

JAMES C. BENFIELD, 59; ORGANIZER, ACTIVIST
(By Richard Pearson)

James C. Benfield, 59, a lobbyist since about 1980 who was chief financial officer and a partner at Bracy Tucker Brown, the Washington government and public affairs consulting concern, died of a brain tumor Nov. 2 at his home in Takoma Park.

Mr. Benfield, an authority on grass-roots organizing and advocacy, had corporate clients and was often involved in consumer issues, as well as causes including coinage, daylight savings time reform and help for the poor.

He had done work for such clients as the Continental Group, the Clorox Co. and McDonald's. But he made headlines locally for his advocacy efforts, often as a volunteer, managing the Daylight Savings Time Coalition, which he founded, and directing the Coin Coalition and the Campaign for Home Energy Assistance.

Mr. Benfield, who joined what became Bracy Tucker in 1980, was a master at organizing coalitions. In his successful efforts to extend daylight savings time in April, he trumpeted the belief that daylight savings, with its longer hours of afternoon daylight, extended hours of outdoor activity. This helped him secure the support of associations representing amateur softball, barbecue makers, convenience stores, service station dealers, chain restaurants and sporting goods.

His efforts to reform coinage featured drives to replace the dollar bill with a dollar coin, which he pointed out would save the government more than \$450 million annually because coins last longer than bills. It helped lead to the Sacagawea dollar coin. Groups that came on board for that campaign included vending businesses and mass transit and amusement park associations.

Another of his great efforts was the Home Energy Assistance Campaign he started in 1993. It now helps 4.3 million households and has secured annual congressional appropriations of \$2 billion. His partners in this effort included the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

Over the years, Mr. Benfield explained his views on these issues on ABC's "Good Morning America," CNN's "Larry King Live" and on National Public Radio. He wrote for *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Des Moines Register*. He also lectured at Harvard University and conducted workshops for the Energy Department.

Mr. Benfield, who was born in Philadelphia, was a 1965 economics graduate of Drake University in Iowa. He was an Army photographer in South Korea in 1967 and 1968. He came to the Washington area in the 1970s. Before becoming a professional lobbyist, he held a variety of jobs.

In fact, the collection of jobs he held led to a 1977 profile in *The Post*. The jobs included public relations director of the National Symphony Orchestra, freelance photographer, and apartment manager and part-time janitor. He also had managed a local chamber music group, had played classical guitar at restaurants and had given guitar lessons.

He assisted the homeless, both with contributions and helping to obtain government aid and secure medical care. He worked with area churches to raise corporate aid for the homeless. *The Post* wrote about his efforts to raise funds for a sick street musician and after the musician's death, to place a plaque on the wall where he most often performed.

His neighbors remembered him as the guy who hosted community Fourth of July picnics that included the firing of a Civil War canon and pruning trees along railroad rights of way. He also improved a muddy

shortcut that commuters took to the local Metro by laying a bed of garbage can lid-size stones. He also was known for always giving a hand, forever taking people into his home who had suffered a tragedy.

His first marriage ended in divorce. Survivors include his wife of 17 years, Susan Storing Benfield, and two children, Anna Corinne Benfield and Michael Storing Benfield, all of Takoma Park; his mother, Corinne Benfield of Lombard, Ill.; and a sister.

CONVERSION BAN IN INDIA SHOWS IT IS NOT A DEMOCRACY

HON. CYNTHIA A. MCKINNEY

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 14, 2002

Ms. MCKINNEY. Mr. Speaker, the party that controls the national government in India, the BJP, has enacted a ban on religious conversions in Tamil Nadu, a state which it controls. The law prohibits anyone from converting to any religion except Hinduism. Anyone who converts to a religion other than Hinduism can be imprisoned and can face a heavy fine. It officially targets conversions "by force, allurement, or fraudulent means," but aren't all conversions by "allurement," that is, by persuasion presented by another person?

