



Georgia Baptist Mission Board
**PUBLIC AFFAIRS
MINISTRY**

**RESOURCE BOOKLET
2023-2024**



Public Affairs Ministry

The Committee on Public Affairs is responsible for giving voice to the Georgia Baptist Convention's thoughts and positions on public policy and social issues as approved by reports or resolutions by the the convention.



Mike Griffin **Public Affairs Representative**

Since January 2014, Mike Griffin has served as the Public Affairs Representative for the Georgia Baptist Convention. His duties include lobbying at the state Capitol and speaking on moral and religious liberty issues around the state.

Mike served as a Southern Baptist pastor in the state of Georgia for over 35 years. Some of his previous background includes:

- 2006 Republican candidate for Georgia State Representative, 29th District
- President of Ten Commandments – Georgia, Inc.
- Georgia Right to Life State Field Director

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Georgia Baptist Citizen Lobby Training (Lobbying 101)

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

Introduction:

The Purpose of the Seminar: To familiarize the average citizen with the place and procedures of lobbying at the Georgia State Capitol.

The Definition of Lobbying (or **Lobby** as verb): *“A form of advocacy through conducting activities aimed at influencing public officials and especially members of a legislative body on legislation. To attempt to influence or sway (someone, such as a public official) toward a desired action. A lobbyist is one who conducts activities aimed at influencing or swaying public officials and especially members of a legislative body on legislation : a person engaged in lobbying public officials.”* Source: Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

“The BBC holds that “lobbying” comes from the gathering of Members of Parliament and peers in the hallways (or lobbies) of Houses of Parliament before and after parliamentary debates. One story states that the term originated at the Willard Hotel in Washington, DC, where it was used by Ulysses S. Grant to describe the political wheelers and dealers frequenting the hotel’s lobby in order to access Grant, who was often found there, enjoying a cigar and brandy. The term “lobbying” appeared in print as early as 1820.” Source: Wikipedia

The bottom-line: Lobbying can be defined with one word “Influence.” Therefore, a **Citizen Lobbyist** is someone who seeks to influence legislation on behalf of his or her own personal convictions and interests. These convictions and interests may or may not be represented by a special interest group or member of a lobby.

1. What your Public Affairs Representative does at the Capitol

(Note different name tags worn by various persons working at the Capitol: Legislators, Staffers, Lobbyists, and State Employees)

My relationships at the Capitol:

1. Politicians
2. People
3. Press

My role at the Capitol:

1. Observation
2. Education
3. Motivation
4. Activation

2. Understanding the surroundings of the Capitol

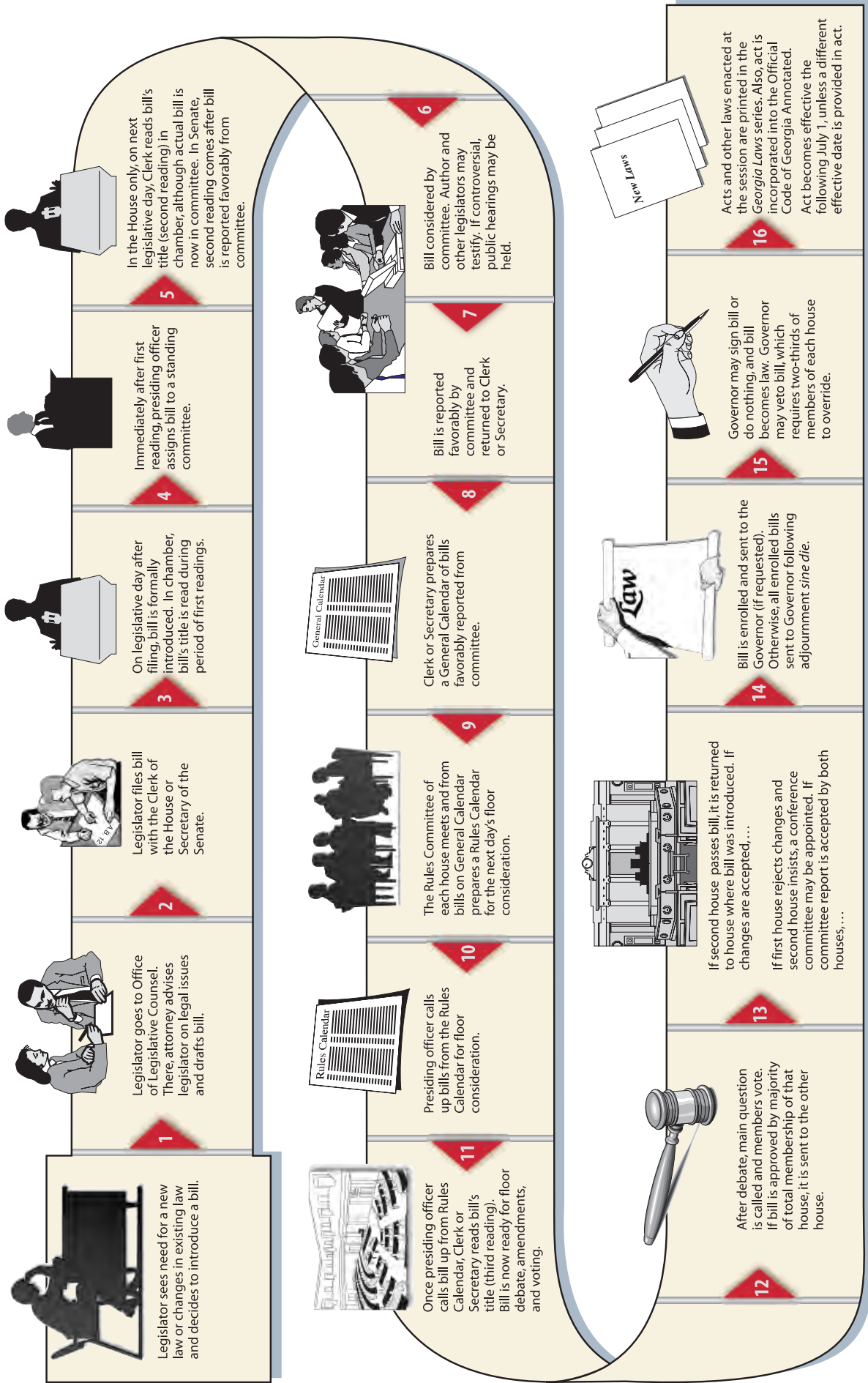
1. The Georgia State Capitol
2. The Legislative Office Building (LOB)
3. The Sloppy Floyd Building (The Twin Towers)

4. The Pete Hackney Deck (Sloppy Floyd Building)
5. The #1 Parking Deck
6. The Steve Polk Parking Lot (by old Coca Cola building)
7. The Educational Building (behind Presbyterian Church)

3. Understanding the legislative process *(How a bill becomes law)*

1. A bill is “dropped”/introduced by the author submitting it to the clerk’s office.
2. The bill is then read the next legislative day during the opening session and assigned to the appropriate committee by the Speaker of the House or the Lieutenant Governor, depending on the chamber in which it is introduced.
3. The author of the bill may then request a hearing from the Chairman of the committee.
4. Once a hearing is granted, appropriate testimony will be given by those who are in favor of and those who are opposed to the legislation.
5. After testimony is given, a vote is taken to pass or not pass the bill out of committee.
6. Favorable passage of the bill sends it to the Rules Committee, where it may or may not be voted on to be scheduled for debate and vote on the floor of one of the chambers.
7. If the bill is approved by one chamber, it is sent over to the other for assignment to a committee for testimony and a vote that has to be asked for from another author who assumes responsibility for the bill.
8. If approved by the committee it is sent to the floor for another debate and vote.
9. If voted on and approved in the other chamber, it is sent to the Governor for approval.
10. If the bill is amended, it must go back to the original chamber for agreement and a vote taken again. If there is disagreement and both chamber chairmen wish to advance the bill, it will be sent to a conference committee. This committee will attempt a compromise that has to be voted on and agreed to in both chambers before going to the Governor for signing.
11. The Governor may sign or refuse to sign a bill into law. If refused, the House must decide whether or not to attempt an override.
12. Remember, every bill has only one cycle of viability once it is introduced. This means no bill has more than two years to be approved.

How a Bill is Passed in the Georgia Legislature



4. Methods of contacting legislators

1. Mail a Letter
2. Send a Fax
3. Make a Phone Call
4. Send an Email
5. Make a Personal Visit

Remember, all politics are local!

5. Finding Your Legislator at the Capitol

1. Look on the floor
2. Look in their office
3. Look in a committee meeting
4. Look in a lunchroom

6. How to Call a Legislator “Off of the Floor”

1. Know who you are looking for on a particular legislation
2. Fill out a request form
3. Give the form to the secretary at the desk
4. Wait off to the side for a page to return with a reply
5. Talk with Legislator on the public side of “the rope”
6. Remember to be mindful of those around you

7. How to Speak to a Legislator

1. Be Respectful (Office and Position)
2. Be Polite (kind and courteous)
3. Be Knowledgeable (know what you are talking about)
4. Be Honest (know what you believe)
5. Be Direct (know what you want)
6. Be Accountable (hold the Legislator accountable)

8. How to find out information about Legislators and Bills

1. Go to the Georgia Legislature website: www.legis.state.ga.us
 - a. Legislators
 - b. Committee Members
 - c. Status of Bills
 - d. Contact the Public Affairs Representative: Mike Griffin at mgriffin@gabaptist.org or 770-936-5365

- 2. Contact a Legislator
- 3. Read newspapers, blogs, media, and social networks

9. How to go about Planning and Scheduling a Group Lobbying Trip

- 1. Contact the appropriate person at the Capitol
 - a. Your Legislator
 - b. Your Public Affairs Representative, Mike Griffin
- 2. Determine your mode of transportation and parking location
- 3. Make sure everyone has appropriate ID
- 4. Encourage appropriate clothes to wear
- 5. Determine who it is you want to see and where their office is ahead of time
- 6. Plan which cafeteria you will eat in
- 7. Determine where someone will go if they lose the group

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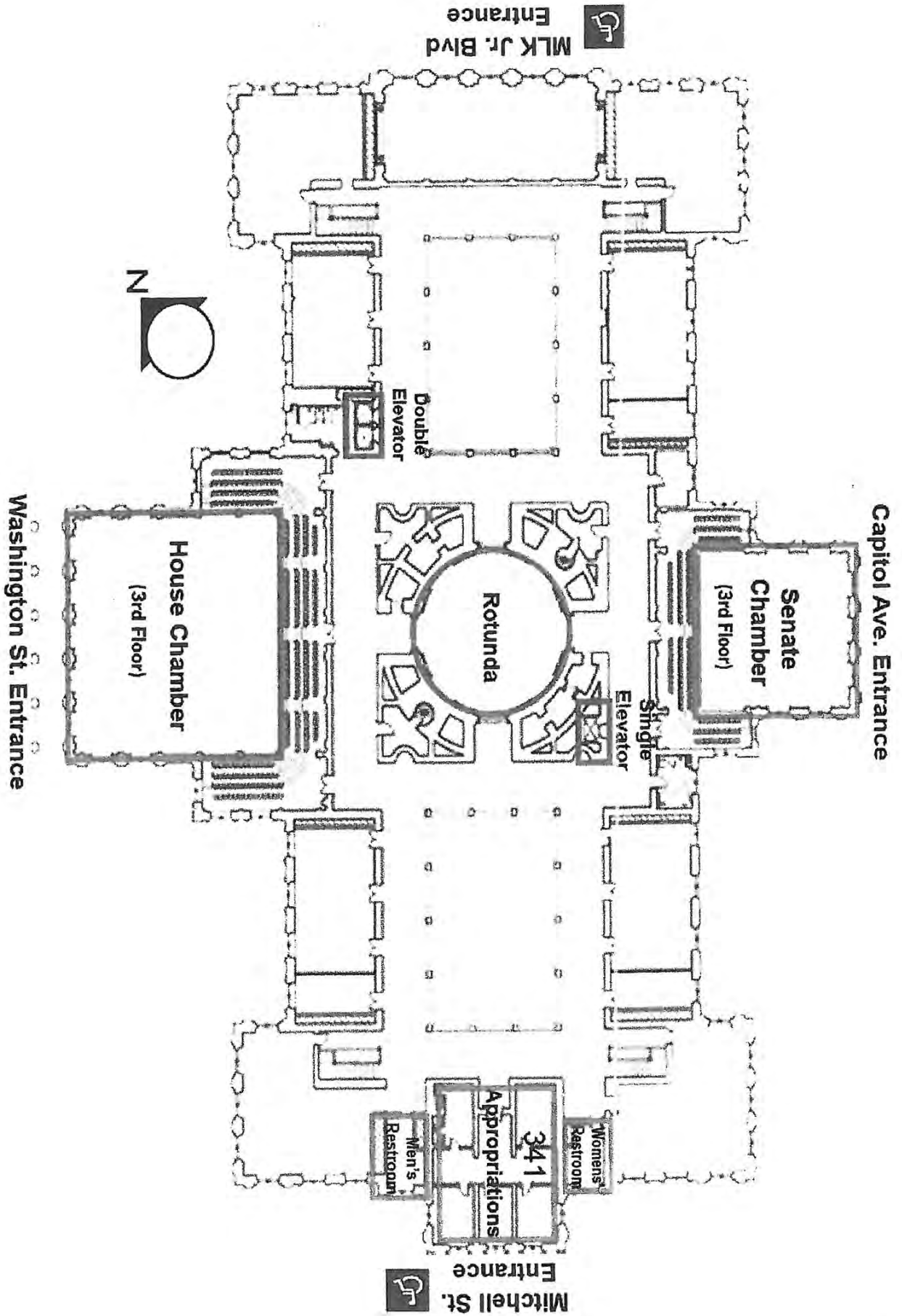
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Why Should a Christian be Involved in Politics?

Originally published in *The Christian Index* in 2021. Written by Mike Griffin

As we think upon the subject of Christians and politics, it may seem odd to many that we would put the two together. Politics is seen in such a negative light these days. The reaction to hearing the two mentioned together often elicits the same response as hearing Christianity coupled with pornography or drug use.

It seems as if the word itself has become synonymous with that which is evil, corrupt, and deceptive. While admitting that this perception is widespread, we must also acknowledge that the word politics is not in and of itself evil. The word “politic” comes from the Greek word “politikos” meaning, “of a citizen.” The word “politics” refers to the science and art of civil government. The word democracy means, “the rule of the people.”

When we put all this together in the context of the United States, we find out that what we have is called a “constitutional republic.” This means that our system of government is based upon a written constitution that guarantees our God-given unalienable rights are protected by representatives that are democratically elected by its citizens. They are elected by popular vote, and they legislate by majority vote.

Practically speaking, this means there must be citizens who willingly offer themselves as candidates for public office. This is where we as individual Christian citizens come in. (Please note, I am not advocating that churches endorse candidates and political parties, but that church members who are citizens should become involved in politics.)

According to Romans 13, it is God who came up with the idea and institution of government. As a matter of fact, people who serve in government or politics are called “ministers of God.” See Romans 13:1,4.

In light of these definitions and what the Bible says, we come up with a different perspective from what is perceived today. For example, in Proverbs 29:12 it reads, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” Since this verse is true, then what makes “politics” good or evil is determined by the caliber of people who get involved in it. If the righteous are involved, the citizens will rejoice. If the wicked are more involved, the citizens will mourn.

It was Edmund Burke who once said, “All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” If you, as a Christian citizen or a citizen of Biblical moral values, stand back and do nothing you will ensure that the things you dislike most about government will continue to happen!

It is with this understanding that I want to share with you four obligations that require a Christian’s involvement in politics.

The Spiritual Obligation to God

The first obligation that the Christian must be involved in politics is what I call the “spiritual obligation to God.” Our spiritual obligation to God says, “that being a good Christian involves being a good citizen.” Being a good citizen is a logical outgrowth of maturing as a Christian.

When Jesus described the character and nature of the Christian in the Sermon on the Mount, He said that we, as Christians, are to be “salt and light” (Matt. 5:13-16).

