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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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**Ben Fisher Announces
September Retirement**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Ben C. Fisher, who has spent 40 years in service to Southern Baptists including 30 years in Christian higher education, has announced early retirement, effective Sept. 30, 1978.

Fisher, executive director-treasurer of the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) since 1970, will be 63 in May. Commission chairman George Bagley, executive secretary for the Alabama Baptist Convention, will name a search committee to look for Fisher's successor.

A native of Webster, N. C., Fisher served as a pastor in North Carolina, 1938-47, before becoming chairman of the English department at Gardner-Webb College in 1947. He later served as executive assistant to the president and director of public relations at Gardner-Webb.

In 1952, he became associate secretary of the SBC Education Commission and associate editor of the commission publication, "The Southern Baptist Educator," and served also as executive secretary of the Department of Christian Education of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky.

He joined Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C., in 1954, as administrative assistant to the president, director of public relations and professor of Christian education.

Fisher became executive secretary of the Council on Christian Higher Education of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in 1962, serving until 1970, when he rejoined the SBC Education Commission as chief executive and editor of "The Southern Baptist Educator."

During a long career in Baptist higher education, Fisher has served in many areas. He is former chairman of the Education Commission, former acting director of the North Carolina Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and a charter member and former president of the Baptist Public Relations Association.

Service and honors have included a number of citations for distinguished service and membership and leadership in a number of denominational and governmental educational boards, committees and advisory bodies.

An accredited visitor for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Fisher has written widely in the field of higher education and is recognized for his writing and expertise in the area of trustee orientation. He currently serves on the advisory board of the Center for Constitutional Studies at Notre Dame University, is a member of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities secretariat, and serves on the United Board for College Development.

During his tenure at the Education Commission, Fisher has emphasized continuing efforts to merge academic excellence, transmission of Christian values and concern for the local church and missions in the sphere of Baptist higher education.

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He served as a member of the steering committee for the comprehensive Baptist Education Study Task conducted by the Education Commission, 1966-67, and led in sponsoring a National Colloquium on Christian Education in 1976. The colloquium resulted in a year-long study of Baptist colleges by Earl J. McGrath and associates through the Program in Liberal Studies of the University of Arizona, funded by a \$100,000 Lilly Endowment grant. The McGrath Study gave a high ranking to Baptist colleges in academics, enrollment and finances in comparison to other schools across the country, and includes an extensive follow-up phase.

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to Baptist state papers by the Education Commission.

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Opinions Clash At
Tax Credit Hearings

By W. Barry Garrett

Baptist Press
1/24/78

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Carter administration has teamed up with religious liberty organizations to oppose proposals for income tax credits for tuition paid for private school tuition on all levels during three days of hearings on bills now pending in Congress.

The hearings were held by the Senate Subcommittee on Taxation and Debt Management of which U. S. Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. (D.-Va.) is chairman. Byrd never showed up for the hearings, which were presided over by U. S. Sen. Bob Packwood (R.-Ore.) and were attended only by U. S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D.-N. Y.) and U. S. Sen. William V. Roth Jr. (R.-Del.). U. S. Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D.-Conn.) and U. S. Sen. Clifford P. Hansen (R.-Wyo.) attended one session briefly.

Although the Senate has in previous years passed bills providing for some form of tax credits for tuition paid to private schools, these are the first hearings on the subject ever held by the Senate Finance Committee.

The earlier Senate-passed tax credit bills never have been enacted into law. They either died before passage by the House of Representatives or were eliminated by conference committees between the House and Senate. Predictions by political observers in Washington about the prospects for the enactment into law of the current proposals are rather uncertain.

Since such proposals have passed the Senate six times before, and since half of the Senate members are listed as co-sponsors of the Packwood-Moynihan Bill (S.2142), it may pass the Senate, although this is by no means certain. Observers point out that it will have much more difficulty in the House. Also, since the administration is in opposition, it is possible that the bill would face a presidential veto.

The Packwood-Moynihan Bill proposes a tax credit of one-half of the tuition paid by parents to parochial and other private schools up to a maximum of \$500 per student. This bill includes both elementary-secondary and post-secondary tuition.

Another bill (S.311), proposed by Sen. Roth, includes tuition only for higher education. It begins with a \$250 tax credit the first year and on a graduated scale increases to a maximum of \$500 the fourth year after enactment.

