

Money pours in for Baptist center on Capitol Hill: Center for Religious Liberty

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A Texas Baptist family's spontaneous challenge to jump-start a Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty campaign to buy and renovate a house on Capitol Hill for its own center in Washington netted the organization nearly \$1.2 million in just a couple of weeks.

J. Brent Walker, executive director of the group, which rents space from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, announced in a July 24 e-mail to supporters that a matching-funds challenge from the Baugh family of San Antonio has been wildly successful.

Donors gave or pledged a total of \$688,372 in response. According to Walker, an unnamed benefactor who gave a \$200,000 gift requested that it not be matched, meaning the challenge raised \$1,176,745.

He said that the total raised by the capital campaign so far now stands at slightly over \$2.5 million—half of the goal.

The matching-funds challenge started during the BJC's annual luncheon, held June 29 in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly and American Baptist Churches USA biennial meeting in Washington, D.C. There, Walker noted that the Baugh family had given \$500,000 to boost the group's campaign to build the Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill.

Family representative Babs Baugh then, in a surprise announcement, said her family would match any other pledges or gifts made to the campaign between June 29 and July 15. BJC leaders, who advocate for church-state separation, have hoped for such a highly visible presence for the Baptist concept of religious freedom near the Capitol.

“I am so moved by the incredible generosity of Babs, the Baugh family and all of you who took up the challenge,” Walker wrote. Babs Baugh is the daughter of Eula Mae and John Baugh, who founded the Sysco Corporation. John Baugh died in March at age 91. -*Associated Baptist Press*