Notice that Jesus was not saying what we “ought to be.” He was telling us what we are! True Christianity is not “trying” to be “salt and light.” True Christianity is salt and light. The issue is not what we are – if indeed, we are converted. The question is: “How effective are we going to be at what we are?”

Jesus encourages us to be “salty” and that means we need to get out of the “shaker.” He encourages us to not “hide our lamp under a bushel,” but rather to display it in such a way that it has the maximum amount of influence for Christ! For us to be uninvolved and silent is a sin against God and His Word.

As Christians we have a dual citizenship. We are citizens both of heaven and earth. And, because of that we must guard against the temptation to be so “heavenly minded” that we are “no earthly good” (“good for nothing”, Matt. 5:13)!

The Social Obligation to Others

The second obligation that we as Christians must be involved in politics is what I call the “social obligation to others.” Our social obligation to others says that to be a good citizen involves being willing to run for public office.

The government of the United States is unique in comparison to other governments because if you are a legal citizen, YOU ARE THE GOVERNMENT. This truth is powerfully attested to in the first three words of the U.S. Constitution: “We the people.”

So many times, we think of the government as “those people” in Atlanta or in Washington, D.C. They are our representatives. But we as a whole, the people of the United States, are the government. And the people who serve us in Atlanta or Washington will only be as good as those who run and whom we elect to public office! We are losing our best representative government not because of revolt or rebellion but by DEFAULT!

If we are left with nothing but unrighteous and unprincipled men and women to lead us, then we shouldn’t be surprised at the laws and policies we have. Each of us as Christians have a social obligation to our families, our children, our communities, and our future generations to be engaged and involved in our political process.

Are we so selfish that we don’t care what kind of country we will pass on to our children and our grandchildren? Is it not time again to say with the prophet Isaiah, “here am I Lord, send me”? Note how Charles Spurgeon put it...

“I often hear it said, ‘Do not bring religion into politics.’ This is precisely where it ought to be brought! I would have the cabinet and members of the parliament do the work of the nation as before the Lord, and I would have the nation, either in making war or peace, consider the matter by the light of righteousness. We have had enough of clever men without conscience. Now let us see what honest, God-fearing men will do.”

The Moral Obligation to Truth

The third obligation that we as Christians must be involved in politics is what I call the “moral obligation to truth.” Our moral obligation to truth says that if we run for public office, we must stand for something!

It’s been said that “if you do not stand for something, you will fall for anything!” The problem we have today with “politics” and “political parties” is that we have unprincipled people who will say, do and confess anything to get elected and stay elected.

We have too many “politicians” and not enough “statesmen.” It has been said that the difference between a politician and a statesman is that a “politician” knows the truth but tells you what you want to hear. A “statesman” knows what you want to hear but tells you the truth anyway!

It is a sad commentary upon the state of our society that truth is not what our citizens are looking for. It is only in the pursuit of truth that any society can have the kind of values that make life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness worth living for.

Our laws and policies must be based upon those certain unalienable rights that come from our Creator God. And it is He alone who, in the Ten Commandments, has established eternal standards of right and wrong that any civilized society must be based upon. All those who run for such offices must hold fast to the moral obligation of truth. This is seen in Romans 13:9-10.

The Eternal Obligation to Righteousness

The fourth and final obligation that we as Christians must be involved in politics is what might be called the “eternal obligation to righteousness.” Our eternal obligation to righteousness says that if we are willing to “stand for something that is right,” we must also be willing to “suffer the consequences” for it!

This fact goes to the very core of what drove and motivated our founding fathers in the writing of The Declaration of Independence. How can any of us forget their words, that they were willing to give “their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor!”

Our founding fathers knew that anything worth living for was indeed worth dying for. For the Christian this means we must be involved in the political process of our country, even if it means running for public office, and even if it means losing! You see, my friend, there is more at stake than simply an election. We, above all people, have an eternal obligation to righteousness that transcends this earthly life into eternity itself!

We must realize that it is never wrong to do what is right, even if we don’t see the immediate results of our labor. It’s not just about us. It’s about others. It’s about the generations that will follow us, and it is ultimately about having to stand before God in eternity and to give an accounting to Him.

I am not known for quoting a lot of what former football Coach Mike Ditka has said, but years ago I heard him say, “you’re never a loser unless you quit.” I fear that too many Christians are more worried about being a “loser” in the world’s eyes than being a “winner” in God’s eyes!

If you, as a Christian, decide to run for public office and, in standing for righteousness, you lose, just remember, if you stand for truth, you are still a winner! I believe that it is possible to win the race, even if you lose the election.

Listen, the fact that the best candidate does not always win, must not keep us from trying. We must not be too short sighted in understanding what true success is! True success is not measured by just what happens on election night, but rather on Judgment Day!

There is an eternal obligation to righteousness that transcends our personal comfort zone. When your personal obligation to God, others, truth, and righteousness is fulfilled - you are a success. Think about the seeds you have sown. Think about the lives that have been touched. Think about the lives that have been encouraged and, not to mention, those that have been inspired to action!

When we stand up and suffer the consequences for doing what is right, it encourages others to stand up also. That's what the apostle Paul is referring to in Philippians 1:12-14.

It may very well be that your witness for Christ, your testimony, your involvement or your example keeps hope alive in this country! As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that it is better to suffer for doing what is right, than to suffer having done what is wrong! (I Peter 3:17)

Don't make excuses for not accepting your responsibility to be involved in politics as a Christian Citizen. You do have, as a genuine Christian, a spiritual, social, moral, and eternal obligation to be involved in politics. I think this is something worth thinking and praying about (Isa. 6:8...here am I, send me.)!

“Is There Not a Cause?”

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

1 Samuel 17:28-29

28 And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightiest see the battle.

29 And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?

Is There Not a Cause?

Are there reasons why we should be concerned about our country?

Abortion	Gambling	Same-sex Marriage
Evolution	Prostitution	Drug Abuse
Pornography	Alcoholism	Sex Trafficking
Assisted Suicide	Divorce	Euthanasia

Why is it that we don't take our responsibility as Christian citizens more seriously?

- Piety
- Complacency
- Cynicism
- Apathy
- Fear

“It takes \$80K for a year to treat one child who has been rescued from sex trafficking.”

“It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.” -Jesus Christ (Lk. 17:2)

“If we (the church) don't at least care about the impact the culture is having upon our children, then what kind of “gospel” are we preaching?”

Do pastors, churches, and Christian citizens have a responsibility in correcting and directing our country? Yes!

Exhibit: A - Rev. Martin Niemöller

- German pastor who served during the time of Adolph Hitler
- Spent last 7 years of Nazi rule in concentration camps

“And then they came for me and by that time there was no one left to speak for me.”

So, where do we get our “authority” to become involved?

1. Constitutional Authority

The 1st Three Words of the Constitution:

“We the People”

The 3 Most Basic (Unalienable*) Rights in Our Country Are:

1. Life
2. Liberty
3. Property Rights (Pursuit of Happiness)
4. “Endowed by Our Creator”

“Our Rights come from God, NOT Government. The Government’s responsibility is to secure our rights, NOT determine our rights.”

Roe v. Wade ,1973 decision:

... the personhood of the preborn child was the single point on which the entire debate turned.

“In the Roe v. Wade decision, Justice Harry Blackmun wrote that, ‘(If the) suggestion of personhood [of the preborn] is established, the [abortion rights] case, of course, collapses, for the fetus’ right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [14th] Amendment.’”

2. A Biblical Authority

The first 3 words of “God’s Constitution”:

“If My People” (II Chron. 7:14)

Three God-given Institutions:

1. The Church
2. The Home
3. The Government

Two Basic, Primary Responsibilities of Government (Romans 13):

4. Protect Innocent Life
5. Punish Evildoers

Dr. Francis Schaeffer quoted this in his book: “The Evangelical Disaster”...

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

3. A Gospel Authority

The problems of our country are not as much political as they are spiritual!

Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions!

Romans 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...”

Our country will never be changed through politics, but through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ!

Janet (Folger) Porter, *The Criminalization of Christianity*: “As a Christian in this country, you may be understandably reluctant to speak out on moral issues like abortion, homosexuality, or pornography. But while we have the right to remain silent, that’s not what God calls us to do. ...because if the world can silence truth, it will silence the gospel.”

Here is the point: “Any defense of truth leads to an eventual defense of the Gospel!”

“Ministry in the Killing Fields,” **William Carey** 1761–1834, known as “The Father of Modern Missions”

What he spoke out against:

1. Infanticide – The killing of infants
2. Murder – Burning of widows
3. Euthanasia – Exposing the sick
4. Assisted Suicide – Burning / Drowning of Lepers

Here’s the point:

Our unwillingness to speak out on these kinds of issues undermines our moral authority to preach the gospel!!!

(former) Ga House Rep. Doug McKillip:

“I became a Christian...You start reading the Bible, and you realize life begins at conception.” -“Abortion bill another consequence of McKillip’s party switch”, Athens Banner-Herald. By Blake Aued, Feb. 9, 2012

Now is the time to take a stand! Future generations are looking to us!

I Kings 2:3 “And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.”

Remember the Founding Fathers “...willing to give of their Lives, their Fortunes and Sacred Honor!”

Living for Christ in the Public Square

Matthew 5:13-16

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

Introduction:

This class is about educating pastors and church members on ethical issues in our culture. It is important that a witness to the life changing power of the gospel be seen in our local, state, and national government.

Note with me the following passages of scripture:

- 1) Luke 9:18-23
This passage illustrates that Theology and Ethics go together. Ethics is living out your Theology in daily life. We are to follow Christ in every area of life.
- 2) Acts 11:19-30
Here we find for the first time Believers in Christ are called Christians. This means the people who were professing Christ, were being characterized as Christ.
- 3) Acts 19:17-28
This passage shows us that real evangelism not only changes your eternal destiny but changes your present lifestyle. They believed the gospel and they lived the gospel.

There are (3) words that describe what it means to live for Christ in the public square:

#1. Influence (Matt. 5:13-16)

The point is this: If you were to choose one word to describe “salt and light” what would it be?

(2) points of emphasis:

- 1) Salvation not only prepares us for Heaven!
 - 2) Salvation changes the way we live on Earth!
Our life on earth is changed so much that Jesus calls us “salt and Light”!
-
- 1) Salt reminds us of two things:
 - a. Taste (Testimony)
Christianity is not about behavior modification, but heart transformation.
Gal. 5:16
 - b. Preservative (Standing and Maintaining what is Right)
Benjamin Franklin said in 1787, “We have given you a republic, if you can keep it.”
 - 2) Light reminds us of two things:
 - a. Removes Darkness
Reminds us of what it is like to cut the lights on!
Note: Eph. 5: 7-17; 2 Tim. 1:7
 - b. Reveals Truth

Truth needs nothing to be truth, it just needs to be revealed.

#2. Intentional (Mindful, Determined, Committed)

Point: I'm not asking you to "act" like a Christian, I'm asking you to "be" a Christian in every area of life. There is no such thing as "compartmentalized Christianity".

Because Jesus is Lord, we are to recognize that fact in every area of life. Therefore, everything is to be Christ-centered.

- 1) The Practical Areas of Life: Education, Business, Sports, Recreation, Industry, Government, Politics, Family, Relationships, Health/Science.
- 2) The Disciplines of Thought (Academics): Theology, Philosophy, Biology, Psychology, Ethics, Sociology, Politics, Economics, History.

All of this is known as a Biblical Worldview. Therefore, the world wants to keep Christians out of these areas. (Cancel Culture)

#3. Involvement (Three sources of authority to put "salt and light" into the culture)

Where do we get our authority to be involved in the public square?

- 1) The Constitution: "We the People"

It is just like when we were playing "tag" in school as kids: "we are it".

We are to be reminded of Jesus when he was standing before Pilate. In our day we are not only Jesus, but we are Pilate too! We are the people and government at the same time.

- 2) The Bible: "If My People" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

The point is: "If my people", will be "We the people"- we can make an exponential difference on our nation.

Prov. 29:2, When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

- 3) The Gospel: "God so Loved" (John 3:16)

Fact: God did not just talk love, but he demonstrated love. God is our example of getting involved!

Janet (Folger) Porter, *The Criminalization of Christianity*: "As a Christian in this country, you may be understandably reluctant to speak out on moral issues like abortion, homosexuality, or pornography. But while we have the right to remain silent, that's not what God calls us to do. ...because if the world can silence truth, it will silence the gospel."

We must speak out on these issues in the public square and do so in the context of the power of the Gospel! (Rom. 1:16)

Any defense of truth leads to an eventual defense of the Gospel!

You see—If the Gospel is true, it determines all that is true! If the GOSPEL is not true? NOTHING IS TRUE!

Conclusion:

Now is the time to put holy salt and light into the equation of saving and preserving our nation.

As it was said of our Founding Fathers, "...willing to give their lives, fortunes and sacred honor." Therefore, it will take nothing less NOW!...

Note the example of the story of King Ahab and Naboth in I Kings 21. Naboth said that he could not give up his inheritance. The same is true for us today.

Now is the time to stand! Future generations are looking to us!

Christ must be represented in the public square!

Plan of action to get involved in Government. (James 2:14)

- 1) Pray (You can't pray for leaders you don't know!)
- 2) Register to Vote (You can't vote if you're not registered!)
- 3) Vote (You can't vote if you don't go and vote!)
- 4) Vote for the Right Person (You can't vote for the right person if you don't know who to vote for!)
- 5) Be Willing to Run Yourself (Isa. 6:8) (You can't be a good steward if you're not willing!)
- 6) Stay Engaged! (You can't finish your work if you quit!)

A Pastor's "How To" for Establishing Relationships With Their Legislators

Dr. Tom Rush

Why is it important for pastors to establish relationships with their legislators?

Historically pastors have been some of the most influential people in their communities. In our current cultural climate, it is critical that pastors be involved in the political process. It is part of being a good citizen and the Scripture clearly calls us to that (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-7). Dr. Jody Hice, a former Baptist pastor and U.S. Congressman representing the Tenth District of Georgia contends "that to be a good Christian, you must be a good citizen. It is part of the stewardship commission that God issued to His followers" (It's Now or Never, WestBow Press, 2012, p. 19).

From experience, we know that pastors can influence their legislators and make an impact for the cause of Christ in our state. Our cherished freedoms are under assault from every corner. We have the opportunity and the obligation to stand in the gap for our churches and our children, for our flocks and our families. Pastor, you can make a difference! It is essential that you do so, as the tide is quickly turning against us. Voices are being raised in opposition to the most important thing we have in terms of fulfilling the call of God to reach our communities with the Gospel of Christ – our first amendment freedom of religious liberty.

Please take some time to consider the following six steps in establishing a relationship with your legislators.

Step 1: INFORMATION

The first thing you need to do is to find out who your legislative representatives are, including national, state and local public servants. Find out how to get in touch with them. Their contact information is public and easily accessible. You might also consider making this information available to your church members. Do not discount the impact of phone calls, emails and letters. As recently as the last legislative session in Georgia we saw a tremendous impact from calls and emails from our Georgia Baptist churches across the state on the gambling issue.

Here are some websites that will help you find your representatives....

www.sos.ga.gov - The Georgia Secretary of State site, provides election information, sample ballots, and exact information on the districts you reside in.

www.senate.ga.gov – Provides information on your Georgia Senator*

www.house.ga.gov – Provides information on your Georgia Representative*

*Also provides information on pending legislation and bills as they go through the legislative process.

www.openstates.org – Provides information on elected officials from the national level down.

Gather as much information as you can about your legislators before contacting them.

Step 2: INTRODUCTION

The next step in the process is to introduce yourself to your legislator. The best starting point is to send them an email or letter letting them know you are praying for them. You are praying for them, aren't you? They need to know that. I have been working at the Capitol for several years now and I have yet to meet an elected official who would refuse my prayers for them! Your simple contact lets them know you care. You will find in most cases that they will respond to you.

Step 3: INVESTMENT

Most pastors understand well how relationships work. You must invest in the relationship if you wish it to be successful. Follow up your initial introduction email or letter with a call and invite your legislator for coffee or a meal. Let them know your purpose is simply to get to know them so that you can more specifically and effectively pray for them. At the local and state level I think you will be surprised at the positive response you will receive to such requests. If you are unable to meet with them, don't get discouraged, just continue to periodically contact them to let them know you are praying for them.

