A Look Inside the House With Congressman Pat Swindall

by Ralph Barker

Recently, I interviewed U.S. Congressman, Pat Swindall, who represents Georgia's fourth congressional district. He is a strong conservative and an active Christian. The purpose of my interview was to discover what the current mood of Congress is concerning moral issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and welfare. There is some good news and some bad news coming from Capitol Hill.

Winning the Battle for the Unborn

I first asked if there had been any changes in the attitude of Congress concerning moral issues. Congressman Swindall responded that the mood was definitely changing. He said, "There has been a very discernable and quantitative difference in voting patterns of the Congress when it comes to pro-life issues."

The Congressman's appraisal was very encouraging in that battles were being won in the area of limiting Federal funding for abortions. But his main concern is the big battle to reverse the *Roe vs. Wade* decision. This will be an extended one, Swindall says, because it will take a change in the leadership of both Houses of Congress.

Swindall continued by stating that this issue has been "hopelessly bottled up in the House Judiciary Committee and will remain hopelessly bottled up until you change the leadership to change the composition of the House Judiciary Committee so the issue can move to the floor. Once we move it to the floor we would have at least an even shot on getting the two thirds votes necessary."

Congressman Swindall believes that the only long-term solution to the abortion problem is to remove the issue from judicial determination. This can only be done by constitutional amendment. Otherwise, even if *Roe vs. Wade* were reversed by the next Supreme Court, a future President could have it reinstated by his appointments to the Supreme Court. A constitutional amendment would make it constitutionally impossible to reinstate.

The Congressman believes that abortion is a Federal issue and not a "states rights" issue. He bases his belief on both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution which guarantees citizens the inalienable right to life. He says, "I differ with the notion that any state has the right Constitutionally to deprive anyone of life or liberty for any reason other than through due process of law, proving them guilty of some capital offense." The slavery issue was settled at the national level. Should the unborn be given less justice because they cannot speak for themselves?

Future Laws May Favor Homosexuals

Our next area of discussion was homosexuality. My question concerned possible legislation that would give homosexuals a minority status unde the law.

When asked this, Congressman Swindall responded, "I know that Ted Weiss has for a number of years had legislation similar to that pending in Congress. It has never received much attention nor much support." He went on to say, "there has been for some time a growing sentiment in the direction of including sexual preference among the 'Title Seven' protection language. Currently, of course, the language has been held to the standards of race, religion, color, national origin." If the "Title Seven" language were changed to include homosexuals, then they would even be guaranteed participation under Affirmative Action programs.

At this point the Congressman does not think these "Title Seven" changes are probable. His fear is that the changes may slowly come into being over a period of time. Policies and mindsets change gradually. Swindall believes the changes are more likely to come where there is a large homosexual population.

Welfare, Fix or Fiction?

We next turned our attention to the welfare problem. I have heard various statements from the liberal camp that seem to indicate a desire to get people off the welfare roles and back to work. I asked Congressman Swindall if my perception was true or whether this was only more liberal rhetoric.

His response was quick, "It is rhetoric. It is also very dangerous rhetoric because one of the latest liberal tactics is to take conservative nomenclature and then re-implement the same policy that has typified welfare programs for decades."

One example the Congressman cited was the liberal's use of the word "workfare." Swindall went on to explain that every able-bodied person must accept a job that is offered to him. Most Americans, on both sides of the issue, would agree that this is the right way to go. The small print, however, says that the job under consideration must pay equal to or greater than current welfare benefits.

Swindall stated that the current benefits for a single parent with two children exceeds $13,000 per year if you aggregate the benefits. Based on these figures you would be preempting a large number of welfare recipients from having to accept a job under the liberal's "workfare" concept. The Congressman says the most responsible approach would be to require all able-bodied persons to accept a job when offered. If they refuse, they would be refused benefits. If they accept the job and are still underemployed they would deduct their salary from their Federal benefits. To quote Swindall, "It has to be an all or nothing proposition. If you refuse a job, you get nothing. If you take the job, you get it all." This practice, if adopted, would certainly reduce the burden to the taxpayer and at the same time improve productivity in America.

I asked Congressman Swindall if there was any desire on the part of Congress to give back some of the responsibility for the poor to the churches and individuals. He said, "There is a great deal of sentiment along that line." Swindall has himself formed a foundation called F.A.V.O.R., Foundation for the Advancement of Voluntarism, Opportunity, and Responsibility. The purpose is to encourage private-sector solutions to problems that are identified in Washington. It receives no Federal funding.

F.A.V.O.R. will focus on the homeless issue. Swindall says, "Congress passed a homeless bill for one billion dollars, half of which goes to brick and mortar, assuming that homelessness is a function of the lack of housing. That's not true. How can you say there is a lack of housing when I would say at least 75% of the churches and synagogues in the fourth district of Georgia are not using their buildings to house any one that is homeless? The problem is a lack of vision and planning to utilize existing facilities. So what we are going to try to do is to bring creativity to the solution instead of more money."

Policing the Pews

My last question centered around the issue of Congressional interference into the affairs of churches and non-profit organizations. The PTL scandal has, of course, rekindled complaints about religious organizations. Congressman Swindall thinks much of the current sentiment against ministries, a rush to arms if you will, has been spurred by the PTL story. Swindall warns us, "Clearly, I think there have been examples where non-profits have abused their tax-exempt status. We ought to move with great caution because if we are going to err at all, I would rather err on the side of religious freedom freedom. This will mean that there will be abuses. I would rather allow those that are non-abusers to exist even though a few abusers will get in rather than eliminate the abusers and throw the baby out with the bath water."

In closing, Congressman Swindall shared some words of encouragement. He said, "I think we're seeing a shift in the direction of absolutes, basic values, and traditional family values." The question in the Congressman's mind now is whether or not the shift is permanent. He believes the results of the next election will be important evidence pointing to the substance of this shift, whether or not it's fleeting or fixed.

Our thanks to Congressman Pat Swindall for his time and long-time friendship to American Vision. We pray many more like Pat Swindall will be elected to office in 1988. You can make it happen: VOTE!

Conclusion

Let's remember several important points. First, politics and government are just *one* slice of life and our salvation will not come from Washington D.C. or the voting booth. Submission to Jesus Christ and faithfulness to His laws are the only answers to society's problems. We do, however, have a responsibility to be stewards over this great country the Lord has given us. Part of that responsibility is to be politically aware and to participate in the electoral system. Edmond Burke is attributed to have said, "The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." I for one believe that to be true. If we do nothing we will allow evil men to gain office and to rule this land. We are approaching an election year. Let us be remember that we can impact civil government, and therefore our land, for Jesus Christ by voting intelligently and demanding of our elected officials that they vote righteously.

Second, and this is so neglected and yet so important, pray for our elected officials. The Apostle Paul placed the highest priority on this when he said, "*First of all*, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings, and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). One of the direct benefits from doing this is that we can lead a tranquil and quiet life so we can be free to worship and serve the living God. Let us remember that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

Book Review

THE DOCTRINE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD by John M. Frame; Presbyterian and Reformed, 437 pages, Hardback, $24.95

Reviewed by Peter J. Leithart

Future generations of Christian theologians and philosophers will remember 1987 as a year of great significance, perhaps as the end of one era and the beginning of another. In April, Dr. Cornelius Van Til, longtime professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and one of the leading defenders of orthodox Christianity in this century, died in his sleep at the age of 91. In September, Prof. John Frame, a leading pupil of Van Til, published his first book, *The Doctrine of*