At the hearings, in addition to the Carter administration, those opposing the tax credit proposals included the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, constitutional lawyer Leo Pfeffer, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the National Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty (PEARL), the National Parent-Teachers Association, the National School Boards Association and the American Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO). The National Education Association did not appear at the hearings, but it is lobbying heavily against tax credits.

Those in favor of the proposals included the Federation of Catholic Teachers; Antonio Scalia, professor of constitutional law at the University of Chicago, the Council for American Private Education, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, National Association of Independent Schools, Congress of Racial Equality, Citizens for Educational Freedom, and professors from two universities in Canada.

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The obviously biased attitude of the Senate sponsors of the bill turned the hearings almost into a mockery of those who appeared in opposition. For instance, Sen. Moynihan accused those who objected to his proposal on constitutional grounds, including the United States Supreme Court, of being ignorant of the history and meaning of the First Amendment. He charged those who objected on grounds of religious liberty and separation of church and state with being handovers from 19th Century know-nothingism and anti-Catholic bigotry, and of holding Ku Klux Klan viewpoints.

As for the Carter administration, Moynihan in a lengthy and highly-charged emotional outburst, accused President Carter of violating his campaign pledge of seeking constitutional aid to private education. Moynihan said he was tired of the government lying to the American people and accused the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare of being dedicated to the destruction of the Catholic parochial school system. The New York Democrat was so incensed over the Carter opposition that he threatened to stump his state in the next election and urge the people to vote Republican.

Those who argued against the tax credit proposals in general claimed that the plan is unconstitutional, that it would be harmful to the public education system of the nation, that it would aid those people who need help the least, and that a program of tax credits for school tuition is not the proper way to provide for the educational needs of the nation.

Those who argued in favor of tax credits in general claimed that the proposal is constitutional, that it would aid the beleaguered middle class in America, that it would provide parents freedom of choice in the education of their children, and that it would help to destroy state monopoly in education.

Many college groups were neutral on the proposals and some felt that the best way to aid higher education is through other channels such as more and better help to needy students.

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Bold Mission Challenges
New Boyce School Director

Baptist Press
1/24/78

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--When David Q. Byrd, then pastor of the West Jackson Baptist Church, Jackson, Tenn., finished his Bold Mission Commitment Day sermon last October, he recalls, "I came near to responding to my own invitation."

He says that on his way home that Sunday, his wife, Florlene, "also had a deep feeling that God was calling us to some place that would be a vital part of Bold Mission Thrust." (Southern Baptists' program to spread the gospel to everyone in the world by the year 2000.)

Two months later, Byrd answered that call by becoming the new director of the Boyce Bible School, a branch of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Boyce School, now in its fourth year, is a training center for ministers who lack a college degree.

Byrd believes that these students are important to Bold Mission Thrust since many come to the school from outside traditional Southern Baptist areas. He points out that 8,000 Southern Baptist Convention ministers are currently without college degrees.

"God is calling more and more people into the ministry," he explains, "people who are mature adults with a family and job. Many of these don't have the opportunity to go to college, but they need practical ministerial training. After a couple of years at Boyce, they receive the instruction that will better equip them in their ministry."

Byrd is also enthusiastic about Boyce Bible School's ability to help the bi-vocational pastor, a growing number of Baptist ministers who combine secular employment with the pastorate. Off-campus training facilities added to those already in Little Rock, Ark., and Columbus, Ohio, sponsored and supported by the state Baptist conventions, will also aid Bold Mission Thrust, Byrd says.

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Byrd succeeded Jim Ryan who resigned to become pastor of the First Baptist Church, Manassas, Va. He was pastor at the West Jackson Baptist Church for 24 years. While in Jackson, he served as president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention (1964), and as a trustee of Union University, Jackson, for the past 20 years. He is presently a member of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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(BP) Photo to be mailed to Baptist state papers by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Poling Says Baptist Strength
Promises 21st Century Revival

Baptist Press
1/24/78

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--Southern Baptist strength is one of the reasons North America stands at "the threshold of a 21st Century revival," David Poling told Louisiana Baptist student leaders here.

"Southern Baptists are beginning their Bold Mission Thrust (to proclaim the gospel of Christ to all the world in this century), and I never underestimate what Baptists are going to do when they set their minds to it," said the famed Presbyterian minister and writer.

Poling said the South and West, areas of Baptist strength, are the "staging areas" for his predicted nationwide revival.

