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Rogers, Land join call for GOP
to maintain its pro-life plank

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/15/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Southern Baptist megachurch pastor Adrian Rogers and agency head Richard Land have joined 10 other pro-life/pro-family leaders in calling on the Republican Party to readopt without change the pro-life plank in its platform.

The statement was drafted in the wake of comments attributed to Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed by The New York Times which indicated a willingness to liberalize the platform language. Reed later labeled the report "totally inaccurate" and said he opposed any change which "would signal a retreat from (the platform's) defense of innocent human life."

The statement signed by Rogers and Land supports re-adoption of the GOP pro-life plank from the 1984, '88 and '92 platforms "without any change or deletion." While it did not refer to Reed's comments, the statement said, "In the past week, there has been considerable media comment about proposals to change this language. Such comments show that any change or deletion would be interpreted as a retreat from the Republican Party's principled position."

Among other signers of the statement were James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family; Chuck Colson, chairman of Prison Fellowship Ministries; Gary Bauer, president of Family Research Council; and Beverly LaHaye, chairman of Concerned Women for America. The statement, released May 14, appeared with its list of signers as a full-page ad in the May 15 issue of The Washington Times.

Rogers, a three-time president of the Southern Baptist Convention, is pastor of one of the SBC's largest churches, Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn. Land is president of the Christian Life Commission, the convention's ethics and religious liberty agency.

A focus of the statement is the pro-life plank's "support for a human life amendment to the Constitution." Some conservative Republicans have called for removal of this portion of the plank and for change in other parts of the plank.

"We believe that the goal of constitutional and legal protection for unborn babies is the transcendent moral, social, cultural and political issue of our times," the statement says.

"A constitutional amendment is necessary because the 1992 Supreme Court decision in Casey v. Planned Parenthood declared abortion to be a constitutionally protected liberty. A constitutional amendment is the means provided by the Constitution itself to return this great question to the American people.

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"Though this point has been greatly obscured in the media, this is the heart of the issue," the statement says. "It is not our position that is unyielding. Our position has been made necessary by the usurpation of power by the justices of the Supreme Court."

In the statement, the signers deny it is a partisan issue:

"We long and pray for the time when the platform of the Democratic Party and any other party is as pro-life as the current Republican Party platform. We seek a day when all parties and the country as a whole are so overwhelmingly pro-life that abortion will not be an issue of dispute in the nation's political life."

In interviews, Rogers and Land both said the statement transcends party politics.

"While we are fully aware some will interpret this politically, it is absolutely apolitical and totally moral to stand up for the unborn," said Rogers. "Had the Democratic Party a pro-life plank they were thinking about removing correspondingly, this would have been directed toward them.

"It rises above the political. It's just a plea for anyone to protect the unborn. Somebody has to speak up for the unborn, because they cannot speak for themselves."

Land said, "In our system it is absolutely essential that at least one of the two major parties be committed to the pro-life position. As the statement makes clear, we long for the day when all major parties in American political life will be committed to the pro-life position, just as all major parties in American political life are now committed against slavery and for civil rights. That was not always the case, but it is now.

"In the slavery controversy, one party was anti-slavery and the other party was pro-choice on slavery," Land said. "One party had to have as its goal changing the status quo. Similarly, in the civil rights controversy one party was increasingly committed to civil rights legislation, and eventually both parties accepted the need for civil rights legislation. But for the status quo to change, at least one party had to be committed to change."

Of the need for a constitutional amendment, Land said, "Just as denial of the humanity of African American slaves could only ultimately be remedied by passing the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, so too the denial of the humanity of the untold millions of unborn American babies can only ultimately be remedied in law by an amendment to the Constitution which recognizes and acknowledges their status as human beings and thus puts them under the protections of the Constitution. The argument that passage of such an amendment is not now politically possible in no way should negate the fact that must be the ultimate goal."

