

SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE™

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Dear SLI Friend:

This may be the first time you have ever heard of the Southeast Law Institute. If that is true, please read on and learn more about us. Our friends and supporters have known us throughout our eighteen year history of educating public officials, lawmakers, and the general public on significant freedom issues and they have also known of our mission to protect rights. Our mailing list includes churches, bible studies, sport organizations, schools and individuals who have shown an interest in supporting pro-family issues. If you are a current friend or supporter of SLI this letter is important to you too. We need your help now more than ever.

SLI's primary mission is to provide education in a variety of ways on legal and public policy issues concerning religious freedom, freedom of speech, sanctity of life, parental rights, education, healthcare, and other issues which affect our basic and fundamental, protected, individual rights and the integrity of the family. In fulfilling our secondary mission, that of protecting rights, we provide litigation and legal support services.

We do not charge a fee for all that we do. If a person requests help because their child is being denied religious freedom in a public school, we provide advice and legal representation without charge. Licensed and cooperating attorneys provide those needed services. Generally, the attorney contributes his time and is paid little or nothing. If a legislator requests assistance on the drafting of legislation, we also provide that assistance at no charge. Not a single day goes by that we are not called upon for help.

We are private practice attorneys who serve for the Southeast Law Institute. Sometimes the work of SLI takes us away from our paying work for significant periods of time. The need for our services never goes away and the work never ends. In fact, the demand continues to grow. Contributions from the general public and a few churches make our work possible.

We sincerely appreciate those of you who support our efforts. We rely on you to meet our needs so we can provide the statewide services, which are so desperately needed. However, as the demand continues to grow, we need to increase our financial base by adding even more people to our list of supporters. We need your help in order to accomplish that. Do you know anyone, an individual, a church, or an organization, which would include us in their annual budget? If you do, please tell us about them. You can do so by simply filling out the card on the back of the enclosed address form and returning it to us.

The Southeast Law Institute represents a variety of things to a variety of people. To some, it is a ministry; to others it is a legal organization; to still others, it is an integral part of the pro-family network of organizations seeking to protect our rights and privileges. Whatever it is to you, please let us hear from you and please support our work through finances, prayers, and referrals. We cannot do it without you.

Faithfully yours,

A. Eric Johnston

**EDUCATIONAL MEMO FROM
THE SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE**

To: Southeast Law Institute Supporters

From: A. Eric Johnston

Date: June, 2001

Re: A FINAL REPORT: The 2001 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature in Review

INTRODUCTION

SLI has been involved for a number of years with the legislative process. The 2001 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature was no exception and SLI was pleased to have provided assistance and advice on a variety of pro-family and moral issues. SLI does not act as a lobbying organization, but provides legal assistance free of charge to legislators and pro-family groups. We work with ALCAP, Eagle Forum, Christian Coalition, Citizens for a Better Alabama, The Alabama Pro-Life Coalition, Inc., The Alabama Policy Institute and others.

LEGISLATION

SLI drafted most of the positive legislation and drafted amendments to nullify or neutralize most of the destructive legislation. SLI offers unique qualification and experience to address what may seem to be ordinary issues, but which have or may have significant impact on constitutional rights, freedoms and protections. Here is what happened on those issues:

- The **DIAL gambling bill** did not pass. This bill sought to expand electronic gambling at the four gambling racetracks in Alabama and to authorize unlimited electronic gambling machines at business locations with less than 300 square feet, i.e., the arcades that have sprung up all over the state. There was a great deal of trickery and subterfuge in this legislation, with its propaganda being that it was meant to limit gambling in the state. This bill was only two steps from becoming law, *viz*, a final vote by the House and signature by the Governor.
- If the DIAL gambling bill did not pass, a fallback position for the gambling industry would have been the **FORD gambling bill**. The FORD gambling bill would have permitted said electronic gambling at the four gambling racetracks in the state. It was a weaker bill, yet it was just another version of the attempt to expand gambling. It did not pass.
- The third gambling bill was the **McCLAIN gambling bill** which would have changed existing law on the amount of time simulcast gambling could take place at the four gambling racetracks. Current law limits gambling to 310 days per year and not on Sundays, Christmas and Thanksgiving. This bill would have permitted 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year simulcast racing and wagering. This bill did not pass.
- On the other hand, the **Arthur Payne anti-gambling bill** would have removed all of the electronic gambling machines from the state racetracks, the arcades, and elsewhere. There would have been no exceptions. This bill also died.
- The annual attempt to amend the **Alabama Hate Crimes law** to add “**sexual orientation**” as a category again failed. Since Alabama became a state in 1819, it has been its public policy to prohibit homosexuality or the recognition of it as a protected right. The Hate Crimes law can add an additional penalty if a crime is motivated by a prejudice. The prejudices listed in the current law deal with immutable characteristics such as race or fundamental rights such as religion. To amend that law to recognize sexual

orientation would do significant damage to Alabama's strong moral public policy and open the door for later recognition of homosexuality as a protected right in the state of Alabama.

- The most important abortion related bill was the **Woman's Right to Know Act**. This bill required abortion clinics to give objective, scientific, medical information to women considering abortions. It required a 24 hours waiting period. It provided for other proper medical information so that women could make informed decisions. Women do not have this information available to them at abortions clinics, unlike thorough and complete medical information they receive from their own private physicians. The bill did not ever get out of committee.
- On the other end of the pro-life spectrum was the **Prohibition of Assisted Suicide bill**. Most states are passing such laws in order to protect the value of life, although the quality of life may be somewhat diminished, due to illness, disability or age. The bill got out of committee, but never came up for a vote.
- The **Historic Documents Act** (HDA) would have required public schools to post four important historic documents: *The Ten Commandments*, *The Magna Carta*, *The Declaration of Independence*, and *The Bill of Rights*. This was not the misguided "Ten Commandments bill" which got so much publicity. An earlier SLI Educational Memo addressed some of the problems with that legislation. The HDA was supported by the Attorney General and is believed to be a constitutional expression of important moral truths. In some curious ways, the bill encountered opposition and did not pass.
- Various efforts to **re-write the Alabama Constitution**, such as permitting the legislature to do it or calling a Constitutional Convention for doing so all died. While the efforts concerning the bills listed above were all important, the efforts to change Alabama's Constitution were, perhaps, potentially the most dangerous. *The Birmingham News* recently took a poll saying the majority of Alabamians wanted the constitution rewritten. This debate has not yet begun. SLI's last Educational Memo addressed this issue and we expect to see significant events in the future.
- It took five years to get the first "Living Will" now termed "**Advance Directive**" law written. Because of significant opposing interests, the required form was quite lengthy and complex. Four years after its original enactment, we agreed on a simplified format using lay language. That bill became law. It still protects our individual interests concerning euthanasia and end of life issues.

CONCLUSION

When you look down this list, you realize virtually all bills of significant moral implications died, both the bad and the good. It is much easier to kill legislation than to pass it and that is true for both sides. Conservatives believe in "limited government." This year was an exercise in "limited government."

The reality is that we will continue to have gambling bills dominate each legislative session and we will see needed bills meant to protect individual freedom and the family fail. This is due to a lack of leadership and control in the legislature by moral dedicated officials. Even some of the

sponsors of the good bills were not dedicated to their task. Until we have that leadership, we can expect to see this unusual form of limited government, a form not anticipated by the founding fathers.

Next year's elections will have vast significance for Alabamians. Each one of us must begin right now, today, considering whether we should run for office, work for or contribute to candidates, or be involved in some other way in the process. SLI does not prophecy, but we do not foolishly disregard warning signs. Our culture continues to secularize and that brings weaker foundations of truth and righteousness. This year's legislative session was a danger warning.