Speaking at a banquet honoring Louisiana Baptist Convention student directors, Poling said signs of revival include conversions of notorious celebrities such as Charles Colson, Eldridge Cleaver and Larry Flynt.

He described such conversions as hard to accept both by the secular culture and by the church. "As Christians, we have to take a leap of faith and affirm the newly converted person," he said.

"I have no background on the conversion of Larry Flynt," said Poling, who is editing Cleaver's new book, "Soul on Fire." But, he declared, "We should trust that conversion unless we find out differently."

Poling described Cleaver as "one of the emerging Christian leaders in North America." He said the former Black Panther leader has the mind to become a leading theologian should he choose to do so.

While Poling sees a North American revival, he did recognize problems face many churches, such as Episcopalians facing upheaval over their prayer book, Catholics facing those who want to turn back to Latin, and Presbyterians struggling over ordination of homosexuals (which Poling doesn't see as a viable option).

"But the question before the U. S. Christian community is whether we can accept and enjoy our diversity," he said. "Can we thank God for it?"

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CORRECTIONS

In BP of 1/18/78 entitled "WRAPUP WMU Studies Mission Advance, Dedicates New Building," graph 19, page 4, please delete last sentence.

In BP of 1/23/78 entitled "Allen Says SBC Must 'Storm the Barricades,'" in graph 5, second sentence, change It is: to He identified them as cries, etc.....

THE FOLLOWING is a M.E.M.O. column done by Martin E. Marty, associate editor of Christian Century magazine, for that publication. Used with permission.

Missing the Target

The Baptists may be the largest and most vital Protestant group in the country, proudest of all of their contributions to the separation of church and state, and producers of more southern public servants (good and bad) than any other group. But Lewis H. Lapham, editor of Harper's, has decided that they are un-American and subversive of their public trust. In the January issue of his magazine he connects being Baptist with being a politician. Let me relay his descriptions and try them on for size and accuracy, thinking of a variety of Baptist public officials and representatives.

The Baptist, according to Lapham, "believes himself rescued by Jesus (a figure somewhat comparable to a Southern banker who lends unlimited amounts of money without charging interest)," so the Baptist "would find it difficult to take much of an interest in a world elsewhere." Lapham explicitly charges the Baptist politician with engaging in the Baptist habit of private meditation on the Word, thus turning inward and becoming detached from the real world. So I thought of the most notable Baptist politician of modern times, rescued-by-Jesus Harry S. Truman. He surely was disengaged from and uninterested in the world, wasn't he? And what about Baptist Nelson Rockefeller?

Lapham is convinced that the Baptist is wide-eyed about the good world and glum about his own depravity; "perhaps he believes that he is the only corrupt man in an innocent world." Now the name of Senator Strom Thurmond came to mind as a typical Southern Baptist in office. His collected works, however, show him convinced of the world's depravity, not his own.

Lapham's Baptist politician "preserves himself within a realm of abstraction in which it is enough to say the magical words and wish for something pleasant to happen." How does that describe the most powerful Baptist on the Hill, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, a concrete headknocker who makes things happen?

Nor does Lapham's typical Baptist politician "feel moved to do anything political that somehow might implicate his visions in the corruption of the world." Don't tell that to the most visibly born-again Baptist in politics, Senator Mark Hatfield, whose adversaries wish he would not try to do so many political things in pursuit of his visions.

"If he has revelations instead of policies," says Lapham of the Baptist in politics, "then it is equally possible that he identifies the temporal with the spiritual authority." Let him follow Baptist Representative Harold Ford of Tennessee for a year or two and see if that typifies the activity of this liberal congressman.

"The Baptist," says Lapham, "blurs the distinction between public liturgy and private devotion, and so it is possible that [he] imagines that he can apply the tidying up of systems analysis to the more complicated matters of war, death, fate, and human destiny." The Baptist: which Baptist? Does that phrase describe the late Senator John McClellan in action, or his fellow Baptists Senator Herman Talmadge and Representative Claude Pepper or dozens of others?

No. Presumably these generic Baptist vices apply to the specific Baptist Lapham most despises, President Jimmy Carter, who may or may not bear the traits that apply consistently, so far as I can tell, to no other known Baptist. Lord knows--there I go, spouting meditations and visions--the Baptists offer a big enough target; why could Lapham not find it?

Ethnic joke, adapted:

"Didja hear about what happened when Lewis H. Lapham shot an arrow into the air?"

"No, what happened?"

"He missed."

Martin E. Marty

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