In a new book excerpted in the May 13 issue of Newsweek magazine, Reed presents a proposed pro-life plank which does not specifically mention a human life amendment. In his proposal, Reed supports attempts "by all legal and constitutional means to protect the right to life for the elderly, the infirm, the unborn and the disabled." The Washington Times reported May 7 Reed had sought privately to gain consensus among pro-lifers for change in the plank which would be acceptable to pro-choice Republicans, but the Christian Coalition head said in the same article he doubted there would be any change.

In an early edition May 4, The New York Times reported Reed would add "rape and incest exceptions as a possible change" in the platform plank. According to the Times, Reed called the newspaper after its first edition and said he had referred to reluctantly accepting such exceptions only in the case of legislation, not a constitutional amendment or the party platform.

"The Christian Coalition opposes abortion in every case except when the mother's life is in danger," Reed said in a prepared statement. "We will oppose with every fiber in our being any effort to include a rape and incest exception in the pro-life plank or to drop a call for constitutional and legal remedies such as an amendment to the Constitution."

Others who signed the statement calling for readoption of the current pro-life plank in the GOP platform were Judie Brown, president of American Life League; D. James Kennedy, a Presbyterian pastor and president of Coral Ridge Ministries; Richard John Neuhaus, a Roman Catholic priest and editor-in-chief of First Things magazine; Phyllis Schlafly, president of Eagle Forum and chairman of the Republican National Coalition for Life; Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress Foundation; and Jack Willke, president of Life Issues Institute and the International Right to Life Federation.

In addition to Rogers and Land, Bauer, Colson and LaHaye are members of Southern Baptist churches.

While a struggle continues over abortion in the Republican Party, there are indications one may be in its early stages among Democrats. Two recently published reports said about 40 pro-life Democrats in the House of Representatives are preparing to challenge the abortion rights position of their party.

The pro-lifers hope to present their desires for a softening of the party's pro-choice plank to the platform committee at the Democratic National Convention, according to a report in the May 14 issue of The Washington Times. They admitted they do not expect the platform to change, however.

"We will be talking about it on the floor and in informal meetings" in an effort to gain an acceptable compromise, said Rep. Tony Hall, D.-Ohio, according to the May 8 issue of The Hill newspaper.

"I would fight as hard as I could" to "make our national party platform abortion-neutral," Rep. Glenn Poshard, D.-Ill., told The Hill. "I think it's incumbent upon those of us who hold these views to do everything we can."

Poshard is a member of a Southern Baptist church. Hall received the Christian Life Commission's 1995 Distinguished Service Award.

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D.A.T.E. warns youngsters
of drugs, tobacco, alcohol

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press
5/15/96

ST. LOUIS (BP)--"Just say no" may become the answer to a trivia question after the year 2000: What was the three-word phrase promoted by First Lady Nancy Reagan that encouraged children to avoid using drugs?

Both the message and public awareness of the risks of drugs to children have faded from public consciousness in the 1990s.

Today, studies show, more young people are saying "yes" to using illegal drugs. Marijuana use almost doubled between 1992 and 1994 among children ages 12 to 17. They also continue to use tobacco and alcohol in alarming numbers.

"We're pretty faddish in America," said Curt Scarborough, president of the Christian Civic Foundation in St. Louis and a member of First Baptist Church, Harvester. "We've sort of cycled out of that ('Just say no') and now we're paying for it." He cited shrinking federal funding for drug prevention as another factor in increased drug use by youths.

Scanning the faces of fourth-graders in the library at Concordia Elementary School in St. Louis, it is hard to imagine that one in 10 has consumed a beer in the past year or that three of every 20 have sniffed glue. But if national statistics apply, that is the case.

The children gathered to hear a presentation by Doug Dunlop, a prevention specialist with D.A.T.E. -- the Christian Civic Foundation's drug, alcohol and tobacco education program. Dunlop, minister of family life and youth at Maywood Baptist Church in Independence, also spoke to a group of fifth-graders and a group of sixth-graders.

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"I enjoy the innocence of the younger children -- they're more moldable," Dunlop said. He sometimes makes presentations at high schools, where his listeners include the not-so-innocent. "You can already tell that they've given in and they don't give a rip about what you're saying. It breaks your heart to see them making the wrong decision." Sometimes teachers will tell him of a drug fad going around among students, such as combining inhalants. "They'll ask me to hit hard on that."

