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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hasty, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Smith Opens Conversations
With Rival SBC Factions

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--In the midst of what he calls "volatile times," Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith has opened conversations with rival factions within the denomination.

Smith told Baptist Press he has talked both with Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge identified as a leader in a drive to commit the SBC to biblical inerrancy, and Cecil Sherman, an Asheville, N.C., pastor who opposes Pressler's efforts.

"I called both of them to encourage them to do everything they can to create love and harmony," Smith said, adding he telephoned Pressler and both telephoned and met with Sherman.

Smith, who sees himself as a "unifier" in the denomination, said he telephoned Sherman, noting: "I told him I wanted to get together, that I don't think we ought to talk to one another through the press."

At the meeting, which took place during the February meeting of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, Smith said time was spent "getting to know one another. We talked about our backgrounds; we do not agree on the (method of) inspiration of the Bible and we talked about that. I have a deep respect for his personal commitment to Jesus Christ. I like the man."

Of Pressler, Smith said: "I told him I wanted us to be kind. I told him, 'Paul, don't say anything that is volatile and hurtful.'"

"My purpose was to do everything we can to engender a spirit of fellowship and cooperation in our denomination."

The Del City, Okla., pastor said he encouraged Pressler to "disband his organization," but Pressler told Baptist Press, "there is no organization. There is communication between people of like belief, but no organization."

While Sherman and Smith talked of the president's upcoming appointments to the resolutions committee and committee on committees, Pressler said he did not and would not talk with Smith about them.

"We talked about these appointments. He told me all kinds of Southern Baptists would be on the committee on committees," Sherman said, commenting Smith has publicly promised to be president of "all Southern Baptists," and not just the inerrantists who claim credit for his first-ballot election in St. Louis in 1980.

"He did not tell me who these people were. Naturally, I am very curious (about them) but I am optimistic that Bailey Smith's appointments will reassure those who would be excluded

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by Pressler/Patterson (Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, and another leader of the inerrantist faction).

Sherman added: "I'd like to have a chance to look at them. That is not spoken out of any great mistrust; it would just help. We are nervous about these appointments."

Pressler, on the other hand, said: "I have purposely stayed away from him, and for me to try to position or influence him would be very bad. He is an outstanding person and will do what he thinks the Lord is leading him to do."

The judge also noted he feels "rank and file" Southern Baptists are inerrantists—believers in a Bible without error—and have "not been adequately represented in the appointments" of the past.

Smith said he is working on the appointments, and has had second vice president C. Wade Freeman, of Dallas, ask James H. Landes, executive secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, to write other state executives for recommendations. "I did not see the letter before it went out, but I understand it was one paragraph asking the executives to please send names of warm-hearted, Bible-loving folks."

He already has received some replies through Freeman, and said he has "some ideas" about appointments from his pastorates in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and New Mexico.

Smith said that although he is not required by the constitution to release the appointments prior to the convention, he hopes to have the list to Baptist Press for publication by mid-April.

Smith also added he is seeking "about a dozen" ethnics to serve on the committees, and that he plans to "avoid appointment of people who have been heavily identified as belonging to either side."

Smith confirmed there is "no change" in his view of inerrancy: "I wish personally everybody in the world believed in inerrancy. I believe that it is the right way, but I have a deep respect for some men who do not (believe in inerrancy)."

Of the appointments, he told Baptist Press: "Since I believe in inerrancy, I will look for men who believe in that. I believe most Southern Baptists believe in it. You would not expect a person who believes like I do to seek out men who do not believe in inerrancy, just like those who do not believe in inerrancy would not seek out those of us who do."

Despite his stance, Smith said: "I want to be a unifier ... I don't want to be divisive. I want us to be able to differ and still love each other."

He added he believes some inerrantists "would not be qualified to serve" on the committees, while others "who do not believe in inerrancy in a classical sense would qualify for some of these appointments."

The president noted he is wrestling "with this word 'inerrancy.' I don't ever want it to be a hammer to hit somebody over the head with."

"You cannot settle every issue of our denomination with one word. I wish everybody believed in inerrancy, but some may never. I give them the right to believe what they believe. They have a right to be a part of the denomination."

"There are so many things to judge ... it is more than one single word."

While noting he is "an inerrantist, an evangelistic and premillennial person," he said: "Bailey Smith is his own man ... (his) very own person. I was elected by the Southern Baptist Convention and I intend to represent the denomination and not one segment of it."

"I believe the whole issue is a turning of the nation to the right, and a turning of our denomination to the right. I am on the right. I believe in inerrancy and infallibility—out of conviction, not out of coercion—but I do not believe the Pressler/Patterson coalition elected me. I believe I was elected president because of what I believe."

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Cooperative Program Study
Group Organizes for Work

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Cooperative Program Study Committee, which will study Cooperative Program promotion and stewardship emphases in the Southern Baptist Convention, was appointed during the February meeting of the SBC Executive Committee.

The appointment of a special committee was recommended during the September meeting of the Executive Committee, and it was charged with responsibility to "make and recommend a plan of action to increase the level of giving to the local church and through the local church to SBC cooperative ministries."

In making the appointments, Executive Committee Chairman Howard Cobble of Avondale Estates, Ga., indicated the committee will make a thorough study. "No area is out of bounds," he said. "We will look at every aspect of the Cooperative Program."

Appointed chairman of the study committee was James Pleitz, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church of Dallas. The group held its first meeting after the Executive Committee session.