Effectively, the new law prevents all conversions, except conversions to Hinduism. This is part of the fundamentalist Hindu nationalists' drive for *Hindutva*—a totally Hindu-dominated culture. "Even if one converts of one's own free will, those involved in the conversion can be punished on the grounds that it's a forced conversion," said former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi. Yet the BJP and other groups under the umbrella of its parent organization, the RSS, have been forcibly re-converting people to Hinduism after they have converted to other religions of their own free will.

According to the *Washington Times* of November 11, a Dalit group, the Dalit Panthers of India, is planning to have 25,000 of its members convert to Christianity. Another group of 10,000 Dalits in Chennai plan to convert to Buddhism on December 6 if this unjustified law is not repealed by then. Dalits, or "Untouchables," are the lowest caste in Hinduism and their continuing oppression is essential to the preservation of the repressive Hindu social order.

It is clear once again that there is no religious freedom in India. India's claims to be democratic are a lie if people cannot freely choose something as basic as their religion.

This is more evidence that India is not the democracy it claims to be. America must speak up for the rights of all people in South Asia by cutting off our aid and trade to India, by imposing the sanctions the law mandates for violators of religious freedom, and by declaring openly our support for self-determination. Why can't the country that proudly claims to be the world's largest democracy settle its minority issues through a free and fair vote? That is the way that democratic countries do it, and it is the way world powers do it. As long as India refuses to do it, it will not be a member of either category.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place the article I referred to before into the RECORD at this

time for additional information about the conversion ban.

[From the *Washington Times*, Nov. 11, 2002]

A SAWDUST TRAIL FOR LOW-CASTE HINDUS?

(By Shaikh Azizur Rahman)

NEW DELHI.—Low-caste Hindus in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu are threatening to embrace Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam to protest a new law that outlaws religious conversion.

A bill passed into law by the state legislature last month penalizes those who convert to a religion other than Hinduism with imprisonment and a hefty fine.

While religious minorities in Tamil Nadu plan to challenge the law in court, many Hindus from so-called "untouchable castes," known as Dalits, are threatening to publicly defy the new law.

One group of Dalit Hindus in the state capital, Chennai, said that a group of 10,000 will convert to Buddhism on Dec. 6 if the law is not revoked.

Another group, known as the Dalit Panthers of India [DPI], pledged that 25,000 of its members would become Christians to protest what they called an "unjustified" decree. "The upper class has been torturing the Dalits for centuries, and now, by passing the bill, the government has decided to shackle us in a society where we are denied even our basic democratic rights," said one Dalit activist, who identified himself by the Christian name Emmanuel. On Oct. 31, Tamil Nadu became the first—but probably not the last—Indian state to outlaw religious conversions. Though the law targets conversions "by force, allurement or fraudulent means," opponents say the language offers the means to challenge all conversions to faiths other than Hinduism.

"Even if one changes one's religion of one's own free will, those involved in the conversion can be punished on the ground that it's a case of forced conversion," said M. Karunanidhi a former chief minister of Tamil Nadu. The new law was welcomed by Hindu fundamentalists, who govern the nation in a coalition led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"The BJP is strongly of the view that this law is most necessary for the whole country. Lots of money is coming into the country from Islamic organizations to aid conversions," said BJP President M. Venkaiah Naidu. Ashok Singhal, leader of the World Hindu Council (VHP), hailed the law as a "timely and bold step" and he urged other states to pass similar laws.

The issue of religious conversion has long been a source of strife in India. While federal law allows Indians to change their faith, the ruling BJP makes no secret of its dislike of the practice, while its ruling partner—the VHP party—views conversions as betrayal.

Opponents of the new law warn it will only trigger an even larger exodus of Hindus to other faiths.

The Global Council of Indian Christians said it was "alarmed by the hurriedly promulgated ordinance," and called it "the most heinous violation of religious freedom aimed at targeting Christian missionaries engaged in poverty alleviation and spreading the light of education." The All-India Christian People's Forum said that it went against the core of the Constitution. "This ordinance is uncalled for, unwarranted and smacks of a pro-Hindu ideological bias of the government".