To arm young people to make wise decisions, the D.A.T.E. curriculum focuses on information about drugs, reasons people use drugs and ways to avoid using drugs. Dunlop kept the youngsters' attention by calling on them. "What do we mean by 'psycho?'" he asked. A student replied, "A person who's crazy."

"Where?" Dunlop responded. "Crazy in your elbow?" The children corrected him. "In your brain." Psychoactive drugs, he proceeded to explain, are those that work on the mind -- stimulants, depressants, narcotics and hallucinogens. The deadliest drugs fall under the first two headings.

"What's the No. 1 killer?" Dunlop challenged. "It comes from smoking." A student volunteered the answer and he affirmed it.

"Nicotine is the psychoactive stimulant in smoking, and it's the No. 1 killer.

"I'll be honest with you guys," he told his listeners. "There's not a single thing that smoking does good for you."

The No. 2 killer, Dunlop continued, is the depressant known as alcohol. "What are the two products that are easiest for people to get their hands on?" he asked. The students knew the answer to that one -- tobacco and alcoholic beverages.

Narcotics originally were developed to relieve pain, Dunlop told the children. "Drugs can have a good purpose if they're used right." Hallucinogens include marijuana, LSD and PCP. "It alters your five senses," he said. "You're not in reality anymore."

People start taking drugs for various reasons, Dunlop noted. They have problems and they can't cope with them; they have low self-esteem; or they're bored. They think it makes them "look big," or they do it out of curiosity or because their friends do.

"As long as you're alive and walking on this planet, you're going to have problems," Dunlop told the students. Taking a drug to help with a problem only makes it worse.

As for boredom, D.A.T.E. challenges students to seek "natural highs" in activities they enjoy. "It's OK to pursue thrills," Dunlop told the sixth-graders. "Just make sure they're not chemically dependent."

Dunlop emphasized repeatedly the need for young people to decide they won't take drugs before they get into a situation where they are forced to make such a decision. "If you choose now not to be a person who's addicted to drugs, you will be better off when you're challenged later."

He suggested strategies for avoiding the use of drugs. One was to say "no" -- over and over and over -- to anyone who offers them. "If you say that long enough they'll get the message and they'll move on." Another was to recruit a friend who will commit to staying drug-free.

D.A.T.E. prevention specialists end their presentations with an invitation to students to "take the freeway" and make a signed commitment to live a life free from the harmful effects of chemicals. Scarborough compared the invitation to the altar call at the conclusion of a church revival service. "It's actually taking peer pressure to work on a positive side."

Since 1974, D.A.T.E. has taken its anti-drug message to 1.25 million young people -- an average of 170 children a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. Its curriculum, The D.A.T.E. Manual, is in use in 40 states besides Missouri.

The Christian Civic Foundation plans to expand D.A.T.E. significantly in the 1996-97 school year. Its focus with the public schools will shift from once-a-year visits by invitation to once-a-month visits under contract. Sixty school districts have entered into contracts, Scarborough said, including 15 of the 23 districts in St. Louis.

Currently the foundation is recruiting prevention specialists. D.A.T.E. director Sharon Bartlett said she hopes to triple the number of specialists -- from 15 to 50. Specialists are born-again Christians who model a drug- and alcohol-free lifestyle.

Many are bivocational pastors or youth ministers. Their pay is about what a substitute teacher makes.

D.A.T.E. tries to hire people who live within 60 miles of the schools it serves, partly because they know how young people think in a geographic area.

"I have seen an attitude sometimes of: 'Why try? You can't do any better so why try?'" she said. Some communities communicate acceptance of alcohol use. "People say, 'Kids around here don't do drugs, they just drink,'" Bartlett said. "You'd be surprised how often we hear it."

Scarborough, Bartlett and Dunlop see themselves as missionaries to the public schools. Bartlett, who attends Mid Rivers Baptist Chapel in St. Louis, said she surrendered to missions as a teen-ager. "This is not exactly what I had in mind at the time," she acknowledged with a laugh. Her mission for the schools through D.A.T.E.: "We need to put more emphasis on prevention. We've gotten away from it."