Step 4: INVITATION

Hopefully, by this point you have had some personal contact and are in the beginning stages of establishing a long and fruitful relationship. Invite them to your church. When they come introduce them to the congregation. Politicians welcome such opportunities! Clear it with them ahead time, but consider a prayer time where you pray specifically for them. Gathering around them and laying hands on them is perfectly appropriate, if they are comfortable with it. If not, accomplish the prayer time in some other format – but let them know that you and your church appreciate their service to the community (even if you sometimes disagree with their votes and decisions!).

You will have to make a judgment call regarding this suggestion, but wherever practical invite your legislator to speak to your congregation. Since this is not always advisable you may wish to seek counsel from your Public Affairs Representatives at the GBMB – we will be glad to assist you in this regard. I have had several of my legislators address my church with great success. This has led to my opportunity to influence them. (On several occasions they have sought my counsel on issues they were dealing with – all because of beginning a relationship where the goal was to pray for them.)

Step 5: ISSUES

If you are going to take a biblical worldview and try to influence your representatives you must be knowledgeable of the issues facing your church, your community and the culture at large. You have taken a first step by attending this Public Affairs Training Day. Get involved, study the issues, know what you believe and why, then put yourself in a position to educate others. There is a plethora of information available on the GBMB website Public Affairs page – www.gabaptist.org/publicaffairs.

You need to know how things work down at the Capitol in Atlanta. The best way to get informed on that is to attend one of our Pastor's Days. You will meet some of our good and godly legislators. You will be brought up to speed on the issues facing our state. You will get to see firsthand how things are done at the Gold Dome.

Step 6: INVESTIGATION

Ultimately, you will get what you inspect not what you expect. Building a relationship with your legislator will allow you to more closely inspect what they are doing. Realize that in some cases they will only tell what they think you want to hear. But if you know how they vote then you can question them as to how they came to the conclusion to vote as they did. If you are well educated on the issues you will be able to more effectively encourage them to consider a change of position and challenge them to vote in ways that support religious freedom and morality.

It is imperative that you try to keep the relationship positive, even when there are serious and deep divides in your worldviews. Our nation was founded on biblical, Judeo-Christian morals and ethics. That foundation is fundamental to the freedoms we cherish. Thank you for being willing to champion the cause, to be a leader, to be a Man of God who is willing to stand in the gap!

If we can be of assistance to you in your efforts to establish relationships with your legislators please let us know.

The Challenge To Be Engaged

Brad Hughes

Director Of Field Operations, Office Of Governor Brian P. Kemp

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(502) 645-6297

#1. PRAY SPECIFICALLY

- Pray personally
- Pray by name in corporate worship
- Print names of elected officials in bulletin
- Post names of elected officials in your office
- Write out prayers and sent them
- Pray for God to raise up leaders

#2. ENGAGE INTENTIONALLY

- Spend 5 minutes learning each day
- Read headlines, subscribe to emails, podcasts
- Attend city council, county commission, school board meetings
- Host a dinner for elected officials
- Offer babysitting for law enforcement, EMS, elected officials
- Write thank you notes
- Invite us to speak in your churches
- Register voters
- RUN FOR OFFICE

A Busy Legislative Session at the Capitol Comes to an End

Originally published in *The Christian Index* March 31, 2023
Written by Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board

This year's legislative session began slow but ended very busy because it was the first year of a two-year legislative cycle. This was the first year of the Governor's second term and it was also the first year of a new Lieutenant Governor and a new Speaker of the House.

Georgia Baptists monitored around 12 legislative subjects with 27 bills. Once again, we were able to support more legislation than we opposed. Of the 12 legislative subjects that we dealt with, we were in favor of moving legislation in 10 of those areas.

Among the 27 bills that we were monitoring, we were in support of 16 of those bills and in opposition to 11 of them.

I want to give you a review of some of the top pieces of legislation related to the four main subject headings I gave in the *Christian Index* at the beginning of the session.

Pro-Life

Further Abortion Restrictions

As many of you know, we are still waiting on the Georgia Supreme Court to make a final ruling on the heartbeat law. We are very thankful that the law is still being applied while we wait. Because of the pending court case, legislation regarding any further restrictions has been held back this year at the state capitol.

The Abortion Pill

There is another pending court decision that deals with the use of abortion pills that we are waiting on. A lawsuit has been filed in Federal Court in Texas that could restrict the abortion pill nationwide. We have already attempted to limit its use through legislation over the past two years. Depending on the court findings, we will hopefully be restricting it here in our state.

Maternity Care

One of the positive things we saw on pro-life legislation is a bill that passed that deals with maternity care from a welfare standpoint. Rep. Soo Hung authored HB 129 to temporarily expand Medicaid assistance for needy families to pregnant women who meet the eligibility criteria. This legislation is crucial to help needy mothers during their pregnancy. It passed the House and the Senate and is going to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

It is important in a post-Roe era that abortion never be seen as viable. While we certainly need to have further restrictions on abortion, the church needs to be focused as much on the care for moms and babies. This is one of the reasons why our focus on pre- and post-natal care through Mission Georgia is so very important!

Religious Freedom

We are thankful that Sen. Ed Setzler, along with more than 20 other senators, introduced SB 180, the

Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), this year. This legislation is very simple – it merely provides that the RFRA protections from federal law will also apply to religious-liberty questions arising under Georgia law.

The enactment of SB 180 will bring Georgia into line with 34 other states that have taken action to restore a full level of legal protection for people of faith.

Under current federal RFRA law, a claim brought under the “free exercise” clause of the First Amendment is treated as a full constitutional right that must be analyzed using the “strict scrutiny” legal standard.

This legal standard simply means that the government may not substantially impact a citizen’s free exercise of their religious faith unless it demonstrates a truly “compelling interest” and that in doing so the government agency uses the “least restrictive means” to achieve its compelling interest.

This legislation has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee but did not have a hearing before the 28th day. Therefore, it is still available for next year.

Gambling

It is amazing at the amount of gambling legislation that has been introduced this year. If you include both the House and Senate chambers there were at least 8 bills! I will highlight five of them.

Sports Betting

First, Sen. Billy Hickman introduced SB 57 for the purpose of legalizing sports betting and horse racing through the Georgia Lottery. This legislation did not require a constitutional amendment, but only a majority vote in the Senate to pass. It was soundly defeated by a vote of 37 against and 19 in favor.

Secondly, Sen. Bill Cowser introduced two bills, SR 140 and SB 172, a constitutional amendment and enabling legislation to show how the law would be managed and where the tax revenue will be applied.

The good news is that SR 140 was voted on and failed to get a constitutional majority. It had 30 votes for and 26 voted against. 38 votes were needed to pass a constitutional amendment. SB 172 was not brought up for a vote.

Thirdly, Rep. Marcus Weidower introduced HB 380 for the purpose of adding sports betting to the State Lottery without a constitutional amendment. It had been assigned to the House Higher Education Committee, had two hearings and was passed out to the Rules Committee on the 28th day to go on to floor for a vote but was never called up. It is still available next year.

Fourthly, it is amazing that anyone in Senate Leadership would still be advocating for any sports betting legislation when two bills already dealing with sports betting had been overwhelmingly defeated on the Senate floor. This just shows how willing the legislature is at times to push what it wants.

The Georgia Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism decided to replace House Bill 237, sponsored by Rep. Leesa Hagan, which would establish the Southeast Georgia Soap Box Derby as the official soap box derby of the State of Georgia with language that made it a sports betting bill.

Then, the Senate Rules Committee passed it to be put onto the Senate calendar for a floor vote either on the 39th or 40th day.

Thankfully, because there was not enough support from both Republicans and Democrats, the bill failed to even come up for a vote on the last two days of the legislative session!

It is almost unbelievable that since so many legislators have claimed that the majority of people in the state of Georgia want sports betting, that they would attempt what could be labeled as a “sneak attack” to get it passed.

However, the latest statewide poll done in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution has shown that the interest in sports betting has gone down. It was as high as 57% in 2020 and now is as low as 49% in 2023.

Coin Operated Amusement Machines (COAMs)

This year again, both the House and the Senate sought to bring legislation that would help better regulate this dangerous industry. HB 353, sponsored by Rep. Alan Powell, and SB 174, sponsored by Sen. Clint Dixon, are two examples of legislation that would allow gift cards to be awarded as winnings for these machines.

While we support tighter regulations on COAM Class B machines, we do not support creating incentives to encourage more people to play them. Although these machines are technically not classified as gambling, they are often viewed as such and can be addictive and destructive to those who use them.

Thankfully, only one of the bills got a hearing, SB 174, and it was passed out to the Rules Committee to be considered for floor vote. As it went to the floor, it was amended to remove the gift cards, then it was voted back the House but no vote was taken. Therefore, it failed this year but, it is still available for next year.

Child Protection Policy

One of the four top priorities of Georgia Baptists is legislation concerning child protection policies. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups of people in our nation. We’re living in a day when children are suffering the most from societal ills that are facing our culture.

Protecting Minors from Gender Dysphoria Surgeries and Medical Treatments

One of the major pieces of legislation this year at the Capitol was SB 140, authored by Sen. Carden Summers. This legislation prohibited certain surgical procedures and certain medical treatments, including hormone replacement therapies and surgeries that have irreversible effects for gender dysphoria in minors. We were disappointed that it did not include prohibiting puberty blockers.

Georgia Baptist supports the intention of the bill, but we had concerns about flaws in the wording. We initially opposed it on the Senate floor, but then supported the amendment going forward in the House. The bill was amended to add civil liability. This was very important to add needed accountability. Therefore, we did support it as it moved forward.

The bill was eventually passed by the House as amended and has been sent to the Senate for an agreement. The Senate agreed and it was sent to the Governor’s desk. The Governor signed it into law before the close of the legislative session.

Child Obscenity Protection

First, there was the Student Technology Protection Act, HB 338, by Rep. Chris Erwin. This was designed

to include methods for promoting the safe and appropriate use of technology devices used in education programs. “Technology protection measure” means a technology that inspects and analyzes unencrypted internet traffic for malware and that blocks or filters electronic access to obscene materials, child pornography, or material that is harmful to minors.

This bill passed out of the House and has been sent to the Senate Education and Youth Committee for a hearing and passed out of committee to the Rules Committee. It was placed on the calendar for consideration but was never voted on. It is still available for next year.

Second, there is the Removal of Library Exemption for Obscene Material to Minors legislation, SB 154. This was authored by Sen. Greg Dolezal and it aims to remove public school libraries from exemptions regarding laws regulating access to obscene materials by minors.

This bill was sent to the Education and Youth Committee but did not have a hearing before crossover day (28th). It is still available for next year.

Conclusion

As you can see there was a lot of legislation to observe this year. The list before you contains only some of the 27 bills we were trying to keep up with during this year’s legislative session. There will be more legislation as we go into the 2024 legislative session.

Thank you so much for all of your prayers and support as we work on public policy.

Georgia Baptist Top Legislation Being Watched

Originally published in *The Christian Index* March 29, 2023
Written by Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board

40th Day of the Legislative Session

1. Opposition: Sports Betting and Horse Racing added to the Lottery

Senator Billy Hickman introduced SB 57 to legalize sports betting and horse racing in Georgia through the Georgia Lottery. This legislative bill does not require a constitutional amendment, but only a majority vote in the Senate to pass.

Status: It went on to the Senate floor for a vote and failed with 37 against and 19 in favor.

2. Support: Increased Penalties for Pimping and Pandering

Sen. Randy Robertson authored SB 36 to increase penalties for pimping and pandering related to human trafficking. This legislation is in alignment with the Mission Georgia's focus on combatting human trafficking.

Status: This legislation has been approved by the Senate. It has been assigned to the Judiciary Non-civil Committee in the House and passed out of committee to the full committee. It did not receive a vote on the Senate floor. It will be available next year for consideration.

3. Support: Ban on Animal Fighting

Rep. Scott Hilton authored HB 217 to update the statute to include all cockfighting and make it illegal to take a minor child to an animal fight. This bill aims to address the cockfighting issue and prevent unsavory and illegal activities, such as illegal gambling, drug trafficking, and other illicit crimes associated with animal fights.

Status: It had a hearing in the subcommittee of the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee. No vote was taken.

4. Support: Expansion of Maternity Care

Rep. Soo Hung authored HB 129 to temporarily expand Medicaid assistance for needy families who meet the eligibility criteria for pregnant women. This legislation is crucial to help needy mothers during their pregnancy and relates to the Mission Georgia emphasis on Pre and Post-natal Care for mothers.

Status: It was passed out of the House and passed on the floor of the Senate (3/7/23). Now available to have the Governor sign it into law.

5. Support: The Child Protection Act

Sen. Clint Dixon authored SB 141 to ban "gender reassignment" surgeries, chemicals and hormone treatment from being performed on minor children and prevents school officials from concealing from parents that a minor is "identifying" as a different gender than their biological sex.

Status: This bill had a hearing in the Health and Human Services Committee, but no vote was taken.

6. Support: The Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)

Sen. Ed Setzler authored SB 180, and more than 25 other senators including Senate leadership introduced the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). This bill provides people of faith the same protections from

state and local government actions that they currently have from federal government actions.

Status: It has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee but did not have a hearing before the 28th day. It is still available for next year.

7. Opposition: Georgia Lottery Game of Sports Betting Act

Rep. Marcus Weidower authored HB 380 to add sports betting to the State Lottery without a constitutional amendment.

Status: It has been assigned to the Higher Education Committee, has received two hearings and was passed out to the Rules Committee. It passed out of the Rules Committee on the 28th day to go on to floor for a vote but was never called up. It is still available next year.

8. Opposition: Constitutional Amendment and Enabling Legislation to Legalize Sports Betting

Sen. Bill Cowsert authored SR140 and SB 172 to legalize sports betting through a Constitutional Amendment to be voted on by the people. It also includes enabling legislation to show how the law will be managed, and where the tax revenue will be applied.

Status: Both bills were voted out of the Rules Committee for a possible vote on the Senate floor on the 28th day. SR 140 was voted on and failed to get a constitutional majority 30 to 26. 38 votes were needed. SB 172 was not brought up for a vote.

9. Opposition: Coin-Operated Amusement Machines (COAM Class B) Revision Bills

HB 353 (sponsored by Rep. Alan Powell) and SB 174 (sponsored by Sen. Clint Dixon) are two examples of legislation that aim to allow gift cards to be awarded as winnings for these machines. While we support tighter regulations on COAM Class B machines, we do not support creating incentives to encourage more people to play them. Although these machines are technically not classified as gambling, they are often viewed as such and can be addictive and destructive to those who use them.

Status: HB 353 was passed out of the Rules Committee on to the House floor for a vote. It passed on the 28th and has now been sent to the Senate Economic Development and Tourism Committee. SB 174 got a hearing in and was passed out to the Rules Committee to be considered for floor. It was amended to remove the gift cards on the floor and voted back the House, but no vote was taken. It is still available for next year.

10. Support: Child Obscenity Protection

HB 338 was authored by Rep. Chris Erwin. This bill is designed to include methods for promoting safe and appropriate use of technology devices used in education programs.

“Technology protection measure” means a technology that inspects and analyzes unencrypted internet traffic for malware and that blocks or filters electronic access to obscene materials, child pornography, or material that is harmful to minors.

Status: This bill passed out of the House and has been sent to the Senate Education and Youth Committee for a hearing and passed out of committee to the Rules Committee. It was placed on the calendar for consideration but was never voted on. It is still available for next year.

11. Support: Removal of Library Exemption for Obscene Material to Minors

SB 154, authored by Sen. Greg Dolezal, aims to remove public school libraries from exemptions regarding laws regulating access to obscene materials by minors.

Status: This bill was sent to the Education and Youth Committee but did not have a hearing before crossover day (28th). It is still available for next year.

12. Support: Foster Care Reform

SB 133, sponsored by Sen. Brian Strickland. This bill seeks to establish a more uniform process for assuming custody of foster children. This legislation aligns with the Mission Georgia emphasis on foster care and adoption.

