

Briefly noted

News in the [August 24, 2010](#) issue

As many as 1,000 people who had registered for the five-day Baptist World Congress in Honolulu were unable to attend because their visas were denied by U.S. officials, said leaders of the sponsoring Baptist World Alliance in an opening day news conference July 28. The BWA drew about 10,000 to its congress five years ago in Birmingham, England, but this year's gathering was expected to number fewer than 5,000—mostly for economic reasons. Other major church gatherings in the U.S. have had the same problem in the past decade. Would-be registrants from Africa and Asia were the most affected. "It would be very unfortunate if the U.S. had to be eliminated from the list of places to hold meetings," said Neville Callam, general secretary of the BWA, whose office is based in Falls Church, Virginia.

The American Jewish Congress, a national advocacy group that has argued for church-state separation on prayer in public schools, has laid off most of its employees and suspended operations. The 92-year-old organization lost \$21 million of its \$24 million endowment to financier and felon Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme, which devastated a range of Jewish groups, including Yeshiva University. As with other nonprofits, the economic downturn has also hobbled fund-raising efforts, officials said. Once a prominent organization in combating anti-Semitism and promoting women's rights and other progressive policies, the AJCongress has struggled in recent years to distinguish itself from the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League, said Jonathan Sarna, an American Jewish history professor at Brandeis University. "Once it lost almost all of its endowment, its days were numbered," Sarna said. "The wonder is that it held on as long as it did." AJCongress president Richard Gordon said the group will operate "with a skeletal staff over the next few months" while weighing its options.