Although he is not permitted to talk about his faith, Dunlop introduces himself to groups of students as a minister. Often a young person will come up to him after he speaks and say, "I'm a Christian, too."

After his presentation in Concordia, some girls talked to him about their lives at home.

"My mom smokes all the time, and I tell her please, please, please don't smoke," one said. Dunlop told her, "Keep encouraging them, OK? It means a lot to them when they hear from you like that."

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Devotional guide seeks
to stir youth to prayer

By James Dotson

Baptist Press
5/15/96

ATLANTA (BP)--How do you encourage students to become interested in developing a deeper prayer life? That was the question a few years ago when a group of Georgia Baptist youth leaders gathered to discuss how they could encourage youth to plug into a renewed interest in prayer that has arisen in recent years.

At first their efforts began to gel in the form of a conventional book, but then they hit upon another idea: Give the information to youth a day at a time in the form of a guided devotional. The result is the "Journey Prayer Guide," released earlier this year by the Georgia Baptist Convention.

With the daily format, youth could assimilate the principles in small bites, while at the same time developing the spiritual disciplines at the heart of the teaching, according to Dennis Rogers, youth consultant in the GBC discipleship training department and general editor of the volume.

"Our commitment up front was to make it experiential, so this is not a fill-in-the-blank kind of thing," he said. "We asked youth to actually record prayers, the purpose being that we want them to think about what they pray for and to become very specific in their prayer requests. It's topical ... but its all related back to a prayer experience."

The prayer guide includes daily sections with material based on 13 units that last about one week each. Each day features a scriptural basis for the topic of the day, what others have said about it, what Jesus said on the subject, some suggestions for personal prayer, as well as a "living prayers" section that suggests how what the student has learned about prayer can be applied to his or her life.

The interactive part of the experience includes the section where students are asked to write out a prayer of their own. There is also a daily journal section where participants can respond with their own thoughts, with ideas offered to guide the experience.

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"If somebody does this for 92 days, we feel like a habit would be established that they can continue," Rogers said, adding he hopes youth will see it not as just a course to be completed but the beginning of a true prayer journey.

"If you just work through it to say, 'I've completed it,' you haven't gotten the spirit of it. This is to help you develop a lifestyle of prayer."

Rogers said he knows of nothing else on the market like the prayer guide. "There are a lot of prayer journals out there, and a lot of them are for youth, but none of them are guided like this. So we feel like this is the best of both worlds," he said.

Contributors include 12 additional youth workers who all worked in Georgia when the project began, although some have since moved out of state. Each writer was primarily responsible for one of the units in the volume.

"We tried to make it with some logical progression," Rogers said. Some of the early units address developing a heart for God, the way Jesus modeled prayer for his disciples, what it means to confess and what it meant to praise God.

Rogers said he is encouraged by the response to the project. Since the book was introduced at a conference in January, he said, about 1,000 copies have been sold without a major marketing push.

"The interesting thing that has evolved in this is we've discovered a lot of adults are using this ... and that's fine," Rogers said, adding while there are scattered references to youth concerns, "the content is for everybody."

A Journey leader's guide, which will also include a variety of other helps for leading youth in developing a prayer life, is scheduled to be available in early summer, Rogers said. It is being edited by Joe Graham, an associate in the GBC student work department.

The prayer guides can be ordered for \$10 each, postpaid, through the GBC Discipleship Training Department, 2930 Flowers Road South, Atlanta, GA 30341. For more information, call (770) 936-5274 or 1-800-746-4422.

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**Missionary says persecution
strengthened Ethiopian church**

By Bruce Sims

**Baptist Press
5/15/96**

FOLEY, Ala. (BP)--The adventures of Indiana Jones can't hold a candle to a missionary's experiences, according to Jerry Bedsole.

Along with his wife Rosie, Bedsole served as a Southern Baptist missionary veterinarian to Ethiopia the past 25 years. He is retiring Feb. 1 to a home near Foley, Ala., due to health problems stemming from a childhood bout with polio.

