Although the backers of the Con-Con, the first the country would have since 1787, ostensibly seek it only to pass a constitutional amendment to require a balanced federal budget, constitutional experts generally agree that, once convened, a new Con-Con, like the one in 1787, could not be held to a single purpose and could revise the whole Constitution and Bill of Rights. Con-Con opponents warn that a powerful coalition of Radical Right groups would try to control the selection of Con-Con delegates in order to change the Constitution to authorize government sponsored group prayer and the teaching of "creationism" in public schools, to allow or require government to support sectarian private schools, to outlaw abortion, to allow censorship, and to weaken civil liberties in other ways.

The California initiative was ruled to

violate the U.S. Constitution by trying to call a Con-Con in a manner not provided for in the Constitution. The measure was also held to violate sections of the California state constitution.

The suit challenging Proposition 35 was brought by the AFL-CIO, the ACLU, and a number of civil rights, women's, senior citizens, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups.

Montana and Michigan are now the targets of the Con-Con promoters. An initiative, similar to California's but less vulnerable to legal attack, will be on the November ballot in Montana. In Michigan pressure will increase on the state House of Representatives to pass a Con-Con resolution, Senate Joint Resolution E, which was passed by the state Senate in April.

(Michigan and Montana ARL members are urged to order and distribute copies of the ARL pamphlet, "A New Constitutional Convention: Threat to the Bill of Rights," 10 for \$1, 75 for \$5. Available from ARL, Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20906.) ■

Doerr to Speak in NY

ARL executive director Edd Doerr will speak on "The Role of Religion in Politics" at a dinner sponsored by the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York on Monday, September 17, at 6:30 p.m., at the New York University Club, 123 West 43rd Street, New York. Phone 687-2477 for reservations or information.

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they would be seriously jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

As the materials for the Republican convention were being assembled in Dallas, someone discovered that a copy of the New Testament had been included in each delegate's kit. A strong protest was made, and the Christian Scriptures were removed. The attempt to slip the Gospels into the Republican convention is of a piece with the Republican effort to persuade Christian clergy that God wants Ronald Reagan back in the White House. It is time for religious leaders of all faiths to demand that it be stopped.

Reprinted from the *Washington Post*, August 26, 1984.

Newsbriefs, *continued*

In other action, the Louisiana House of Representatives has defeated a bill, passed earlier by the Senate, to repeal the state law requiring equal treatment of creationism and evolution. A federal court can now proceed with a case challenging the law. In Columbus, Ohio, scientists, educators, clergy, and community leaders are trying to get the city's school board to rescind its 1980 policy requiring equal treatment for creationism and evolution.

The Virginia Board of Education in July approved licensing as biology teachers graduates of Jerry Falwell's fundamentalist Liberty Baptist College, despite widespread fears that those graduates will teach creationism in public school classes. A committee of the board said it found creationism taught in theology and philosophy but not biology classes. State board member Margaret Marston asked, "How can a college that has a doctrinal statement [against evolution], which students and professors must sign, separate evolution and creationism in a biology class?"

The New York State budget for 1984-85, passed by the legislature and signed by the governor, will provide state aid to school districts for the purchase of computer software programs costing up to \$2.50 per pupil for students in nonpublic as well as public schools. The New York Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty will challenge the aid to sectarian schools in court. PEARL maintains that the aid violates the Supreme Court's 1975 *Meek* ruling on a similar Pennsylvania program.

In Colorado an initiative to provide full public funding for parochial and private schools under a voucher plan will not be on the November ballot. The voucher plan's backers failed to collect the 46,737 signatures needed to get the measure on the ballot. A similar voucher initiative in Michigan was defeated at the polls in 1978 by a 3 to 1 vote.

ARL in Action

Americans for Religious Liberty has joined with other organizations in *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) briefs in two important cases to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In *School District of Grand Rapids v. Ball* the Court will review lower federal court rulings against the Grand Rapids, MI, policy of providing public school teachers to Catholic, Missouri Synod Lutheran, Christian Reformed, and other denominational private schools. Key figure in the suit is the Rev. Jay Webeke, a member of the ARL board. The *amicus* brief opposing the parochial plan was filed by the American Jewish Congress, the ACLU, ARL, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the National Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty, and the National Education Association.

In *Wallace v. Jaffree* the Court will consider the constitutionality of an Alabama law which mandates silent prayer in public schools. ARL is joining an *amicus* brief prepared for ACLU, the National Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty, and other groups.

ARL has called on the U.S. Coast Guard to stop allowing vessels and crews to participate officially in denominational religious ceremonies. The Coast Guard cutter Point Roberts and its crew had participated in a blessing of the fishing fleet ceremony led by Catholic Bishop John Snyder in St. Augustine, FL. ARL told Acting Commandant Admiral B.L. Stabile and Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole that the incident showed government favoritism toward one religious body and interfered with the religious freedom of crew members.

ARL executive director Edd Doerr presented a statement at the Republican Platform Hearing on June 30 sponsored by Senator Lowell Weicker and other moderate Republicans. Doerr said that both parties should support religious neutrality in public schools, confine tax

support to public schools, and refrain from opposing free choice on abortion, which he said was a legal right at the time the Constitution and Bill of Rights were adopted and for many years thereafter.

Kenneth K. Gjemre of Dallas, TX was elected treasurer of the ARL board of directors in June. Mr. Gjemre has long been active in defending religious liberty and church-state separation.

ARL board member Jay Webeke was featured in a *Grand Rapids Press* article in June for his work in trying to stop church-state separation violations in local school districts in Michigan.

ARL board member, and attorney, Gilbert Feldman debated Reagan biographer Bob Slosser on WFLD-TV in Chicago in April.

Leonard Cherlin has been reelected chair of the Long Island Chapter of ARL.

ARL executive director Edd Doerr and assistant director Maury Abraham conducted a workshop on religious liberty problems at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly in June. During the summer Doerr addressed meetings in Ohio and Maryland, and appeared on talk shows on WAMU-FM in Washington and WOR-AM in New York.

Doerr will be speaking at church services, meetings, and conferences in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio in September and October. On December 19 he will present a paper on "Religious Liberty in America: A Constitutional Perspective" before the Constitution Study Group at the National Archives in Washington.

Americans for Religious Liberty P.O. Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20906

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