Status: It was passed by the Senate and assigned to the House Juvenile Justice Committee. It had a couple of hearings and passed out to the Rules Committee for a possible vote on the House floor. No vote was taken but is still available for next year.

13. Support: Stricter Requirements for Posting Human Trafficking Hotline Information Senator Brian

Strickland authored SB 42 to create stronger incentives for businesses to post accurate and appropriate human trafficking hotline information on various platforms such as the internet. This legislation is in alignment with the Mission Georgia's focus on combatting human trafficking.

Status: SB 42 has passed the Senate and the House and is sent to the Governor's Desk and was signed into law.

14. Opposition: Exception to the 3-Tier System for Craft Breweries Bills

Representative Tyler Smith authored HB 407 and Senator Chuck Hufstetler authored SB 163, which aims to exempt craft breweries from the 3-Tier system on the sale of alcoholic beverages. However, Georgia Baptists staunchly oppose any loosening of restrictions on the sale of alcohol and view the 3-Tier system as a crucial standard for public health and safety since the prohibition era.

Status: Both were assigned to the House and Senate Regulated Industries Committee. SB 163 did have a hearing, but not a vote. They can still be brought up again next year.

15. Opposition: Extension of Delivery Distance for Alcoholic Beverages

HB 397, authored by Representative Kasey Carpenter and SB 194, authored by Senator Shawn Still, proposes allowing the home delivery of malt beverages, wine, and distilled spirits up to 25 miles beyond from the business selling it. This excessively extends availability of alcohol into homes, where issues related to this product are going to be potentially made worse.

Status: These bills have been assigned to the House and Senate Regulated Industries Committee and did not get a hearing before Crossover Day (28th). The bill was amended in a Senate Committee on to HB 170 as a vehicle to be passed on the floor. The amended bill never made it out of the Rules Committee. Both bills are still available for next year.

16. Support: Prohibiting Certain Surgical Procedures and Medical Treatments for Gender Dysphoria

SB 140 is authored by Senator Carden Summers. This legislation prohibits certain surgical procedures and certain medical treatment, including hormone replacement therapies and surgeries that have irreversible effects for gender dysphoria on minors. We supported the intention of the bill, but its wording is flawed. We opposed it on the Senate floor, but supported the amendment going forward in the House. Civil liability language was added. We supported the Senate approving the bill as it came over for an agreement.

Status: The bill made it to floor for a vote on Day 28 and passed over to the House and was assigned to the Public Health Committee and amended for adding civil liabilities. It passed the committee, was approved by the House as amended and has been sent to the Senate for an agreement. The Senate agreed and it

was sent to the Governors desk. The Governor signed it into law before the close of the legislative session.

17. Opposition: The Parents and Children Protection Act of 2023

SB 88 is authored by Senator Carden Summers. We appreciate the heart behind this legislation, and the work the Senator has put in, however, we have heard from many folks, including our legal partners and activists from around the state on the issues with this bill. We believe that this bill has dramatic unintended consequences for parental rights, and for children in public schools as well. Those concerns have not been addressed. As it stands, we are concerned with this bill though we certainly share the motivation of the sponsor. We opposed it as written.

Status: The bill had a hearing in the Education Committee and was tabled. It is still available to be heard and possibly amended next year.

18. Support: Firearms Revision Bill

HB 560 is authored by Karen Mathiak. This is bill among other things, allows churches the full authority in determining the use of weapons. Churches under this provision would be treated as private property, so that they could determine what their use policy would be. This legislation coincides with the 2021 GBC Resolution on Church Safety and Security: <https://gabaptist.egnyte.com/dl/plO6wJbmxO>.

Status: This bill has been assigned to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee and is awaiting a hearing. It is still available for next year.

19. Support: The Georgia Early Literacy Act

HB 538 is authored by Bethany Ballard. This legislation requires such things as local boards of education to approve high-quality instructional materials for students in kindergarten through third grade and to administer universal reading screeners multiple times each school year to students in kindergarten through third grade. It also requires reports of the results of such screeners to parents of students and to the Department of Education for analysis, and requires reading intervention plans for students with significant reading deficiencies. This legislation is in alignment with the Mission Georgia's focus on Childhood Literacy.

Status: This bill has passed the House and has been assigned to the Senate Education and Youth committee for a hearing. It passed the committee and was sent to the Senate floor for a vote. It passed and has been sent to the Governor's desk for a signature.

20. Support: The Georgia Council on Literacy Bill

SB 211 is authored by Senator Billy Hickman. This legislation is designed to establish the Georgia Council on Literacy. This council is responsible for conducting a comprehensive study of all state resources and activities, so that it can make recommendations regarding the priorities for future investments and strategies. The focus will be on goals for clearly defined measures for third, fifth, and eighth-grade reading outcomes. This legislation is an alignment with the Mission Georgia's focus on Childhood Literacy.

Status: It has passed the Senate and has been assigned to a House Education Committee where it has been approved and passed a floor vote in the Senate and has been sent to the Governor's desk for his signature.

21. Opposition: Southeast Georgia Soap Box Derby Bill as amended with Sports Betting

HB 237 was originally authored by Rep. Leesa Hagan and substitute language was amended to it by Sen. Derek Mallow with Sports Betting through the Lottery.

The Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism replaced HB 237 which would establish the Southeast Georgia Soap Box Derby as the official soap box derby of the State of Georgia with language that now makes it a Sports Betting bill. Rep. Hagan was not in favor of the substitute language, but the committee still did it. She had her language removed from the bill.

Status: It passed the Economic Development and Tourism Committee and was sent to the Rules Committee with a recommendation to be voted on by the Senate. It was placed on the calendar for consideration on the 39th or 40th day. The bill was not brought up for a vote.

22. Support: Protecting Minors from Sexually Explicit Performances

HB 840 is authored by Rep. Tim Fleming. This bill protects children from harmful, overtly sexualized material in public settings such as Drag Shows and Drag Queen Story Times. More and more footage is emerging constantly from events – billed as “Family-friendly” – of behavior which, by any standard, is entirely inappropriate for children. HB 840 requires that anyone hosting an event with obscene behavior, sexually provocative dancing, or overtly sexual reading material limit the event to 18 years or older, opening a civil cause of action for any who allow minors to be harmed by breaking this law.

Status: This legislation has been assigned to the House Judiciary Committee and available for a hearing during the next legislative session.

23. Support: Providing School Privacy Protection for Boys and Girls

HB 836 is authored by Rep. Mitchell Scoggins. This bill recognizes the God-given biological distinction between male and female, and protects the privacy of boys and girls throughout Georgia school systems. It requires that areas of privacy – bathrooms, locker rooms, changing & shower rooms – be restricted to members of the same biological sex. This bill also protects the sleeping quarters of school children who are taken on school-supervised overnight trips, and if this law is violated, HB 836 provides the parents of harmed children a cause of action against the school.

Status: This bill has been assigned to the House Education Committee and is available for hearing during the next legislative session.

Religious Freedom



The Relevance of Religious Liberty to the Priority of Evangelism and Missions Handout Notes

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

This information is about the theological and philosophical approach that churches should have regarding the rights of Religious Liberty in our country. Its goal is to help church leaders gain a practical understanding that promotes evangelism and missions.

Christians believe in obeying and honoring governmental authority.

- Rom. 13:1-7
- I Pet. 2:13-17
- Mk. 12:17
- Acts 5:27-29

Following a “1 Chron. 12:32” type of approach, what do we as Christians need to know about the importance of defending religious liberty?

1. The Scope of Religious Liberty

The First Amendment is not designed to restrict the practice of religion to the confines of a church building.

1st Amendment: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

Why? Because obeying God is not confined to a certain day, in a certain building!

2. The Conscience of Religious Liberty

The underlying premise of religious liberty is that the government should not set itself up as Lord of the conscience.

Which means:

1. There is a court higher than the Supreme Court.

2. Every other freedom we have is based upon the 1st freedom: the freedom of religion.

3. The freedom of religion is key to right to be able to preach the gospel in public.

It is the right to appeal to the conscience of man that gives us leeway to conversion.

3. The Principle of Religious Liberty

The principle of religious liberty is based upon an order of authority that exalts God!

The Order of Religious Liberty:

1. God

2. Man

3. Government

Point: Our rights come from God, not government. Government's responsibility is to protect our rights, not determine our rights.

4. The Freedom of Religious Liberty

The defense of religious liberty is not the same thing as promoting religious and moral relativism.

- There is a difference in saying differences are accepted and differences are to be respected.
- I can respect your right to differ without agreeing that you are right.
- In our country we have begun to label disagreement as hate speech.

Two Facts:

1. I don't have to agree with you in order to love you!

2. If I disagree with you it does not mean that I hate you!

Important point: Biblical Christianity believes in a free market of ideas.

Why? Because we believe in our "product"! The gospel wins out!

We have to remember that there is a difference between "persuasion" and "coercion." One confronts

the will, the other forces and manipulates the will. Pluralism is not the same as relativism! Confidence in the gospel does not require us to stop others from speaking.

5. The Responsibility of Religious Liberty

Biblical Christianity requires that we stand up for religious liberty.

Why?

1. As Christians we are citizens of two Kingdoms. (We all have a “green card.”)
 - Paul used his rights as a Roman Citizen to preach the gospel. It became a platform.
 - How much more is that true for us since we live in a democratic republic?
 - The 1st (3) words of the Constitution are: “we the people.”
 - Example of Jesus standing before Pilate:
 - Most us identify ourselves with Jesus! (the “persecuted”) (Citizen)
 - But we are Pilate, too! (the “persecutor”) (Government)
2. As Christians our relationship with Christ is personal, but it is not private for two reasons:
 1. We have a declaration to share. (Matt. 28:19-20)
 2. We have a demeanor to share it from. (New nature) (2 Cor. 5:17)

We have a risen Lord in us that cannot stay hidden. There is no such thing as a privatized gospel. The goal of religious persecution is to silence witnessing! (Most of us have voluntarily done this already without the government’s help)

“As a Christian in this country, you may be understandably reluctant to speak out on moral issues like abortion, homosexuality, or pornography. But while we have the right to remain silent, that’s not what God calls us to do. ...because if the world can silence truth, it will silence the gospel.”
Janet Folgers

The goal of religious liberty is to free-up witnessing!

3. As Christians we have a responsibility to protect the freedom of future generations.

“...Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.” 1 Kings 21:3

Naboth said, “Don’t give up your inheritance!”

I’m fighting for the rights of my children and grandchildren – a right they will not have if I don’t do something about it NOW! This means we have to be willing to suffer physical, financial, and criminal persecution!

Do not fear that which is frightening

“But if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, nether be troubled.” – 1 Peter 3:14

“There is one thing worse than going to jail – it is sacrificing the gospel!”- Dr. Russell Moore

Are we willing to stand up on this issue when it costs us?

We must never render to Caesar that which is God’s – The Conscience!

THESE ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY DEFENDING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS IMPORTANT TODAY!

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Support the Religious Freedom Restoration Act pending in the Georgia Senate

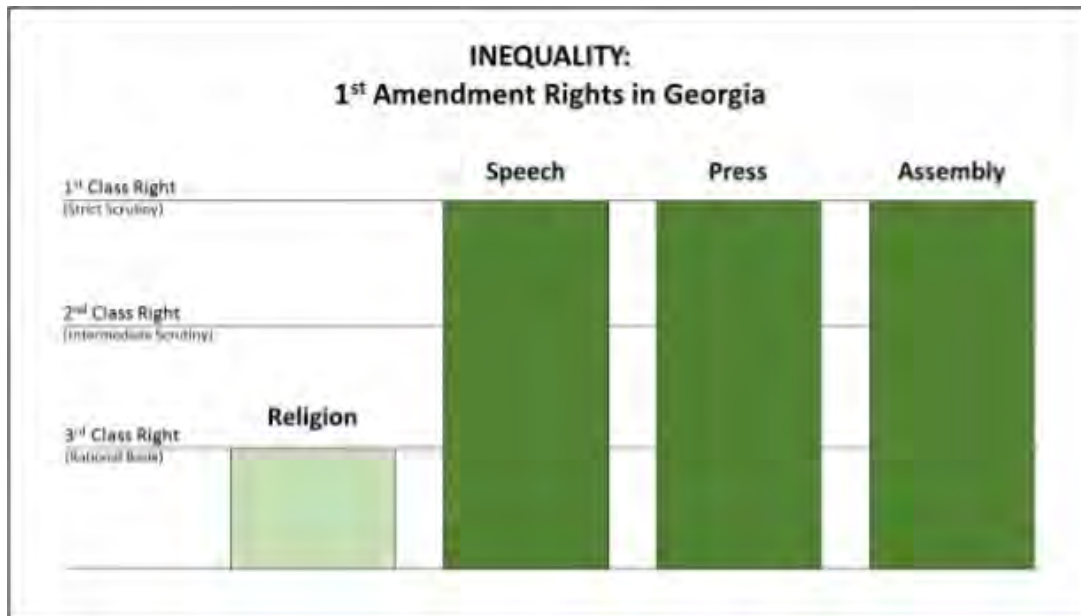
By MIKE GRIFFIN, Georgia Baptist Mission Board

Georgia Sen. Ed Setzler, R-Acworth, along with at least 25 other senators including senate leadership, introduced SB 180, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act today at the Capitol. This bill provides people of faith the same protections from state and local government actions that they now have from federal government actions.



This legislation is very simple. It merely provides that the RFRA protections from federal law will also apply to religious liberty questions arising under Georgia law.

Enactment of SB 180 will bring Georgia into line with 34 other states that have taken action to restore a full level of legal protection for people of faith. Under current Georgia law, the freedom of religion has a weak level of legal protection:



Under current federal RFRA law, a claim brought under the “free exercise” clause of the First Amendment is treated as a full constitutional right that must be analyzed using the “strict scrutiny” legal standard. This legal standard simply means that the

government may not substantially impact a citizen’s free exercise of their religious faith unless it demonstrates a truly “compelling interest” and that in doing so the government agency uses the “least restrictive means” to achieve its compelling interest.

The Hobby Lobby case, in which the US Supreme Court held that Christian business owners could not be required by the federal government to pay for their employees’ abortion-inducing drugs, was decided under the federal RFRA law. Senator Setzer’s SB 180 would merely apply this same legal analysis to cases arising under state and local law in Georgia.

President Bill Clinton, who signed the federal RFRA law in 1993, put it this way: “But let us never believe that the freedom of religion imposes on any of us some responsibility to run from our convictions. Let us instead respect one another’s faiths, fight to the death to preserve the right of every American to practice whatever convictions he or she has but bring our values back to the table of American discourse to heal our troubled land.”



Thank you, Senator Setzler, for leading the way in guaranteeing that Georgians will have the same basic rights the federal RFRA provides to prisoners and soldiers on military bases.

Please begin praying intensely and contacting your state senator now to urge him or her to vote in favor of RFRA when it comes to the floor of the Senate for a vote.

Find your senator’s contact info here: www.legis.ga.gov/members/senate

The Danger of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Laws

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

Plain and simple: Public accommodation and anti-discrimination laws that protect sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI's) can end up being a form of religious censorship, discrimination and persecution!

As Baptists we support civil rights -- we just have a problem with “special rights” that are generated from behavior choices. You see, basic civil rights protect people from discrimination based on immutable characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or biological sex, or those based on attributes expressly protected in the Constitution, such as religious exercise and belief. Even if there were evidence of widespread discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity – which there is not – such characteristics are not properly included among basic natural or constitutional rights!

It is interesting to note that according to the American Psychological Association, there simply is no objective evidence that same-sex or bisexual attraction or “transgender” identity is in any way genetically passed down.

“Sexual orientation is commonly discussed as if it were solely a characteristic of an individual, like biological sex, gender identity, or age. This perspective is incomplete because sexual orientation is defined in terms of relationships with others...Therefore, sexual orientation is not merely a personal characteristic within an individual. Rather, one’s sexual orientation defines the group of people in which one is likely to find the satisfying and fulfilling romantic relationships that are an essential component of personal identity for many people.”

It is also important for us to remember that the central theme of our country’s civil rights movement has been the defense of human rights based on the personhood of each individual.