"The bill runs foul of Article 25 [25] of the Indian Constitution, which grants freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion to every Indian citizen," the group said.

Dominic Emmanuel, director of New Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, called the measure,

“an assault as much on civil rights as on human dignity.”

John Daya, secretary-general of the Christian Council in New Delhi, said: “In fact, the only inducements by fraud and fear are those being carried out by [Hindu organizations] in the tribal belt, where innocent tribals are being forced to become Hindus.”

Muslims, too, are concerned. “How can conversions be prevented if an individual is attracted to another religion because of his or her faith in it? Force is never used to convert one to Islam because it is against the basic tenets of [Islam],” said Maolana Siddikullah Chowdhury, general secretary of the Jamiat-e-Ulema party in Calcutta.

He added that low-caste Hindus converted to Islam simply to “escape discrimination and ill treatment” and not under any coercion.

A TRIBUTE TO JOHN LAFALCE

HON. BARNEY FRANK

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 14, 2002

Mr. FRANK. Mr. Speaker, for the past several years, I have had the privilege of working under the leadership of our colleague from New York (Mr. LAFALCE) in his role as Senior Democrat on the Committee on Financial Services (as it is now officially called, after our Republican colleagues gave a hint of their policy preferences by excising from the Committee's title any reference to cities, urban affairs or housing).

In his leadership of the minority on this important committee, Mr. LAFALCE has been a committed, creative, forceful advocate of policies that combined support for a strong free market with concern for fairness for consumers and social justice for people with low incomes. No opposition was strong enough to deter him from fighting for an America that was both prosperous and fair, and he helped people understand that these goals are mutually supportive, not exclusive.

Personally, I have been the beneficiary of his ability to lead in a cooperative spirit, and to perform both his partisan and bipartisan roles with great skill. That is, when possible, he worked constructively with the majority party to improve legislation, when necessary he led the minority in an effective and cohesive way.

The financial community, the House, and I personally will miss him. As an indication of this, I ask that the well-merited tribute contained in a recent editorial from the official publication of America's Community Bankers be printed here. And, I thank America's Community Bankers for this gracious—and entirely accurate—summation of JOHN LAFALCE's work.

THE LAFALCE LEGACY: THREE DECADES OF LEADERSHIP FOR BANKS

Congressman John J. LaFalce (D-N.Y.), who represented western New York's 29th Congressional District since he was elected to Congress in 1974, will retire at the end of the current Congress. His departure represents the end of an era.

Congressman LaFalce has been a good friend of the banking industry. In his years of service, from the U.S. Army Adjutant General Corps, to the New York State Senate and State Assembly, to the House of Representatives, John LaFalce personified the best in public service.

He listened to those on all sides of an issue, staking out his position and, as a pragmatist, using his skills as a politician to craft compromises on both sides of the aisle to move needed legislation.

In his leadership role as the ranking Democrat on the House Financial Services Committee, John LaFalce exercised extraordinary influence over the outcome of financial services and housing legislation. He contributed greatly to the historic Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act by first introducing his own bipartisan bill and then by helping to craft the final product. In his long career, Rep. LaFalce was involved in all of the major legislative initiatives on banking and financial services.

John LaFalce is a consumer and community advocate, and a staunch defender of the Community Reinvestment Act and financial privacy. And yet bankers also found him to be a champion of balance.

As chairman of the House Small Business Committee, John LaFalce paid special attention to the needs of women who are small business leaders and entrepreneurs. He wrote the Women's Business Ownership Act, which improves access to credit for women.

Rep. LaFalce's public service career was aptly summarized in a citation by Niagara University when it awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. It read, in part, “Three qualities emerge as best describing the man: honesty, energy and conviction.”

These qualities, along with his integrity, leadership, and good humor, will be missed in the halls of Congress. John LaFalce leaves behind a legacy of outstanding achievement. America's Community Bankers extends its best wishes for the future.