"You know, Indiana Jones gets to see exotic locales, experience exciting adventures and eat things we would consider strange," Bedsole acknowledged.

But, he noted, the places he has seen, the conditions he worked through during Ethiopia's long civil war and some of the foods he has eaten have given him a "been there, done that" attitude in comparison to the fictitious Jones.

"One of the hardest things I had to learn in Ethiopia was when to shut up and learn from these people," said Bedsole, a native of Thomaston, Ala.

"Since I've been home on furlough and have been preparing for retirement, one of the hardest things has been simply to readapt to our culture."

A graduate of Auburn University's veterinary school, Bedsole said he made a vow when he graduated to give up working on donkeys and chickens and concentrate on horses and cows.

"When I was working with Dr. Max Foreman in Summerdale, I could do that, but when I got saved and responded to the Lord's call of mission work in 1967, I found that Ethiopia had about 5 million donkeys, and over the next 25 years I got to treat half of them," he said.

"God is faithful in the little things as well as the large," Bedsole said of missions work in Ethiopia, "and when we in turn are faithful in the little things, we see how the big things in life come about."

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Bedsole said he saw loving Christians emerge from individuals who had once been atheists. "I also saw God use a communist government for his purpose as he built his church during those years."

The hard times of famine and civil war tested the church in Ethiopia but in the process strengthened it as well, Bedsole noted.

"The Bible says you will be blessed when you are persecuted in his name, and that as a Christian you can count it a privilege to suffer," he said. "I can tell you it works, because suffering brought life to the church in Ethiopia."

People learned to pray together, to love one another and to understand what it took to stand for Jesus even if it meant facing death in the process, he said.

"Once one of our churches, Rabel -- the entire church -- was arrested and put in prison. This even included their children. They were imprisoned for several weeks, all together in one place," Bedsole said.

"After their release, we asked them how their children took the imprisonment," he said. "The basic answer was that 'Our children have never experienced such love.' The entire church family had watched over them. They added, 'And never has the church enjoyed such rich fellowship and Bible study.'"

Bedsole said the civil war, which along with famines claimed the lives of well over a million Ethiopians, pitted an army of 65,000 rebels against 1.5 million communist soldiers. In 1991, after 30 years of fighting, the rebels toppled the communist government.

"Not a single bullet touched us in our time there," he said. "With God's protection, we also raised three well-adjusted kids."

From 1984-88, millions of people watched on television as one of the most devastating famines the earth has ever known swept Ethiopia.

"God used that famine to spread his gospel," Bedsole said, "because suddenly we had access to regions of the country we never thought we'd get into. God didn't just open the door -- he knocked it down!"

As wheat and other disaster relief materials from the United States and other countries poured into Ethiopia, missionaries from all the denominations serving in the country were used to help distribute it.

"As a result, churches sprang up at aid stations," he said. "People would come in asking for grain and then request a Bible as well. The Holy Spirit applied the Word to their hearts."

Once in a highland district, Bedsole was one of several missionaries and one national who were accused of being Central Intelligence Agency spies by the communist military who interrogated them and confiscated their radio.

Confronted by the military commanders, Bedsole felt a deep sense of suspicion and animosity, a "strange coldness."

"Everyone seemed to look down on us as enemies," Bedsole said. "I had never been in a room that was so dominated by Satan."

"Through the night my family and church prayed for me. The next morning when I went in, the communists were all smiles and said a mistake had been made and that I was free to go."

Bedsole said Ethiopia still faces a number of problems, including relations with orthodox Coptic Christians.

"They are like the Pharisees of Jesus' day," Bedsole said. "If one of their family members becomes an evangelical, or a 'Pente' (Pentecostal) as they call us, the person is disowned."

Many Coptics have never heard the gospel or accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, Bedsole said. Those who joined Baptist churches were turned out, he said, including one young girl who was seven months pregnant.

"In 1992, family members stoned this girl," he said. "As she wasn't quite dead when they had finished hitting her with the rocks, their priest had her thrown out on the side of the road where she finally died."