This photo features a group of sanitation workers marching in Memphis in 1968.

When we start to divide people and award them “rights” based on behavior—and especially when, as in transgenderism, that behavior may signal a serious psychological health problem -- we actually begin to diminish their humanity.

The main point of the discussion needs to be on the fact that their dignity comes from their humanity, not their sexual preferences or behavior!

The problem that threatens the religious community is that public accommodation laws can become a vehicle to punish and force another person to agree with a behavior that violates his or her conscience.

Our founding fathers believed that God is the Lord of the conscience -- not the government!

In the states that have enacted SOGI laws, citizens have lost their right to privacy (for example, women who object to sharing private spaces with men), their right to free speech (for example, those who decline to use inaccurate pronouns with respect to gender-confused persons), and their right to practice their profession in accord with ethical standards (for example, doctors who refuse to mutilate the healthy bodies of gender-confused children). Significantly, religious freedom rights have also been diminished.

In case after case, believers who simply declined to participate in an event that violates their religious beliefs have been subjected to persecution by the government. In some cases, they have even lost their businesses for refusing to adopt the new sexual orthodoxy. Public accommodation laws have in many cases made it difficult for Christians to live out their faith.

Bottom line: People of faith should not discriminate against others based on immutable characteristics such as race -- but neither should they be forced to participate in or support events, activities, ceremonies, and messages that violate their religious and moral convictions.

Gambling



There's No Good Reason to Legalize Sports Gambling

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

As we prepare for the 2023 Georgia legislative session, issues like sports gambling are being discussed especially since it's an election year. And, once again, there is not anything truly good about legalizing gambling!

Studies have shown repeatedly that the legalization and promotion of vices like sports gambling could increase addiction rates by at least another 110% in our state.

Sports gambling, while it is being done illegally in our state now, will be exponentially worse if made legal, especially in terms of addiction. An addiction hotline in Tennessee has seen as much as an 800 percent increase in calls since sports gambling was legalized.

Here is another fact: The American Psychiatric Association's "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" classifies gambling as an addictive product likened unto heroin, opioids, alcohol, and cocaine.

One of the most chilling effects of gambling has to do with mental illness.

This year in an anti-gambling press conference held at the Georgia State Capitol, Representative Todd Jones, the sponsor of the new mental health legislation, reminded us, "We know, no matter what your opinion is on gambling that almost every family in this state is impacted by either mental health or substance abuse."

Representative Jones said suddenly putting in a third entity like gambling, which is intellectually dishonest, will harm families. He said this is not something that Georgians can support.

In addition to the mental aspects, there are economic ones to consider.

We already know that each new addicted gambler costs the taxpayers \$28,000 to \$104,000 per year, and like drug addicts, each gambling addict negatively affects the lives of between seven and 17 other people.

It is a well-established fact that for every \$1 in new revenue from gambling, the cost to taxpayers, DHS agencies, and governments is at least \$3 to \$5. Gambling creates no new product and is profitable only via constant increases in human misery.

The APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders lists multiple socioeconomic costs connected to gambling. Problem gamblers regularly engage in child abuse, spousal abuse, and crime—culminating in increased divorce rates.

Again, it is beyond any reasoning that I can understand to justify the expansion of any predatory activity, such as sports gambling. There is no doubt that our citizens will be manipulated by false advertising – financed by the almost unlimited resources of Big Gambling -- into believing that the "benefits" of gambling outweigh the detriments.

Not to mention, the detriment this will be to our children.

In Australia, the online gambling establishment has children starting to gamble at age 11. In the U.K. there are 55,000 problem gamblers who are under 16 years old, and 28 million U.K. kids were illegally targeted by gambling companies, resulting in a 15% increase in problem gambling in kids.

In the U.S., the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids reports that “more than half of 16-year-olds have gambling apps on their smartphones.”

This is a critical point: Much of the newly legalized gambling would be instantly available to minors on their phones, making it almost impossible to protect the most vulnerable prey from the traps set by this kind of predatory gambling.

We must constantly stay on our guard because our children are the ones who suffer the most from the legalization of vices such as alcohol, pornography, abortion, and gambling activities.

There is no amount of taxation, regulation and economic gain that would justify the harm that legalized sports gambling would have on individuals, marriages, families, and children!

The legislation that they may be considering next year may or may not require a constitutional amendment. Therefore, without a constitutional amendment, all that would be required is for the House and the Senate to have a majority vote in favor of it and then the Governor to sign it into law.

That is why now is the time for you to contact your Georgia state representatives and senators and let them know that you are opposed to the legalization of sports gambling in the state of Georgia.

13 Facts About Legal Online Sports Gambling

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

1. Commercialized Sports Gambling is a form of financial fraud, similar to loan-sharking, price gouging, and false advertising, that results in life-changing financial losses for millions of Americans.
2. This financial exchange is mathematically rigged against you so inevitably you lose your money in the end, especially if you keep gambling. They make you feel good about losing your money.
3. An ESPN journalist who covers sports gambling told an Ohio newspaper: “There was a study in Australia of the accounts at a major bookmaker. Out of 500,000 accounts, only 50 individuals were found to be profitable.”
4. If you win too much, the bookmakers don’t let you place bets anymore. An ESPN story recently highlighted that bookmakers are severely restricting or closing accounts for the very fact that these people are winning!
5. In a survey of nearly 10,000 adults in Massachusetts, sports bettors had higher rates of problem gambling — 5.7 percent — compared with adults who bet at casinos, bought lottery and raffle tickets or made private bets.
6. Gamblers who bet online had even higher problem gambling rates, 18.2 percent.⁸
7. According to a major UK report, online gambling operators make more than half of their profits from at risk and problem gamblers.
8. Ireland, just issued its 1st ever national survey on gambling. It found three quarters of online gamblers have borrowed money or sold something in order to place a bet.
9. In the UK, where sports gambling is legal, 1 out of every 5 ads during a sporting event is a gambling ad.
10. Promotions and special offers for several major online gambling firms are regularly appearing in the social media feeds of children and directing them to the companies’ websites via the social network.
11. Researchers have previously found that more than half of 16-year-olds in the UK have gambling apps on their smartphones.
12. The high frequency of marketing by gambling operators has normalized gambling for kids, leading them to believe gambling was central to playing and watching sports.
13. 450,000 UK children aged 11 to 16 bet regularly, more than those who have taken drugs, smoked or drunk alcohol.

Documentation: <https://www.stoppredatorygambling.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/03/2019-Fact-Sheet-on-Commercialized-Sports-Gambling.pdf>

The Devastating Effect Legal Online Sports Gambling has on Children

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

1. Promotions and special offers for several major online gambling firms are regularly appearing in the social media feeds of children and directing them to the companies' websites via the social network.
2. Twitter users under the age of 18 who follow popular sports accounts in the UK are being "bombarded" with online gambling ads.
3. The high frequency of marketing by gambling operators has normalized gambling for kids, leading them to believe gambling was central to playing and watching sports.
4. Two in three UK teenagers feel deluged by advertisements for online gambling firms on TV.
5. Almost half these teenagers— 49% – said some of these companies' commercials made gambling look like a good way to make money.
6. Researchers have previously found that more than half of 16-year-olds in the UK have gambling apps on their smartphones.
7. 450,000 UK children aged 11 to 16 bet regularly, more than those who have taken drugs, smoked or drunk alcohol.
8. 75% of children as young as 8 could correctly recall a sports betting brand, repeatedly exposing them to harmful messages and advertisements about sports gambling.
9. Children regularly exposed to gambling advertisements are more likely to bet among friends, try to enter bookmakers, and gamble when they turn 18 years old.
10. The younger children start gambling, the more likely it is they will become habitual and problem gamblers, regardless whether they are from an urban or a suburban community.
11. When gambling operators lobby for sports gambling it can mean allowing gambling on almost any kind of contest such as:
 - Betting on video games like Fortnite or eSports;
 - In-play betting which involves betting on a sporting event is happening.
 - Betting on pop culture events and TV programs.

Documentation: <https://www.stoppredatorygambling.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/03/2019-Fact-Sheet-on-Commercialized-Sports-Gambling.pdf>

Economic, Business, and Legal Studies at Emory, Mercer, U.Ga. & U.S. Universities Conclude: Georgia Casinos & Online Gambling Would Increase Gamblings' ABCS: Addictions, Bankruptcies, Crime, Sex-trafficking & Suicides

Prof. John Kindt

1. **ADDICTIONS:** Gambling addiction is now classified like opioid and drug addictions by the Am. Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. In the general population, gambling addiction rates are Caucasians (1.2%-2%); Hispanics (2%-3%); African Americans (2%-4%); and Native Americans (2%-6%). Jesse Jackson in his Chicago speech on Martin Luther King Day called gambling "the new chains of slavery." Youths and kids exposed to gambling are already showing double these gambling addiction percentage rates. Georgia casinos and online sports gambling would increase these addiction rates again by at least another 110%. Each new addicted gambler costs the taxpayers \$28,000 to \$104,000 per year, and like drug addicts gambling addicts negatively impact the lives of 7 to 17 other people. Around new gambling facilities the gambling addiction rate doubles. Georgia would have 17,000 to 33,000 new addicted gamblers, costing Georgia taxpayers \$476 million to \$3.43 billion.

2. **BANKRUPTCIES & LOST JOBS:** As gamblers lose their money, new gambling facilities increase personal, professional, and business bankruptcies up 18% to 42%. Gambling addicted employees have embezzled from numerous companies and banks throwing non-gambling employees out of work. Every casino averages about 700-1,000 video gambling machines (VGMs). Each gambling machine cannibalizes approximately \$45,000 per year out of the consumer economy which results in \$150,000 in "lost consumer spending" or one lost job in the consumer economy per year per video gambling machine. Current Georgia gambling proposals would initially create several hundred construction jobs and then hundreds of continuing maintenance and management jobs, but the consumer economy would net 5,500 to 15,700 lost jobs every year.

3. **CRIME:** Casinos and gambling facilities make 90% of their profits from video gambling machines. The medical community calls these VGMs the "crack cocaine" for hooking new addicted gamblers. Addicted gamblers and another 6% to 8% "problem gamblers" lose substantial monies, and then resort to crime to get money to continue gambling. Problem gamblers have become interstate serial killers to get gambling money. Within 50 miles of gambling facilities, crime increases 9% every year. Also, problem gamblers are 4.3% to 7.6% more likely to commit crimes. After one Illinois casino opened, a mother lost her life savings and then killed her child to collect the child's life insurance. The mother again lost her money and killed her other child for \$200,000 insurance.

4. **CHILDREN TARGETED BY ONLINE GAMES & SPORTS GAMBLING:** Online gambling promoters brag that Internet gambling (including sports gambling) is the "Killer APP" of the Internet. Despite public protests, in Australia, the online gambling establishment has children starting to gamble at age 11. In the U.K. there are 55,000 problem gamblers who are under 16 years old, and 28 million U.K. kids were illegally targeted by gambling companies resulting in a 15% increase in problem gambling in kids. In the U.S., the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids reports that "more than half of 16-year-olds have gambling apps on their smartphones." U.S. Senator Tom Cotton has introduced legislation to protect U.S. kids from online predatory gambling.

5. **SEX TRAFFICKING & PROSTITUTION OF ADULTS AND KIDS:** When women and kids lose money as new addicted gamblers or problem gamblers, they become newly vulnerable to sex trafficking and prostitution. For example, Atlantic City has large sex trafficking problems—sparking public demonstrations against the government’s “prostitution environment.” Statistically, Georgia’s current prostitution problems could be expected to increase by 35% to 75%.

6. **SUICIDES:** One-third of addicted gamblers attempt suicide. Under current Georgia gambling proposals, Georgia can anticipate increased suicide attempts by at least 5,750 newly addicted adults and kids. Medical experts typically note that gambling addiction has only three results: (1) Jail, (2) Suicide, or (3) Gamblers Anonymous. (Note: Almost all “Councils on Problem Gambling” are controlled & funded by gambling companies.)

7. **SAVINGS & SPENDING ON NECESSITIES OF LIFE:** Around a casino or large gambling facility, there is typically 10% less spending on food, 25% less spending on clothing, and 37% less money in savings accounts. People would rather gamble than feed their children. The APA’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders lists multiple socioeconomic costs. Problem gamblers regularly engage in child abuse, spousal abuse, and crime—culminating in increased divorce rates.

8. **SOCIO-ECONOMIC COSTS TO TAXPAYERS AND GOVERNMENTS:** It is well-established that for every \$1 in new revenue, the costs to taxpayers, DHS agencies, and governments is at least \$3 to \$5--because gambling creates no new product and is profitable only via constant increases in human misery. Problem gamblers and addicted gamblers contribute 67% to 90% of the dollars that commercialized gambling makes. Georgia’s DHS will require \$500 million just to begin addressing the costs of gambling.

9. The movies “MONEY MACHINE” (2020) and MARTIN SCORSESE’S “CASINO” expose the cover-ups promulgated by the gambling establishment.

Abbr. Sources: Vandall & Lanier, Emory Law Sch., Ill. Law Rev. (2021); Grinols & Mustard, U.Ga. Terry Bus. Sch., Ill. Law Rev. (2021); Grinols, *Gambling in America* (Cambridge Univ. Press 2004 & 2009); Grinols & Mustard, U.Ga. Terry Bus. Sch., *Rev. Econ. & Statistics* (Harvard & M.I.T. 2006); Amar, Dean of Ill. Law Sch., Ill. Law Rev. (2021); Kindt, *Mercer Law Rev.* (2004) & *Emory Bankr. Law Journal* (2002); Gottlieb, Daynard & Friedman, N.E. Univ. Law Sch., Ill. Law Rev. (2021); Zorland, *Ga. State Univ.* (2009); U.S. Congress, *Nat’l Gambling Impact Study Commission* (1999); Multiple University & Gov’t Reports, reprinted in Vols. 1-6, *United States International Gambling Report* (repub. 2021). *Ga. Dep’t Behav. Health & Dev. Disabilities* (Zorland Study).

The Dangers of Putting More Gambling on the Ballot in Georgia

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

In January of 2022, a hearing was held in the Georgia Senate regarding the legalization of recreational marijuana. Though no vote was taken on the legislation, the most striking element of the hearing was the numerous negative comments from the Senate committee members and those who testified against the legislation. When the dangers of legalizing recreational marijuana were uncovered, it was obvious that no one wanted this legislation to be considered on a ballot as a constitutional amendment.

The point was crystal clear: Recreational marijuana is so dangerous that we should not risk making a bad problem with marijuana even worse.

Exactly the same argument can be made against the further legalization of predatory gambling in Georgia. Existing forms of legal gambling -- the lottery as well as what has been known as "video poker" in the past -- have already created problems that would be exacerbated by adding dangerous and even more accessible avenues of gambling.

Because illegal sports betting already happens in Georgia, promoters of Big Gambling mimic those of Big Pot by arguing that we might as well make it legal and "do a better job of regulating it."

But we have already seen repeatedly, when it comes to legalizing social moral vices, that the theoretical benefits -- economic and otherwise -- do not match the devastating negative impact that further availability of these kinds of things produces in our culture.

In 2021, Georgia Baptists participated in a symposium that discussed dealing with gambling from an academic perspective. That meeting featured John Kindt, who recently retired from the University of Illinois and now lives in Georgia. In his research analysis, Kindt compiled a wealth of statistics demonstrating the negative consequences of passing a ballot initiative to expand gambling like sports betting, casinos, and parimutuel betting.

Addictions

Georgia casinos and online sports gambling would increase addiction rates by at least another 110%. The American Psychiatric Association's "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" classifies gambling as an addictive product just like heroin, opioids, alcohol, and cocaine.

Each new addicted gambler costs the taxpayers \$28,000 to \$104,000 per year, and like drug addicts, gambling addicts negatively affect the lives of 7 to 17 other people. Around new gambling facilities the gambling addiction rate doubles. Georgia would have 17,000 to 33,000 new addicted gamblers, costing Georgia taxpayers \$476 million to \$3.43 billion -- not to mention the incalculable misery of broken families and ruined lives.

