

**AN EDUCATIONAL UPDATE FROM
THE SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE, INC.**

To: SLI Supporters
From: A. Eric Johnston
Date: October, 2000
Re: Does Your Vote Count For Anything?

America is becoming notorious for the low turnout of voters for local and national elections. Alabama came close to a low voter turn-out record for the run-off elections last June. Admittedly, there were not many candidates on the ballot and there were no high profile races. While the turnout was extremely low for that occasion, it is representative of a trend of voter apathy.

The purpose of this month's memo is not to get involved in any campaign, for that is forbidden by law of tax exempt organizations such as SLI. Our purpose is to give a couple of examples from our experience in the complex arena of legal/political/ethical issues. In recent years our nation has become one more of men than laws, just the opposite of what it should be. Finding elected officials who will conform to proper legal standards, rather than relying on relativistic opinions and polls, has become a very important issue in and of itself.

The first example has been our experience dealing with Legislators on important moral issues. SLI drafts legislation dealing with religious freedom, sanctity of life and similar or related issues. SLI does not lobby Legislators, but in the process of providing legal assistance to legislative sponsors, we are acutely aware of problems and delays that are obstacles to proper laws.

For eleven years abortion regulatory legislation has been introduced by the Alabama Pro-Life Coalition, Inc. and supported by all of the family groups who make up the coalition. In those eleven years, only two pro-life bills have been passed, viz., the partial-birth abortion ban and the post-viability abortion ban. Actually, they did very little to regulate or stop abortions. Similarly, it took five years for legislation to be adopted that would deal with end of life issues, viz., living wills and durable powers of attorney. Another example was the criminal background checks for public schools and whether church schools would be included in state regulation; it took four years to work out that legislation.

Why is it so difficult for the passage of good, necessary, moral legislation? It is because of the competing interests of opposing political/philosophical/theological positions.

Our second example is the recent opinions handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court on the issues of school prayer and abortion. Student-initiated school prayer, an issue in which SLI has been significantly involved in Alabama, was dealt a significant blow in June when a school board policy which would permit students to pray on their own without school direction was found unconstitutional. A few days later the court handed down a decision on the partial-birth abortion ban holding laws prohibiting this gruesome procedure unconstitutional. The division of the nine votes on the Supreme Court results from competing views. There are three conservative, four liberal, and two swing votes. The latter two are more likely to vote moderate to liberal. At least three of the sitting justices are expected to retire in the near future. The prevailing philosophy on the Court will determine the extent of religious freedom and the protection of human life.

Whether the President and lesser candidates to be voted on this November subscribe to moral principles is one of important concern to the voter. The man who is elected President may serve two terms, being eight years. He has a very good chance to determine the direction of religious freedom and sanctity of life in America by who he puts on the Supreme Court.

Next year will be elections of local legislative officers-Representatives and Senators of the Alabama Legislature. They will determine whether sanctity of life will be protected and religious freedom respected. The problems and delays mentioned above have resulted from a lack of leadership and commitment to moral principles. There are too few good men and women in those seats of power.

SLI is not supporting or opposing any candidate or party. We respectfully suggest it is very important that citizens inform themselves of the issues and the candidates' positions, then vote according to their consciences. Our efforts to defend religious freedom and the sanctity of human life are directly related to the views and opinions of the men and women who are responsible for promulgating and enforcing our laws.

This statement is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to provide legal advice. We hope if you have questions or know of those who do, you will contact us and we can assist through referral to one of our cooperating attorneys.