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Local evangelicals came to bury the girl near where an aid tent had been, erecting a wooden cross over her. Coptics came in the night and tore the cross down. A concrete cross lasted six months before once again being knocked down during the night.

"The last cross that was erected over this young martyr's grave would take a bulldozer to destroy," he said.

Bedsole said he had known other children who were turned out by their families who tried to survive on one meal every two to three days.

"Their families may have turned their backs on them, but they never turned their backs on Jesus," he said.

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Sims is a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist.

Missionary's survival linked
to Southern Baptists' prayers

By Todd Deaton

Baptist Press
5/15/96

CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP)--A daughter of missionaries, Margaret "Margie" Callaway Pearson grew up in Morocco, Ethiopia and Yemen. Missions must run deep in her family's blood, for both she and her twin sister were appointed missionaries.

And, not surprisingly, the two-term missionary to Ethiopia has something to say about prayer.

Six years ago, Pearson's life was busy in the "home" part of her church and home assignment on a late January day.

"I was busy taking care of my then-4-year-old and three-month-old sons," Pearson, currently on furlough, recounted during the recent South Carolina Woman's Missionary Union meeting in Taylors. "I had baked and decorated a cake for a little Ethiopian friend's fourth birthday and was preparing to go to the party.

"A fellow missionary came to my door and I said to her, 'I don't know what is wrong, but I have the biggest stomach ache on earth!'

"But busy moms can't be sick," Pearson quipped, "so I went on to the party."

The spicy, oily Ethiopian food did not set well and Margie soon wound up in an Ethiopian hospital, where she was misdiagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy and rushed into surgery. Before she reached the operating table, however, another symptom was discovered and surgery was canceled.

"If you're confused, that's OK -- so were several doctors!" she laughed.

Margie was med-evacuated to Kenya, where she was diagnosed as having a ruptured appendix. She had surgery on Feb. 3.

That date, Pearson said, is significant.

"Now, why didn't I die?" she asked. "Many die of a ruptured appendix" -- especially in that region of the world.

"Well, my birthday is Feb. 3," she said. "That's important because, with the time zone differences, I was surrounded by prayer from Feb. 2 through 4," since Woman's Missionary Union, Acteens and Girls in Action remember missionaries in prayer on their birthdays. "And, boy, did I need it!

"See God's power in prayer!" she challenged.

"When I returned to Ethiopia, I received a big banner in the mail which read, 'Margie Pearson, we prayed for you on February 3rd,'" she recounted. "It was signed by 300 GAs.

"We missionaries depend on those prayers!"

Through the years, Margie and her husband, Jeff, have depended on Southern Baptist prayers for their community development work. Coupled with evangelism and church planting, the work has helped meet Ethiopia's physical and spiritual needs. And Ethiopia's horrible famine in the 1980s has become an avenue to reach people, she said.

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The Pearsons will depend on Southern Baptists' prayers even more very soon. When they return to Ethiopia, they will be assigned to a still-unreached people group. "They are a people who are spiritually blind, not because they've seen and rejected the light, but because they have never even had a chance to see the light! We would like to introduce them to the Light of the world: Jesus.

"We cannot do this unless you come with us. Will you come with us in your prayers?" Pearson asked.

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Last Zambia missionaries
receive new work permits

Baptist Press
5/15/96

LUSAKA, Zambia (BP)--After almost three years of difficulty, all Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionaries in Zambia have been granted work permits by the government, according to missionary Dan Sowell.

A permit issued in late April for missionaries Ed and Linda Miller was the last in a series of work documents previously refused by the government at the request of leaders of the Baptist Convention of Zambia, who wanted to control missionary assignments in the country. The new permits, however, must be renewed at the end of each year, Sowell said.

The dispute over the permits created uncertainty for missionaries and caused division among Zambian Baptist churches. Earlier this year, a large group of congregations formed a new Baptist convention and offered to partner with Southern Baptist missionaries, opening the door to the permit grantings.

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HOUSE MAIL

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