Lost Jobs

Each gambling machine cannibalizes approximately \$45,000 per year out of the consumer economy, which results in \$150,000 in "lost consumer spending" or one lost job in the consumer economy per year per video gambling machine. Current Georgia gambling proposals would initially create several hundred construction jobs and then hundreds of continuing maintenance and management jobs, but the consumer economy would net 5,500 to 15,700 lost jobs every year.

Crime

Within 50 miles of gambling facilities, crime increases 9% every year. Also, problem gamblers are

4.3% to 7.6% more likely to commit crimes.

Targeting Children

In Australia, the online gambling establishment has children starting to gamble at age 11. In the U.K. there are 55,000 problem gamblers who are under 16 years old, and 28 million U.K. kids were illegally targeted by gambling companies, resulting in a 15% increase in problem gambling in kids. In the U.S., the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids reports that “more than half of 16-year-olds have gambling apps on their smartphones.”

This is a critical point: Much of the newly legalized gambling would be instantly available to minors on their phones, making it almost impossible to protect the most vulnerable prey from the traps set by Big Gambling.

Sex Trafficking and Prostitution

Statistically, Georgia’s current prostitution problems could be expected to increase by 35% to 75%!

Suicides

One-third of addicted gamblers attempt suicide. Under current Georgia gambling proposals, Georgia can anticipate increased suicide attempts by at least 5,750 newly addicted adults and kids.

Spending on Necessities and Savings

Around a casino or large gambling facility, there is typically 10% less spending on food, 25% less spending on clothing, and 37% less money in savings accounts.

Socioeconomic Costs

It is well established that for every \$1 in new revenue, the costs to taxpayers, DHS agencies, and governments is at least \$3 to \$5--because gambling creates no new product and is profitable only via constant increases in human misery. The APA’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders lists multiple socioeconomic costs. Problem gamblers regularly engage in child abuse, spousal abuse, and crime—culminating in increased divorce rates.

Again, it is beyond any reasoning that I can understand that would justify putting the expansion of predatory gambling on the ballot, when our citizens will be manipulated by false advertising – financed by the almost unlimited resources of Big Gambling -- into believing that the “benefits” of gambling outweigh detriments.

Just from the facts given in this article, you can see that this is not a risk that is worth taking! The mental health and the public safety issues are way too risky to allow this to be put on a ballot initiative.

Our citizens have already decided that the legislature should determine when the benefits of something being put on the ballot would outweigh the risks. The evidence of dangerous consequences from gambling expansion – just like those of marijuana expansion – is overwhelming. Given these undeniable facts, a responsible legislature should not take a chance with the expanding predatory gambling in our state!

Now is the time for you to contact your legislators and ask them to vote no regarding any constitutional amendments being put on the ballot to further legalize predatory gambling in Georgia! Your children and your children’s children are depending on you!

10 Reasons Why a Christian Should Not Gamble

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

We are living in a day when societal acceptance of gambling is beyond anything we would have ever thought possible in our lifetime. I have seen statistics that reveal there are as many as 48 states in the U.S. that have some form of legalized gambling and that 85% of Americans have gambled at least once in their lifetime. It also has been reported that 60% of Americans have gambled in the last year.

With this kind of activity going on in the country, we must ask the question: “Is gambling something with which Christians should be involved?”

When we talk about Christians and gambling, we must begin with the fact that gambling is out of character with biblical morality. This means that gambling is immoral. This means it is a behavior that is contrary to established biblical moral principles.

The popular gambling of our day would be more characterized as “predatory gambling.” Predatory gambling occurs when corporate gambling interests’ partner with the government to cheat and exploit its citizens. (Which is what is happening now by way of new gambling legislation in Georgia.) So many aspects of this gambling type are rigged by the industry that – if you win – it can be used for the purpose of luring you into more gambling.

Now for the Christian, because of gambling’s predatory nature, it becomes a risky behavior that violates moral principles established in God’s Word. I will share with you what I call: “10 reasons why a Christian should not gamble.”

#1. Gambling violates the principle of worshipping God alone because it promotes idolatry.

There are many Scriptures, beginning with the Ten Commandments that talk about the supremacy of worshipping God (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 18:9-12; Matt. 6:33). Because gambling is basically more about “luck” and not skill, it encourages people to put their trust in “chance” and “superstition”.

As a matter of fact, in Isaiah 65:11 (ESV, NASB, NIV) we have two pagan gods named “Fortune” (Gad) and “Destiny” (Meni). There is no doubt this verse has some relationship to the activity that is involved in gambling. Now, let me ask you are there really any other gods than the Lord? No! Then who are these? I Corinthians 10:19-20, reveals who is looked to, if it is not the Lord God.

Gambling ultimately promotes increased demonic activity in people’s lives. Next time you are in a convenience store, just notice the astrology books and horoscope materials that are available to help in choosing numbers for activities such as the lottery.

#2. Gambling violates the principle of helping others who are in need because it exploits the poor and needy.

It says in Proverbs 14:31, “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.”

Gambling encourages people – often those who are least able to afford it – to spend their money and deprive their families, thinking that they can be better off financially because of it. It is not God’s will that Christians participate in behavior that further oppresses poor and needy people.

Studies have shown us that those people living in poverty or near poverty are more likely to play the lottery than those who are in financially better shape. Sometimes they contribute as much as half of the income to the lottery cooperation in their state.

Amos 2:6 says that God told the people, “I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.”

#3. Gambling violates the principle of being content with what you have by fostering coveting, greed, and money worship.

Jesus himself said in Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Gambling encourages people to lust more after the world and its pleasures than delighting in the things of God. And, so because of that it can lead to the worship of money!

1 Tim. 6:10 states money in and of itself is not evil but rather the “love” of money is! This love distracts us from God. The Scriptures teach that focusing on God and godliness is where the real contentment is in life (Phil. 4:10-13; I Tim. 6:6-9).

#4. Gambling violates the principle of protecting children because it exposes them and their families to the greater risk of evil.

Again, we can look to the greatest authority of all, Jesus and see what he said in Luke 17:2, “It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.” This is just one of many passages, where Jesus puts the priority of caring for children over the other needs and wants in life.

Gambling encourages and has the potential to destroy whole families through addiction, bankruptcy and other evils such as alcohol, drugs and pornography.

I have said for years when testifying in hearings at the State Capitol that the legalization of moral vices has its greatest detriment on our children. And yet, many times children and tax revenue for education are used as the excuse for the legalization of things like predatory state sponsored gambling!

#5. Gambling violates the principle of obeying the law because it increases the amount of crime and illegal gambling.

The Scripture says in Romans 13:1, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

Gambling encourages more lawbreaking through other illegal activity which is usually associated with the gambling. Stats have shown that things such as theft, drugs, pornography, murder, prostitution, drunkenness and illegal gambling increase wherever predatory gambling is legalized.

Once again, the scripture warns us in 1 Timothy 6:10 that "...the love of money is the root of all evil...". The further legal expansion of gambling has proven that it promotes MORE evil in a society!

#6. Gambling violates the principle of a biblical work ethic because it implies that you can have something by doing little or nothing.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

Gambling encourages people to think that being slothful and lazy is not something to be looked down upon, because winning (in some cases) has become more important than working.

There is no doubt that in societies where work is highly esteemed and respected, individuals, marriages and families are more likely express to love, dedication, and commitment to one another. With the amount of homelessness, divorce, child abuse and crime, we can't afford to move in another direction.

In the Book of Genesis and Exodus, we even see that God expressed work and encouraged others to do the same (Gen. 2:2; 3:19; Exodus 20:8-11).

#7. Gambling violates the principle of good stewardship because the majority of wagering is a waste of money with little or no reward.

God wants there to be prosperity among his people and all the earth, but his principles must be followed as seen in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

Gambling, on the other hand, encourages people to take what is usually their hard-earned money (which is also, God's money) and put it up at a tremendous risk. It is a risk, that the majority of the time, ends in failure!

Predatory gambling is based on the premise that there must be a majority of losers! The "House" MUST always win out! Which means the people who play, MUST lose as a general rule.

Proverbs 12:11, puts the principle plainly before us: "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding."

#8. Gambling violates the principle of freedom by enslaving its participants to gambling addiction.

The Scripture says in Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Gambling, however, encourages a compulsion to a behavior that once a person is “hooked”, it becomes uncontrollable. Anywhere predatory gambling is expanded, addiction exponentially explodes!

It is like a moth’s destructive fascination with the flame of a candle. It is a fatal fascination that will theoretically and, in some cases, literally kill you. Statistics nationwide have shown that one-third of addicted gamblers attempt suicide.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:12, All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

#9. Gambling (when legalized) violates the principle of governmental ministry by permitting laws that encourage its citizens to participate in the gambling industry.

The Scripture says in Romans 13:4, “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

Gambling on the other hand, (when run by the government) encourages that which is evil and perverts the purpose for which God intended government.

This is precisely what predatory gambling is. It is state sponsored gambling that is based on the pretext that we are allowing something evil, but it is being sanctified, because it is supposedly doing something (raising tax revenue) that is good (ie. helping the children)!

I do not believe God will hold us as citizens guiltless if we allow this to happen again in Georgia!

#10. Gambling violates the principle of love by leading people into an activity that could very well destroy their lives.

Christians are reminded in Romans 13:10 that, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Gambling on the other hand, encourages the destruction and hurt of individuals and families! This is the opposite of helping them to experience blessings and fulfilment.

It is impossible for us to love people the way God wants us to love people and at the same time participate, promote, or to not do anything to stop those activities which hurt and destroy people’s lives!

Jesus himself said in Matthew 22:39, “...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” He also said this in Matthew 7:12, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them...”

I can never accept that Jesus would be a part of predatory gambling. And it is hard for me to conceive of anyone following Jesus, knowing these dangers, who would participate in it or not fight to stop it!

Conclusion

Gambling is immoral and out of character with biblical Christianity.

The very nature of the predatory gambling industry (The Lottery, Video Coin Operated Machines, Sports Betting, Casinos, and Parimutuel Betting) is antithetical to living the Christian life.

Ephesians 5:8-10 says, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

There is no doubt in my mind that participating in activities like predatory gambling is a bad witness to the transforming power of the gospel in a believer's life!

Alcohol



ALCOHOL ISSUE BRIEF



GEORGIA ALCOHOL POLICY ALLIANCE

Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms in Georgia January 2023

We're All Experiencing the Cost of Excessive Drinking:

- Kills more than 140,000 people in the U.S. each year, and is responsible for about 1 in 5 total deaths among adults 20-49 years old.¹
- Kills more than 3,900 Georgians annually.² This is similar to the number of Georgians who died from drug overdoses last year.³
- Shortens the lives of those who died by an average of 29 years.⁴
- Cost Georgia \$6.9 billion, or \$2.12 a drink, in 2010.⁵

GEORGIA COST: \$6.9B⁵

National Breakdown of Costs:



72%
Lost Workplace Productivity



11%
Healthcare Expenses



10%
Criminal Justice Costs



5%
Motor Vehicle Crash Costs

EXCESSIVE DRINKING IS COMMON IN GEORGIA

14.5%

% of binge drinking among Georgia adults.⁶

10.0%

% of current drinking among Georgia high school students.⁷

59.5%

% of binge drinking among Georgia high school students who drink.⁷

WHAT IS EXCESSIVE DRINKING?⁸

BINGE DRINKING



For men, binge drinking is **5 or more drinks** consumed on one occasion*



For women, binge drinking is **4 or more drinks** consumed on one occasion*

*One occasion = within 2 to 3 hours

DRINKS PER WEEK



For men – **15 or more drinks** on average per week



For women – **8 or more drinks** on average per week

One Drink = 5-ounces of wine, 12-ounces of beer, or 1 ½-ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits or liquor

PREGNANT WOMEN & THOSE UNDER 21



Any alcohol use by pregnant women



Any alcohol use by those under age 21

9 OF 10 EXCESSIVE DRINKERS ARE NOT ALCOHOL DEPENDENT⁹

89.8% of Excessive Drinkers Are Not Dependent

Only **10.2%** of Excessive Drinkers Are Dependent

THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE¹⁰

Injuries
Motor vehicle crashes, falls, drowning

Violence
Homicide, suicide, intimate partner violence, sexual assault

Chronic diseases
High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease

Cancer
Of the breast, liver, mouth and throat

Reproductive health
Unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV

Alcohol dependence/alcoholism

Learning and memory problems

If pregnant

- Miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, and low birth weight
- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) which include physical, behavioral, and learning disabilities
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

CANCER

THE GREATEST CANCER RISKS ARE CONCENTRATED IN THE HEAVY AND MODERATE DRINKER CATEGORIES.¹¹

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING EXCESSIVE DRINKING¹²

The independent, non-federal Community Preventative Services Task Force (CPSTF) recommends several community based approaches for preventing excessive alcohol consumption and related harms.

- ✓ Increasing alcohol taxes
- ✓ Regulation of alcohol outlet density
- ✓ Dram shop liability
- ✓ Maintaining limits on days and hours of sale
- ✓ Electronic screening and brief interventions (e-SBI)
- ✓ Avoiding privatization of retail alcohol sales (for ABC states)
- ✓ Enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors

ADDITIONAL GAPA POLICY PRIORITIES

- ✓ Raise awareness of links to cancer
- ✓ Support the 3-Tier System
- ✓ Home rule: Local control for stronger policies

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12. "What Works: Preventing Excessive Alcohol Consumption: Evidence-based interventions for your community". The Community Guide, <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/resources/what-works-preventing-excessive-alcohol-consumption>.



55 Bible References on the Dangers of Drinking

1. Genesis 9:20-27, The first "man of distinction" and the tragic consequences of his drunkenness.
2. Genesis 19:30-38, Drinking results in Lot's debauchery of his own daughters.
3. Leviticus 10:8-11, The Lord commanded Aaron and his sons not to drink either wine or strong drink while rendering service for God.
4. Numbers 6:3, The vow of the Nazarite excluded drinking wine and strong drink.
5. Deuteronomy 21:20, Drinking is one of the attributes of a stubborn, rebellious, and disobedient son.
6. Judges 13:4, 7, 14, Samson's mother was expressly commanded by the angel of the Lord not to drink wine or strong drink.
7. I Samuel 25:36-38, Nabal, a churlish, evil, drinking man was smitten by the Lord.
8. II Samuel 11:13, By the use of strong drink David led Uriah into a fatal trap.
9. II Samuel 13:28-29, Amnon, on a drinking spree, was murdered by the servants of his brother, Absalom.
10. I Kings 16:8-10, While Elah, King of Israel, was "drinking himself drunk" one of his captains who had conspired against him killed him.
11. I Kings 20:13-21, While Ben-hadad, King of Syria, and 32 other kings were drinking themselves drunk in their pavilions, a small band of Israelites fell upon the Syrians and put them to flight.
12. Esther 1:5-22, After a week's feasting and drinking, King Ahasuerus drunkenly tried to subject Vashti, his queen, to the beastly gaze of the inebriated people and princes.
13. Proverbs 20:1, No wise person will allow himself to be deceived by wine which is a mocker or by strong drink which is raging.
14. Proverbs 21:17, 23:21, Drinking leads to poverty.
15. Proverbs 23:29-30, Strong drink produces sorrow, woe, contentions, babbling, wounds without cause, and redness of eyes.
16. Proverbs 23:21, An admonition to refrain from even looking upon wine.
17. Proverbs 23:32, At the last alcohol bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.
18. Proverbs 23:33, It fills men's minds with impure and perverse thoughts.
19. Proverbs 23:34, It brings on danger, accidents, and insecurity.
20. Proverbs 23:35, Insensibility follows drinking, rendering man into a clod; and it is habit forming so that the drinker upon awaking seeks it "yet again."
21. Proverbs 31:4-5, Officials with the responsibility of human life on their hands should not drink.
22. Ecclesiastes 2:3, The writer of Ecclesiastes tried strong drink but, in the end, admitted that this too was vanity. (Eccl. 2:11, 12:8)
23. Ecclesiastes 10:17, That nation is blessed whose leaders eat for strength and refrain from drunkenness.
24. Isaiah 5:11-12, Woe is pronounced on those who give themselves to strong drink.
25. Isaiah 5:22, Further woe is pronounced upon the drunkards.
26. Isaiah 22:13, Drinking often goes with carnal living.
27. Isaiah 28:1, A woe is pronounced upon the drunkards of Ephraim.
28. Isaiah 28:3, The drunkards of Ephraim to be trodden down and destroyed.
29. Isaiah 28:7, Prophets and priests become incapable of spiritual leadership because of their drinking.
30. Isaiah 56:12, Drinking accompanies foolish optimism and the sinners vain hope that his sins will not find him out.
31. Jeremiah 35:5-8, 14, 19, Rechabites who steadfastly held to total abstinence assured of God's continued blessings.