"I feel this is a very important assignment," Pleitz said. "One of the things we talked about was that the Cooperative Program was created not only for raising money, but as a way to help us work together as Baptists."

He added the committee probably will make a report and recommendations in about a year and a half.

Serving with Pleitz are Executive Committee members Donald Gent of Evansville, Ind., B. Conrad Johnston of Salem, Va., Gene Watterson of Shelby, N.C., and Allen Bradley of Charlotte, N.C.

Also, A.R. Fagan, executive director-treasurer of the SBC Stewardship Commission; Mrs. A. Harrison Gregory, president of the Woman's Missionary Union; Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the WMU; R. Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board, and William G. Tanner, president of the Home Mission Board.

State executives are James H. Landes of Texas, Cecil Ray of North Carolina and Joe Ingram of Oklahoma.

Other committee members are Randall Lolley, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, pastors Daniel Vestal of Midland, Texas, H. Franklin Paschall of Nashville, Tenn., W. Ches Smith III of Tifton, Ga., William M. Hinson of New Orleans and Jim Henry of Orlando, Fla.; John E. Roberts, editor of the Baptist Courier, journal of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, and Dallas layman Fred Roach.

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In other action, the Executive Committee:

- Previewed and accepted a portrait of Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer, painted by artist Wyndell L. Taylor of Columbus, Ga. The portrait will hang with those of previous executives of the Executive Committee at the SBC Building in Nashville.
- Commissioned Albert McClellan, who retired Dec. 31 as associate executive secretary, to write a history of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention;
- Voted to hire R. Orin Cornett to make a study of the seminary allocation formula, the system by which Cooperative Program funds are allocated to the six SBC seminaries;
- Increased honoraria for SBC Recording Secretary Martin Bradley, assistant to the recording secretary Ruth Bradley, and Registration Secretary Lee Porter to \$1,000 from \$880;
- Delayed a decision on the site recommendation of the 1986 Southern Baptist Convention until the June meeting of the Executive Committee.
- Okayed a cost-of-living salary adjustment for Executive Committee staffers of 10 percent, to be effective Oct. 1, 1981;
- Recommended deletion of the Program of Pioneer Missions at the Home Mission Board;
- Declined to participate financially in the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tenn., and to refer future requests of this nature to other SBC agencies;
- Officially welcomed Reginald McDonough as associate executive secretary and director of program planning;
- Requested a report from the SBC Foundation trustees on progress concerning the possibility of charging fees to fund the work of the Foundation.

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Rash of Church-State Bills
Introduced in New Congress

By Larry Chesser

Baptist Press
2/20/81

WASHINGTON (BP)--As expected, supporters of school prayer and tuition tax credits introduced an avalanche of legislation during the first weeks of the 97th Congress.

At least 17 bills dealing with school prayer and 20 related to tuition tax credits were introduced before the new Congress took its first recess in February. But chances for passage of such church-state legislation or other bills with moral implications remain uncertain, and in many cases doubtful.

School prayer proponents, as in the previous Congress, are pushing their goal along three tracks. They have introduced six bills to limit the jurisdiction of federal courts, including the Supreme Court, in school prayer cases. Five constitutional amendments on school prayer have been proposed along with five resolutions expressing the "sense of Congress" that periods of silence in public schools are permitted under the Constitution.

The bills may die in the subcommittee on courts, civil liberties and the administration of justice where a spokesman said it is "unlikely" that the panel will even hold hearings on the prayer proposals.

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However, the spokesman indicated the subcommittee may hold hearings on the larger question of whether Congress can limit federal court jurisdiction over state courts. Legislation has been proposed to limit federal court jurisdiction in areas other than school prayer such as abortion and busing.

In addition to a number of proposals permitting tuition tax credits for parents of students attending private and parochial schools, several bills have been introduced which allow tax deductions for education saving accounts. The proposals would apply to tuition paid to private elementary and secondary schools, as well as colleges, though some are not directed at all three categories.

President Reagan's spoken support for tuition tax credits increases the likelihood the House Ways and Means Committee will take action on the controversial issue, a committee spokesman told Baptist Press.

But the spokesman quickly noted tuition tax credits were not included in the first major tax package Reagan sent to Congress and predicted that chances for passage of the measure "may depend on how hard he pushes for it."

Two other proposed changes in tax laws which may affect U.S. churches and families are more likely to get early consideration in the Ways and Means Committee.

One measure, which has been introduced in both houses, permits taxpayers to claim a deduction for contributions to charitable organizations while taking the standard deduction or using the short form in filing federal income tax returns.

The second, which also has growing support in both the House and Senate, includes proposals to either remove or reduce the so-called "marriage tax penalty" which taxes married couples with two incomes at a higher rate than two single persons with the same combined income.

The committee spokesman said she would be "surprised" if the measures weren't considered with the Reagan tax package because both were connected with the tax cut proposal coming from the Senate Finance Committee near the end of the 96th Congress and already have significant constituencies in Congress.

Abortion, another emotional issue facing the new Congress, has also attracted several types of legislative proposals. In addition to constitutional amendments (15 proposed in the House and three in the Senate), and a bill limiting federal court jurisdiction, single bills have been introduced in both houses "to provide that human life shall be deemed to exist from conception."

In the field of education, numerous anti-busing measures have been introduced as well as bills which either limit the authority of or abolish the Department of Education.

Among the bills related to hunger and food are proposals to establish an international food cartel and to eliminate striking workers from food stamp benefits.