POLICE AGAIN ENTER GOLDEN TEMPLE COMPLEX

HON. DAN BURTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 14, 2002

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, in June 1984, Indian forces invaded the Golden Temple, the most sacred Sikh shrine, and other Sikh Gurdwaras around Punjab, killing 20,000 people. As Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale said, this helped lay the foundation of Khalistan, the Sikh homeland that declared its independence in 1987. Now the police have again invaded the Golden Temple complex on the pretext of searching the three buildings in the complex in connection with the upcoming elections for the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which oversees all the Gurdwaras in India.

The police were accompanied by Indian political officials, including the Chemicals and Fertilizers Minister, Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa.

People of all religions and from all over the world have been welcomed to worship at the Golden Temple. Now even members of the SGPC may well be blocked from entering it. Some SGPC workers had a verbal altercation with two of the invading police officials, according to the Tribune newspaper out of Chandigarh. The article reports that SGPC members have already had to sneak into the Golden Temple complex.

Mr. Speaker, this is further proof that there is no religious freedom in “the world's largest democracy.” India has already been added to our government's list of countries that violate

religious freedom. Now sanctions should be implemented to help ensure real religious liberty in India.

This is just the latest chapter in a long history of repression of Sikhs by India. Over a quarter of a million Sikhs have been murdered since 1984. More than 52,000 are being held as political prisoners, according to a report by the Movement Against State Repression. Another 50,000 have simply been made to “disappear.” The police picked up 50,000 Sikh youth, tortured them, murdered them, declared their bodies “unidentified” and secretly cremated them, and refused to hand the remains over to the families. Christians, Muslims, Dalits, and other minorities have seen similar atrocities committed against them, yet the world treats India as a respectable, democratic country.

Mr. Speaker, we must stop our aid to India now. We must declare our support for self-determination for the Sikhs of Khalistan, for predominantly Christian Nagaland, for Kashmir, and for everyone in South Asia. The cornerstone of democracy is the right to self-determination.

I would like to place the Tribune article on the police invasion of the Golden Temple complex into the RECORD at this time. I think my colleagues will find it very informative.

[From the Tribune (Chandigarh), Nov. 11, 2002]

POLICE ENTERS GOLDEN TEMPLE COMPLEX

(By Prabhjot Singh)

CHANDIGARH, Nov. 10.—Less than 24 hours before a five-member NDA team, led by union minister Sahib Singh Verma, could fly into the Holy City of Amritsar to oversee the conduct of next Tuesday's annual election to the SGPC executive committee, Punjab policemen in plain clothes entered the Golden Temple complex on the pretext of searching all three serais (inns) there.

Accompanying the team would be not only Union Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister, Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, who is also a SAD General Secretary, but also 100-odd SGPC members owing allegiance to SAD chief Parkash Singh Badal.

Though preventive arrests continued throughout the state and Golden Temple complex was put under police siege with the deployment of hundreds of anti-riot policemen in anti-combat gear, some of the Akali leaders, including former Finance Minister Kanwaljit Singh managed to sneak into the sanctum sanctorum.

Talking to The Tribune over the telephone, Mr Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa said the names of four NDA observers—Mr Sahib Singh Verma, Mr Thomas (MP, Samata), Mrs D'Souza (MP, Samata), and Mrs Anita Arya (MP, BJP)—have already been cleared, the Union Civil Aviation Minister, Mr Shah Nawaz, is also expected to be a part of the special NDA team to oversee the SGPC elections. The observers and the SGPC members would take a chartered flight from New Delhi to Amritsar tomorrow afternoon.

Mr Dhindsa further said that on the basis of the complaint lodged by the Shiromani Akali Dal with the Union Home Minister yesterday, the Union Home Secretary today called Punjab Chief Secretary Y.S. Ratra on the telephone and expressed his “strong displeasure” over “politicalisation of the bureaucracy”.

The Chief Secretary reportedly assured the Union Home Secretary that no SGPC member would be stopped from reaching the Golden Temple complex for attending the election meeting. Efforts would be made to facilitate those lodged in jails in one case or the other to attend and vote in the elections.