32. Daniel 1:5, 8, 16, 10:3, Daniel who refused to drink the King's wine was especially blessed by the Lord.
33. Daniel 5:1-2, This is the tragic example of a king who drank and who led his people to do likewise.
34. Daniel 5:3, Drinking leads to profaning sacred things.
35. Daniel 3:25-28, Moral degradation, of which drinking is a symptom, is ultimately punished by God.
36. Hosea 4:10-11, Strong drink and immorality go hand in hand.
37. Hosea 7:5, The king by his drinking was not only made sick but became scornful.
38. Joel 3:3, Young women were sold for the price of a drink.
39. Amos 4:1, Dissolute women, oppressors of the poor, call for their drink.
40. Amos 6:3-6, The evil, idle rich, who were given to imbiber wine were not concerned about the affliction of the poor.
41. Habakkuk 2:5, Arrogance is inflamed by drink.
42. Habakkuk 2:15, It is wrong to lead another to drink.
43. Habakkuk 2:16, Drink leads to shame and humiliation.
44. Matthew 24:48-51, Drinking is not consistent with alertness.
45. Luke 1:15, Greatness of John the Baptist linked with his total abstinence.
46. Luke 12:45, Christ warns against drunkenness.
47. Luke 21:34, Drinking prevents men from being prepared for the judgment day.
48. Romans 13:13, All are admonished to walk honestly, not in rioting and drunkenness.
49. Romans 14:21, Christians are admonished not to drink lest a brother be caused to stumble.
50. I Corinthians 5:11, Christians forbidden to keep company with drunkards.
51. I Corinthians 6:10, No drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of God. (Therefore, the preaching of the gospel must include alcohol education.)
52. I Corinthians 11:21, The Lord's Supper is no time for drunkenness.
53. Galatians 5:21, Drunkenness prevents men from inheriting the Kingdom of God.
54. Ephesians 5:18, Christians commanded not to be drunk with wine, but to be filled with the Spirit.
55. I Timothy 3:3, 8, Church leaders must be "not given to wine."

Although there are many instances of drinking in the Bible, it must be remembered that these are never held up as examples for us to follow. The whole weight of the Bible's authority is against the manifold evils of beverage alcohol. Today Christian love makes a tremendous appeal for believers everywhere to join hearts and hands in an effective program of total abstinence from beverage alcohol, "our fiercest foe." This terrible scourge can be driven from our homes and communities when God's people set themselves to the task in His power.

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Life



Georgia's Heartbeat Law is Already Saving Vulnerable Lives

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

As many of you now know, the Living Infants Fairness and Equality (LIFE) Act, commonly referred to as Georgia's Heartbeat Law, was ruled constitutional and was put into full effect by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals on July 20, 2022.

This legislation outlaws abortions after it is determined that there is a heartbeat. This bill, authored by Rep. Ed Setzler and signed into law in 2019 by Gov. Brian Kemp is the most important legislation passed by the legislature in my 15 years of lobbying at the State Capitol.

I am not overstating when I tell you how desperately we need this law! In Georgia, depending on which year you look at, we have been aborting babies in numbers almost as high as 35,000 in one year.

Before the fetal pain bill (HB 954) was passed in 2012, Georgia had been ranked #3 in the nation for late-term abortions. We were experiencing 1,000 to 1,500 late-term abortions a year.

We also, in essence, had become a "destination location" for women from other states to have these kinds of abortions. Statistics show that as many as 49 percent of the late-term abortions carried out in Georgia were performed on women from other states.

With this court ruling, we now have the opportunity to progress from protecting unborn children from at least 20 weeks (because of the fetal pain law), to approximately six weeks with the heartbeat law.

Think about it! We can eliminate most abortions after approximately six weeks in the state of Georgia. This kind of legislation, even with its exceptions, will save thousands of innocent human lives.

If the heartbeat law just saves one baby's life, it would be worth it. We are taught in the book of Genesis, Chapter 1, about mankind being created in the Image of God. This means all human life is sacred. This means each individual life is important, even if it is just one. Therefore, we should be seeking to save as many of the "ones" as we can.

We live in a fallen, sin-sick world, but we have a perfect standard of the sanctity of all human life given to us in Scripture, and we must therefore do all we can to save as many lives as possible. We must do all we can, to save all we can, without giving up!

Thankfully the Heartbeat Law (the LIFE Act) will not save just one, but thousands of lives, as we move forward to recognize that life in a mother's womb begins at conception and that ALL life is worthy of protection because God's Word teaches it.

I think President Ronald Reagan said it best when he said, "We cannot diminish the value of one category of human life –the unborn – without diminishing the value of all human life!"

Why do you think we have been debating "after-birth abortion" and "late-term abortions" in our country? It is because we have devalued the worth of innocent little children in the womb. Now because of abortion, children outside the womb have been devalued as well.

Devaluing life on the inside of the womb leads to devaluing life outside the womb. This principle, however, also tells me how to increase the value of life on the outside ... you start by again valuing life on the inside. The Heartbeat Law is leading us in the right direction.

This is what is happening in Georgia. Expanding protection for the unborn to the earliest days of conception, and further away from actual delivery, increases the value of unborn life.

The Life ACT is commonsense legislation that says we will save as many lives as we possibly can, beginning at approximately six weeks, as we educate our nation on the importance of ALL human life!

Never has there been a time in this country, that we needed to act more quickly to begin saving more lives and reshaping our nation's conscience on the sanctity of all human life. Every heartbeat is important, and Georgia can make a difference in saving as many heartbeats as possible!

How the Church Should Act in a Post-Roe Environment

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

As we consider the fact that Roe v. Wade has been overturned, I want to set the tone for how we should be thinking.

In the book of Esther, Mordecai asks Esther, “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” As Christians we need to have those kinds of thoughts about the life issue. It is “for such a time as this” that God has brought us into His work, to stand up as He would have us to. God has called us for such a moment as this to stand up for life!

In the book of First Chronicles the author reminds us that the Sons of Issachar “understood the times and they knew what to do.” It’s important as Christians that we “know the times” and “know (what God is calling us) to do.”

I had been saying for months before Roe v. Wade was overturned, that the “church’s hand is about to be called.” Simply put, the church is going to have to prove in a greater way that we are truly pro-life. It is now time to excel at “walking the walk” more than “talking the talk!”

With Roe v. Wade overturned, the church is now going to be called upon like never before for help in caring for mothers and babies. It must be understood that caring for mothers and babies should have never been an “extracurricular activity,” but rather it should have always been the “core” of what we’re called to do. (Lorna Bius, who heads up Mission Georgia, was the first to bring this to my attention.)

The book of James (1:27) reminds us that “pure and undefiled religion is to care for the orphans and the widows...” This kind of ministry is not new! This verse demonstrates that the Church is to be the “safety net” in our society.

On several occasions, I have stood with Suzanne and Rachel Guy in front of an abortion clinic encouraging women and men to choose life. In many cases, when these women are asked why they are there, they indicate it is because they felt like they had nowhere else to go. The church must step up and make sure that these women know the Body of Christ (the Church) is where you can go first for help!

There’s no doubt that this issue begins first and foremost with loving care for mothers and fathers who find themselves in difficult situations with unplanned pregnancies. Since Georgia’s heartbeat bill has become law, almost all abortions have been outlawed after approximately six weeks of pregnancy. This means that life will become a much more favorable alternative to women facing challenging circumstances.

It’s important that the churches show love through serving and meeting needs in the community. Consider providing things like help for women and men who have had a post-abortion experience; tangible help for childcare and housing; provide discipleship and friends to walk alongside of them; baby showers; help with prenatal diagnoses; partner with Pregnancy Resource Centers, and post-abortion healing ministries. Each of these are great opportunities to minister and share the gospel and love of Christ. The churches should be the safety net when it comes to caring for those in need.

This whole process of loving and caring begins with proper biblical teaching on sexuality and the proper role of marriage and family in the lives of all people. Unconditional love will be at the center of what the Church must express no matter what the circumstances are regarding mothers and babies needing to be cared for. This kind of love is what gives greatest evidence to the love that Jesus demonstrated toward us by what He did on the cross.

We demonstrate that same kind of love to mothers and babies who are needing help, so that they know they have many reasons to believe that abortion should be unthinkable! People going through difficult circumstances in their life need to be reminded again that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the place to go find help and care and love during their most difficult times of life!

So much of the difficulty that we find today in our culture is because, practically speaking, we have lost the family in America. We need to understand that as goes the family, so goes the nation! For example, all the issues that we are facing today related to abortion, foster care and adoption go back to the breakdown of the family.

We hear a lot today about making America great again. We must also understand that we need to make families great again, marriage great again, parenting great again, and we must also make men great again. We're finding today that men play a key role in our homes and many of the problems that we're seeing are because of fatherless homes. We need loving, sacrificial male leadership in the home now, more than ever! Parenting based on Biblical principles would go a long way in helping with the needs related to abortion, foster care, and adoption.

And finally, it is essential that Christians engage the culture, politics, and government policy. Though Roe v. Wade has been overturned, the issue of abortion is still not over! The fight for mothers and babies will now be moved primarily to the state level. And in some ways, the issue will be even more intense.

God has called every Christian to be "salt and light" (Matt. 5:13-16) and he has called Christians to be salt and light in every area of life. God wants us to be active in every area of life because Jesus is Lord of every area of life!

We are reminded in the book of Proverbs (29:2) that "when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked baereth rule, the people mourn." If God's people do not get involved, we're going to have a lot more "mourning" on the way. If we want a nation where there's rejoicing, then those who know the Lord must engage the culture, politics and yes, government.

The fight for life is now going to be more intense on the state level. Now is not the time to back down. Now is the time to stand up. Now is the time for the church to release the "salt and light" into our culture. Lives are depending upon us!

Protecting the Most Vulnerable: Our Children

Mike Griffin, Public Affairs Representative

During the 2022 legislative session, I had an opportunity both in the Georgia House and the Senate to testify in favor of public school parental rights legislation (“The Parents Bill of Rights”, SB 449) that was authored by Representative Josh Bonner and signed into law by Gov. Brian Kemp.

In representing Georgia Baptists, I confirmed that we agreed with the legislation regarding parental involvement in public schools based on three points:

- We agreed with it in principle. We believe that parents do have a fundamental right to direct the upbringing and the education of their minor children.
- We agreed with it in practice. We believe that there should always be practical ways that are fair, transparent, and accountable for parents to stay informed regarding the teaching of their children.
- We agreed with it in priority. We believe that children are not only society’s most valuable asset, but also its most vulnerable liability.

It is on this last point that I want to focus for this article.

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups of people in our nation. We’re living in a day when children are suffering the most from societal ills that are facing our culture. Whether it’s abortion, sex abuse or school shootings, children are reaping the greatest consequences of the most grievous social ills of our time.

I have stated on numerous occasions that, “If we (the church) don’t at least care about the impact the culture is having upon our children, then what kind of ‘gospel’ are we preaching?”

The Lord Jesus himself placed one of the highest levels of responsibility on the care and protection of children when he said “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:6 NASB).”

Today we need to understand that God calls upon all parents, all governments, and yes, all adults to act as shepherds when it comes to caring for the welfare of our children. We should all know that the first responsibility of a shepherd is to protect his sheep.

Protection is more important than feeding and leading sheep. Think of it this way. If sheep are not alive there is no need to feed or to lead them.

So, the first responsibility of a shepherd is to protect their sheep from any harm. They must remain protected if the shepherd is going to lead them to places to feed them!

With the onslaught of matters such as abortion, sex abuse and school shootings, children are facing their most difficult days in our nation. While it may not be a comfortable subject, abortion is where this issue of protection must begin.

The value and respect for human life, for example, children, must begin inside of the mother's womb at conception. If there is no respect for the nature and value of human life inside of the mother's womb, then there is going to be a decrease in the value and the nature of human life outside of the womb!

We must begin with the fact based on the book of Genesis that human beings are all created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). All human beings have purpose and value because God created them in His Image!

The fact of the matter is that effective legal and practical protection for all innocent human life begins with understanding that all persons are created in the image of God at the moment of fertilization. Therefore, at that moment, it carries with it the same responsibility of respect that we have for God.

Nothing exceeds our need to respect God first! Parenthetically respecting God and his creation of human beings (persons) impacts our willingness to do all that we can to protect human life beginning with the most vulnerable: our children.

People are constantly asking why we are experiencing the devastation of abortion, sex abuse and school shootings in our country. It is very simple. When we have a lack of belief in and respect for God it creates a lack of respect for human life created in God's image.

When we allow our children to be taught that they are nothing more than an animal and that there is no God, then we should not be surprised that the older they get, the more they will be tempted to act like animals. And when they are older, they will live without clear moral standards. Therefore, the conclusion to this line of thinking is that it impacts their ability to respect and protect the lives of others.

A godless life produces godlessness. The more respect we have for God, the more respect we will have for others.

And there is no greater respect I know than the way God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us that we might be forgiven of our sins by believing on Him (Rom. 5:8; Jn. 3:16). God proves that He is a just and holy God, and that he is also a God that demonstrates His love for all people unconditionally.

Calvary proves that He is a God that is gracious and merciful to all. Once that model of living is in hearts, it has an awesome impact on how people in any culture or society treat one another.

We have to be reminded that our country was based upon a Judeo-Christian ethic, that all people are created equal. God calls upon our government (as stated in the Declaration of Independence) to protect our God-given rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"!

In these times like never before, may we all reach out to God in directing us to protect our most vulnerable: our children!

Resolutions





Resolution Opposing Sports Gambling in Georgia

Submitted By: John Yarborough, Messenger from Hopewell Baptist Church, Gainesville, GA.

WHEREAS, the Georgia Baptist Convention has often stated its opposition at least 21 times since 1963 to the gambling industry, and the devastating effects of gambling upon the moral and economic life of our state and nation; and

WHEREAS, there are many Scriptures, beginning with the Ten Commandments that talk about the supremacy of worshiping God (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 18:9-12; Matt. 6:33). Because gambling is basically more about “luck” and not skill, it encourages people to put their trust in “chance” and “superstition”; and

WHEREAS, the Bible indicates that man is to work creatively and use his possessions for the good of others (Eph. 4:28); gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible calls for careful stewardship; gambling calls for reckless abandon. The Bible condemns covetousness and materialism (Matt. 6:24-34); gambling has both at its heart. The Christian work ethic is damaged by gambling; and

WHEREAS, the Scripture says in Galatians 5:17, *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”* Gambling, however, encourages a compulsion to a behavior that once a person is “hooked”, it becomes uncontrollable. Anywhere predatory gambling is expanded, addiction exponentially explodes!

WHEREAS, studies have shown repeatedly that the legalization and promotion of vices like sports gambling could increase addiction rates by at least another 110% in our state.

WHEREAS, sports gambling, while it is being done illegally in our state now, will be exponentially worse if made legal, especially in terms of addiction. An addiction hotline in Tennessee has seen as much as an 800 percent increase in calls since sports gambling was legalized.

WHEREAS, the American Psychiatric Association’s “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ” (DSM 5) classifies gambling as an addictive product likened unto heroin, opioids, alcohol, and cocaine.

WHEREAS, we already know that each new addicted gambler costs the taxpayers \$28,000 to \$104,000 per year, and like drug addicts, each gambling addict negatively affects the lives of between seven and 17 other people.

WHEREAS, it is a well-established fact that for every \$1 in new revenue from gambling, the cost to taxpayers, DHS agencies, and governments is at least \$3 to \$5. Gambling creates no new product and is profitable only via constant increases in human misery.

