



State Legislators Reach Deal to Revise School Code

After a day of closed-door negotiations, legislators late Thursday reached a deal to revise Florida's school code, ending a \$40,000-a-day special session with a bill that's virtually identical to one they failed to adopt during the regular session.

With little public debate and over protest led by Jewish legislators from South Florida about a controversial measure outlining student religious activities allowed in school, a conference committee finally agreed on the first rewrite of the laws governing education in nearly 60 years.

By a 9-to-4 vote, the negotiating team approved the compromise on the massive, nearly 1,800-page bill just before 9 p.m. Thursday, with Democrats opposing a deal where the Senate took the more politically conservative House's position on nearly all the major disputed issues.

Among the most explosive: a House-backed provision that puts into law that students can pray, proselytize, and distribute religious literature in school, which several South Florida legislators made a passionate last-ditch effort to kill.

"This is a massive expansion of religious activity in schools," said Sen. Ron Klein, D-Boca Raton, and a member of the Senate negotiating team. "A conference is supposed to be a public discussion. It's not happened as it should have."

The conference committee convened briefly a half-dozen times throughout the day to announce the latest offer from one side or the counter-offer from the other side on 41 disputed issues in the bill, but conducted their negotiations in private.

- *Sun-Sentinel*

Vatican Says They Deserved It

The Vatican said on Tuesday the September 11 attacks in the United States were the product of a society that engaged in abortion, euthanasia and genetic experiments on humans.

"The right to life is threatened precisely by today's highly advanced technology... creating a culture of death, in which abortion, euthanasia and genetic experiments on human life itself have already obtained or are on the way to obtaining legal recognition," Nigerian cardinal Francis Arinze said in a letter to Buddhists posted on the Vatican web site.

"How can we not make a correlation between this culture of death -- in which the most innocent, defenceless and critically ill human lives are threatened with death -- and terrorist attacks such as those of September 11, in which thousands of innocent people were slaughtered?"

Arinze, who presides over the Vatican council for dialogue between religions, wrote the letter to Buddhists around the world to mark the Vesah 2002 celebrations of the anniversary of the birth of Buddha. Arinze invited Buddhists to work with Catholics to protect human life and reject what he called today's "culture of death".

- <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>
Times of India

MEETING: 7:30 p.m., Monday, May 13, 2002

Making White Privilege Visible

Nick Mrozinski

◆ This month's meeting will be held in the Board Room at SFCC Downtown Campus ◆



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Bill Introduced to Protect Clergy Housing Allowance

Legislation to protect a long-standing housing tax exemption for ordained ministers and other clergy has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Rep. Jim Ramstad, R.-Minn., introduced the Clergy Housing Allowance Clarification Act, H.R. 4156, April 10. The bill is designed to preserve the exemption by amending the Internal Revenue Code to make clear the allowance does not exceed the “fair rental value” of a house.

The bill was introduced in response to the possibility, if not probability, a federal court will strike down the clergy housing exemption as unconstitutional. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals announced in March it is reviewing the constitutionality of the allowance, even though neither side in the related case challenged the exemption.

The house leadership has given the legislation high priority. A vote is scheduled April 16, according to a congressional aide. A two-thirds majority will be required to suspend the rules and bring the bill up for a vote.

The head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s public policy agency applauded Ramstad’s action.

“It is absolutely imperative that Ramstad’s bill pass in light of the aggressive and hostile behavior of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in which the judges give every indication they are going to try to declare the clergy housing allowance unconstitutional,” said Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. “This legislation would put into black-letter law an IRS regulation and thus give firmer ground by putting the full force of Congress behind the clergy housing allowance.”

Lawyers from the SBC’s Executive Committee, Annuity Board and ERLC have worked on the issue.

Since 1921, pastors and other religious leaders have been able to deduct from federal taxes a portion of their income for housing. This allowance has been especially helpful in enabling small churches to have a full time pastor.

Abolition of the allowance would have a highly negative impact on pastors and other congregational leaders, as well as churches and other religious bodies. It has been estimated loss of the allowance would result in those affected by the change paying an additional \$2.3 billion in taxes during the next five years.

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Newsletter of the
Humanist Society of Gainesville
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