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## Phelps Resigns OEO, May Seek Governorship

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ATLANTA (BP)--With plans to return to his former position as president of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark., coupled with possible designs on the governorship of Arkansas, Ralph A. Phelps Jr., has resigned as regional director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) here.

The well-known Southern Baptist said there is an "outside possibility" that he may run as a Democratic candidate against Republican Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller of Arkansas this year.

He said he has been urged to enter the governor's race, but that there "are no firm plans at this time." The ticket closes March 30.

"So if I'm going to run, I'll have to decide between now and then. One hurdle is getting the financial support one needs to run against a Rockefeller," Phelps said.

He explained when he took the War on Poverty position in September, he expected to stay one year, and had taken a year's leave of absence from the Baptist school where he had been president for 14 years.

He stayed with the OEO, however, only six months. There had been rumors circulating in Baptist circles for several weeks that Phelps was unhappy and wanted to leave the OEO.

Phelps was quoted by the Atlanta Constitution as saying that "anybody who works in the anti-poverty program feels frustrated."

He added that the basic idea of the poverty program -- helping people to help themselves -- is a good idea. But implementation of that idea has sometimes been somewhat less than "a howling success."

He told the Baptist Press, "After six months work with the OEO, I am more convinced than ever before of the importance of Christian education and our church-related colleges."

"If a government bureaucracy is the hope of the world," he said, "then the world is without hope, in my judgment."

"Our sick society has no chance of getting well apart from the moral and spiritual values taught by our churches and by a school like Ouachita," he added. "I am eager to resume my work in our Baptist school."

Phelps became regional director of the Southeast Region of the OEO on Sept. 1, 1967. He was responsible for coordinating all War on Poverty programs in the six state region including Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi and Florida.

In his statement of resignation, Phelps said that "circumstances at Ouachita Baptist University are such" that he decided to return there before his year's leave of absence was over. He said his responsibility in Arkansas was the "primary reason" for leaving the War on Poverty.

Even if he decides to enter the governor's race, he said, he still will serve the remainder of this school year as Ouachita president.

Sargent Shriver, director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington, accepted his resignation "with regret," saying that Phelps had brought "a high degree of integrity and dedication" to the Southeast regional office. Shriver said no successor had been named, but Phelps indicated an acting director would be appointed.

Another prominent Southern Baptist, Ross Coggins, regional director of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA--the Domestic Peace Corps), has been serving as an acting deputy director since the illness of the current deputy director, Jesse M. Merrell Jr., last fall. Coggins is former director of communications for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Nashville.

American Baptist President  
Urges SBC-ABC Unity, Merger

NASHVILLE (BP)--The president of the American Baptist Convention told a Southern Baptist audience here he would do anything within his power to bring about a merger between the American and Southern Baptist Conventions.

L. Doward McBain of Phoenix, Ariz., strongly urged all Baptist bodies in the nation to unite, but conceded later he did not think it would happen soon.

McBain, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Phoenix and president of the 1½ million-member ABC, spoke at the First Baptist Church here where H. Franklin Paschall, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, is pastor.

"We aren't very different when it gets right down to it," McBain told about 200 members of the church attending a Wednesday evening service.

"Let's unite," he declared. "Let's start it tonight. If my saying it would nudge it one inch closer, I would say it with whatever influence the office might have: 'Let's unite,'"

"We've been apart too long---more than a century. We ought to be working together in one body," he said.

"If your pastor had his way, he'd probably say the same thing," McBain added.

Paschall said in an interview that it would be great if all Baptists could get together, but he was more pessimistic about the reality of the possibilities. "There are too many structural and organizational difficulties," he said.

Both Paschall and McBain cited some cultural and theological differences between American and Southern Baptists, but added that within both conventions, there is probably as much divergency as there is between them.

"Theologically," McBain said, "there is probably not as much difference between American Baptists and Southern Baptists as most people might think."

He based his message on the cross and the crucifixion preaching on Hebrews 9, saying the cross is central among all Christians, not just Southern Baptists. Much of his message, however, was devoted to unity between American and Southern Baptists.

Following his address, McBain threw the floor open for questions, answering why American Baptists are not part of the Crusade of the Americas on a national basis.

He pointed out, however, that many American Baptists on a local and state level will be participating in the hemispheric-wide effort, and announced that Paschall had been invited to Phoenix to speak at a Crusade of the Americas rally. McBain said American Baptists in Arizona are in the crusade.

A question by Clifton J. Allen, editorial secretary for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board here, asked McBain to list what he considered to be the positive attitudes that should unify and deepen the bonds between the ABC and SBC.

McBain listed two major factors in reply: first, because of the deep crying need of America, for no denomination can do the job alone.

"The only time we Baptists ever seem to get together is over alcohol and Billy Graham," he quipped. "We're all for one and against the other."

Second, he said, Baptists should recognize the gifts they have and share them with others.

"Who can deny the evangelistic gifts of Southern Baptists?" he asked. "But things are happening in American Baptist churches on the cutting edge of the new frontiers of the sociological upheaval in our time. What if we ever got together, and you gave your gift to us, and we gave our gift to you?"

He conceded that American Baptists are more oriented toward social action than Southern Baptists, but said Southern Baptists are more evangelistically oriented. McBain claimed there ought to be a balance between the two.

"Personally, I am deeply involved in social action in Phoenix," he said. "I believe it is the will of the Lord to become deeply involved to change the wrongs to rights and bring justice in the city. But I don't think I ever talk too much about how God came to change it in the first place and give me the kind of love for people that leads me to seek to change society."

He concluded by saying, "If we ever unite, and I'm for it, what would we do for America?"