WHEREAS, in Australia, the online gambling establishment has children starting to gamble at age 11. In the U.K. there are 55,000 problem gamblers who are under 16 years old,

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and 28 million U.K. kids were illegally targeted by gambling companies, resulting in a 15% increase in problem gambling in kids.

WHEREAS, in the U.S., the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids reports that “more than half of 16-year-olds have gambling apps on their smartphones.”

WHEREAS, there is no amount of taxation, regulation and economic gain that would justify the harm that legalized sports gambling would have on individuals, marriages, families, and children.

WHEREAS, aggressive actions by gambling interests and legislators in recent years make it abundantly clear their intention of seeking to expand legalized gambling in Georgia, including not only pari-mutuel gambling on horse racing, casino gambling, but also, Sports Gambling; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the messengers of the Georgia Baptist Convention meeting at Warren Baptist Church Augusta, Georgia, November 14-15, 2022, urge the members of the Georgia Legislature to cease and desist with any efforts to open the State of Georgia to additional legalized gambling like Sports betting; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge state legislators to have the moral courage to oppose the efforts by representatives of the lucrative sports gambling industry, who seek to exert their influence in the political process by convincing the legislature that state sponsored predatory gambling is somehow something good for our citizens and the state’s economy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we pray for and lend our aid and support to Mike Griffin and our Public Affairs Ministry as we confront this menacing issue at the Capitol and that our churches and pastors educate and speak out on this evil industry in our communities; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be forwarded to Georgia’s Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House and the sitting state senators and representatives who represent the people of Georgia.

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Resolution on The Church in The Post-roe Era

Submitted By: Suzanne Guy, Messenger from First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA.

WHEREAS, with Roe v. Wade overturned, the church is now going to be called upon like never before for help in caring for mothers and babies. It must be understood that caring for mothers and babies should not be an “extracurricular activity,” but rather it should be the part of the “core” of what we're called to do; and

WHEREAS, in the book of Esther, Mordecai asks Esther, “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” As Christians we need to have those kinds of thoughts about the life issue; and

WHEREAS, in the book of First Chronicles the author reminds us that the Sons of Issachar “understood the times and they knew what to do.” It's important as Christians that we “know the times” and “know (what God is calling us) to do; and

WHEREAS, the book of James (1:27) reminds us that “pure and undefiled religion is to care for the orphans and the widows...” This kind of ministry is not new. This verse demonstrates that the Church is to be the “safety net” in our society; and

WHEREAS, since Georgia's heartbeat bill has become law, almost all abortions have been outlawed after approximately six weeks of pregnancy. This means that life will become a much more favorable alternative to women facing challenging circumstances; and

WHEREAS, so much of the difficulty that we find today in our culture is because, practically speaking, we have lost the family in America. Most of the issues that we are facing today related to abortion, foster care and adoption go back to the breakdown of the family.

WHEREAS, in many cases, when women are asked why they are going to abortion clinics, they indicate it is because they feel like they have nowhere else to go. Therefore, the church can step up and make sure that these women know the Body of Christ (the Church) is where you can go first for help; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the messengers of the Georgia Baptist Convention meeting at Warren Baptist Church Augusta, Georgia, November 14-15, 2022, recognize that this whole process of loving and caring begins with proper biblical teaching on sexuality and the proper role of marriage and family in the lives of all people; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that unconditional love will be at the center of what the Church must express no matter what the circumstances are regarding mothers, fathers and babies needing to be cared for with unplanned pregnancies. This kind of love is what gives greatest evidence to the love that Jesus demonstrated toward us by what He did on the cross.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that churches show love through providing things like help for women and men who have had a post-abortion experience; tangible help for childcare and housing; provide discipleship and friends to walk alongside of them; baby showers; help with prenatal diagnoses; partner with Pregnancy Resource Centers, and post-abortion healing ministries; create LIV (Life Initiatives and Values) groups in churches to educate about life

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issues and to care for those in need. Each of these are great opportunities to minister and share the gospel and love of Christ.

BE IT FUTHER RESOLVED, that all Georgia Baptist churches should participate in the Mission Georgia Emphases that has three of its primary focuses on needs such as: 1) post and prenatal care, 2) foster care and adoption and 3) human trafficking that impact mothers and children in a post-roe era; and

BE IT FUTHER RESOLVED, that all Georgia Baptist Churches should educate and promote foster care and adoption services, so that mothers have loving and caring options when not being able to care for their children; and

BE IT FUTHER RESOLVED, that Christians engage the culture, politics, and government policy because while Roe v. Wade has been overturned, the issue of abortion is still not over. The fight for protecting mothers and babies has now been moved primarily to the state level in policy and elections; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that every Christian realize that they have been called by God to be “salt and light” (Matt. 5:13-16) in **every area** of life. God wants us to be active in every area of life because Jesus is Lord of every area of life



RESOLUTION ON GENDER DYSPHORIA AND ITS TREATMENT

Submitted by: Judy Craft, Messenger of First Redeemer Church, Cumming, GA

WHEREAS, in the beginning, God created male and female in His image (Gen 1:27); and
WHEREAS, our broken culture has left many innocent children without even the vital foundation of certainty about their own God-given sex; and

WHEREAS, the families of these gender-dysphoric children are seeking answers from the mental-health and medical communities; and

WHEREAS, too often those communities are guiding the families and children toward dangerous and experimental treatments including medications to delay the normal bodily development of puberty, cross-sex hormones (estrogen for boys, testosterone for girls) to feminize or masculinize the body's appearance, and even surgeries to remove healthy body parts and create non-functioning imitations of others; and

WHEREAS, most of these treatments are irreversible in their effects; and

WHEREAS, the full long-term effects of these treatments have not been studied and are unknown; and

WHEREAS, the known medical risks of these treatments include sterilization, heart disease, strokes, blood clots, cancers, bone weakness, and severe depression; and

WHEREAS, these medical treatments and procedures amount to treating the symptoms rather than the underlying psychological causes of gender dysphoria; and

WHEREAS, the vast majority of children who suffer gender dysphoria will outgrow it if given psychotherapy rather than medical treatments and if allowed to develop normally; and

WHEREAS, no reliable research shows that these treatments improve children's psychological outcomes, and in fact the best research shows that patients who do undergo these treatments persist in their psychological disorders and distress;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Georgia Baptist Convention meeting at New Hope Baptist Church North, in Fayetteville, Georgia, November 11-12, 2019 strongly urge the Governor and members of the Georgia House and Senate to enact legislation prohibiting the administration of puberty-blocking drugs, cross-sex hormones, and sex-reassignment surgery to minors as a treatment for gender dysphoria; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we oppose any legislation that would restrict legitimate psychotherapy to help patients resolve gender dysphoria by addressing underlying psychological problems; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we encourage all believers to love and show compassion toward all persons, including those struggling with gender dysphoria, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is able to bring true freedom from error and to set free the captives of sin (John 8:34-36); and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution be forwarded to Georgia's Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, and the sitting state senators and representatives who represent the people of the state of Georgia.

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WHEREAS, Houston Mayor Annise Parker subpoenaed sermons that challenged Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, a legal measure that allows transgender people to use public restrooms of the gender in which they identify themselves, and while public pressure convinced the Mayor to withdraw the subpoenas, her initial decision reflects a growing attempt to silence America's pulpits and classify sermons addressing certain Biblical subjects as hate speech; and

WHEREAS, the God-given human right of religious liberty, which pre-existed civil government itself, and which is a constitutional birthright of every American, should be personally cherished as a gift of God, strongly defended as a loving act toward our neighbors, and given every support to provide a bulwark against such coercion and persecution in this generation and the generations to come; and

WHEREAS, the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act (RFRA), which passed Congress in 1993, has proven to be an effective buttress for religious liberty, ensuring that federal laws and federal policies, even those that appear to be neutral toward religion on their face, cannot substantially burden religious liberty without a compelling state interest and with the least restrictive means; and

WHEREAS, RFRA was the leading reason why religious liberty claims were upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Burnell v. Hobby Lobby*, ensuring that the Affordable Care Act could not coerce business owners, holding sincerely held religious beliefs, to violate their consciences and force them to include abortion-inducing drugs in their insurance coverage for employees; and

WHEREAS, RFRA only applies to federal laws and federal policies and cannot be applied in the States unless and until States pass their own RFRAs, as now 19 states have done, including all states that are contiguous to the State of Georgia; and

WHEREAS, recognizing that just as in the days when Daniel was thrown in the lion's den due to what appeared to be a neutral law cleverly crafted by those who hated his religion and his righteousness, we, too, live among those who love wickedness and will find ways to use the coercive power of government against God's people, and

WHEREAS, religious liberty has been increasingly under attack in the State of Georgia as is evidenced by restrictions on Christian clubs at several of the State's universities, denial of after-school Bible clubs in K-12 schools, restrictions against placing Bibles in public libraries, zoning restrictions that deny churches the use of their own property, a ban on the singing of religious Christmas songs at a school's Christmas program, opposition against prayer at football games, and even the dismissal of a university student from her course of study in counseling when she expressed disagreement with the same-sex lifestyle;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we must defend religious liberty now for the sake of the next generation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we pledge to defend the God-given and constitutionally guaranteed right of every American citizen to worship God freely in thought, word, and action, according to the dictates of his or her conscience, and to support the passage of legislation such as RFRA or other laws protecting religious liberty in our state and nation.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be forwarded to Georgia's Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House and the sitting state senators and representatives who represent the people of Georgia.



RESOLUTION ON THE DANGERS OF MARIJUANA

Submitted by: Gerald Harris, Messenger from Ephesus Baptist Church, Villa Rica, GA

WHEREAS, the drug problem is a complex and intricately interrelated phenomenon in our society, now including a widespread misuse of valuable prescription products, a broad spectrum of unscientific self-medication, deeply entrenched customs of drinking alcohol beverages, and an alarmingly developing culture involving marijuana and a variety of illegal drugs; and

WHEREAS, the pervasive drug orientation of our culture is resulting in widespread social disruption and destruction of life by causing a variety of diseases, accidents and other drug addiction, and is a factor in other serious social problems such as crime, family disruption, workplace issues, and automobile accidents; and

WHEREAS, basic factors now recognized as perpetuating the drug approach to life are social pressure for using, the fascination of drug use created by the entertainment industry, and widespread ignorance of accurate information pertinent to usage of these drugs; and

WHEREAS, contemporary efforts of government, church, civic groups, and other independent agencies are failing to cope effectively with the drug orientation of our culture; and

WHEREAS, since 1996, 23 states and Washington, D.C. currently have laws legalizing marijuana in some form. This trend reflects a growing national tolerance for the use of marijuana for both recreational and medicinal purposes; and

WHEREAS, in 2015, Georgia legalized medical marijuana for eight specified medical conditions; and

WHEREAS, the State Commission on Medical Cannabis is now considering a recommendation that legislation be introduced in 2016 that would authorize the State of Georgia to cultivate, produce and sell marijuana and its extracts; and

WHEREAS, federal seed laws and federal fertilizer laws add complexity and perhaps liability to those involved in cultivation; and

WHEREAS, legislation has been introduced in the Georgia State Senate for the legalization and regulation of recreational marijuana; and

WHEREAS, marijuana is defined as having a high potential for abuse; and no clinical trials have proven efficacy of marijuana as medicine, nor recommended any dosing requirements; and several major medical organizations including the American Medical Association, National Cancer Institute and American Cancer Society have rejected smoked marijuana as medicine; and

WHEREAS, marijuana is a gateway drug leading to addiction and other drug abuse; and marijuana is also a gateway to health problems, introducing multiple toxic chemicals into the user's body, many of which we do not know the effects on the human body; and marijuana use is associated with higher risk for cancer, psychosis, strokes, respiratory damage and heart attacks; and marijuana is also a gateway to crime, because the relationship between illegal drug use (including marijuana) and crime is undeniable;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we urge the members of the Georgia Legislature to oppose any legislation that would authorize the cultivation of marijuana in the State of Georgia; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the members of the Georgia Legislature to oppose any legislation that would legalize recreational marijuana in the State of Georgia; and

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call for all Georgia Baptists and others of like-mind and purpose to voice their protest of further legalization of illegal drugs, including marijuana; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we pledge our cooperation with others to neutralize social pressures and minimize glamorization of drug usage; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that preventive education in the homes, churches, and the schools be strongly encouraged; and

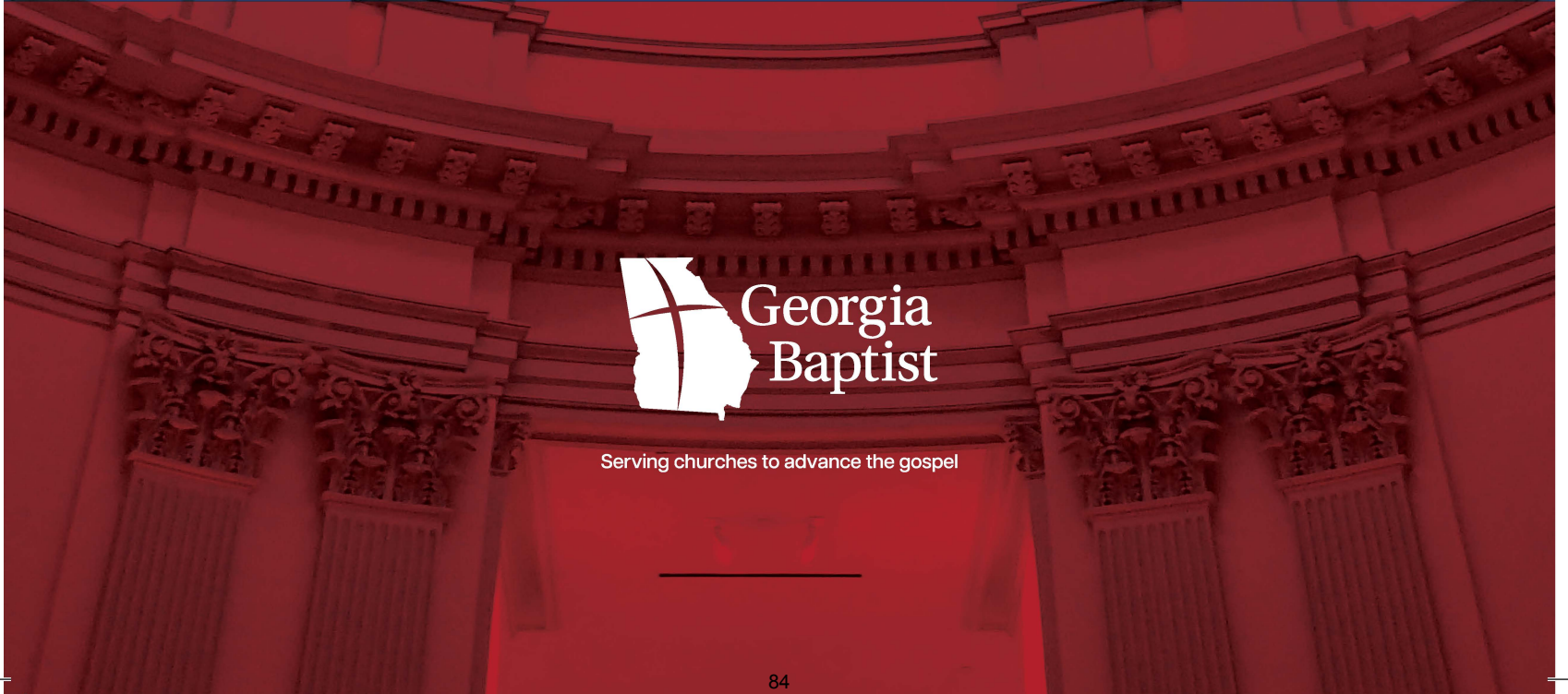
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the GBC Public Affairs Committee be encouraged to work diligently with appropriate agencies of the state convention to publicize this position and to encourage cooperation with others seeking these same objectives; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be forwarded to Georgia's Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House and the sitting state senators and representatives who represent the people of Georgia.

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Georgia
Baptist

Serving churches to advance the gospel