



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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June 24, 1982

82-92

State Worker Resigns In Registration Probe

By Dan Martin

NEW ORLEANS (BP) — A state denominational employee has resigned and four churches have been publicly cited in an investigation into registration irregularities at the 1982 Southern Baptist Convention.

Jim Thomas, 48, church training director of the Missouri Baptist Convention, resigned June 23, at the request of MBC Executive Director Rheubin South, after an investigation revealed Thomas presented false credentials to register as a messenger at the annual meeting of the 13.8-million-member denomination.

Thomas, a member of First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Mo., was one of ten persons asked to return ballots and other credentials after it was discovered their churches had more messengers than permitted under Article III of the SBC Constitution which allows a maximum of 10 messengers per church.

In addition to the Jefferson City church, which registered 11 messengers, including Thomas, the other churches publicly cited for having too many messengers were: Riverside Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., 15 messengers; Second Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn., 13, and First Baptist Church of Tucker, Ga., 11.

Registration Secretary Lee Porter, of Nashville, Tenn., reported the 125th annual meeting of the SBC registered the second highest number of messengers ever, 20,438, second only to the 1978 meeting in Atlanta, when 22,872 messengers registered.

He will write the churches cited since it is not a matter between the SBC and individuals, but between the denomination and churches.

Thomas told the Word and Way, newsjournal of the MBC, he was not elected a messenger from First Baptist Church, but his former associate, Gil Brink, was. Thomas said when he heard Brink joined a church in California, where he has accepted a new position, and was no longer eligible to be a messenger from the Missouri church, Thomas signed his pastor's name to a letter certifying he had been elected.

However, Brink notified First Church he could no longer be a messenger and Mrs. Nelson Duke, wife of the pastor, was certified as the tenth messenger. Earlier, the congregation elected her as first alternate.

Pastor Nelson Duke, a member of the SBC Executive Committee, said he was astonished when the church was cited for violating registration rules. "We had been very careful to elect only 10 messengers and then some alternates," Duke said.

"I am truly sorry about the whole affair, but the church was careful to abide by the rules," he added.

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Thomas, who has been church training director for the convention five years, is a native of Monette, Mo. He has been pastor of churches in Missouri and Texas, and educational director for a number of churches, including Park Temple Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas; North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church; Lamar Baptist Church, Wichita Falls, Texas; Queensboro (La.) Baptist Church; Tower Grove Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Ferguson, both in the Greater St. Louis area.

In an interview with Word and Way, Thomas expressed sorrow and regret for registering illegally, calling his actions "the most stupid thing I've ever done."

Baptist Press contacted the pastors of the other churches publicly cited for violations.

H. Edgar Twine, pastor of the Jacksonville church, said the situation was a "misunderstanding which got compounded." He said the church elected 10 messengers and five alternates, but presented credentials to all 15 persons. The action, he said, was to insure that the church had its full allotment of messengers in New Orleans.

Most of the messengers, he added, had never been to a convention before and were not aware of how the meeting operates. "They thought we would sit by delegations," he added.

Twine acknowledged that the church "probably should not have given cards to the alternates." He said the registration controls "are good and the procedure is quite proper."

When informed of the over-registration, five of the messengers returned their ballots -- all unused -- and other credentials.

James W. Hatley, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Memphis, said he "understands and concurs with the action of the credentials committee. The error was human, unintentional and regrettable."

He said the church elected nine messengers, but was told three of them would not attend. Then, four members of one of the church families asked for credentials to be able to attend. The confusion occurred when two of those who said they would not attend in fact did.

In that confusion, Hatley said, the church came up with 13 messengers. The extra three turned in their ballots immediately, all unused.

"To make sure we didn't have too many, my wife, my son and I did not use our ballots either," he said.

R. D. Mullis, pastor of the Georgia church, said: "I am sorry it occurred. It was innocent. I feel badly about the fact we had to be exposed, but I take full responsibility."

He said the church "properly prepared" 10 messenger cards, and then a retired minister asked for permission to attend as a messenger. Permission was granted, Mullis said, adding: "My wife and our minister of education's wife relinquished their cards to allow our former pastor and his wife to attend. At the convention, someone told me the man's wife did not come to the convention, so I told my wife that she could register. She did."

"The next day I learned the other woman had registered. Lee Porter called me that night, and at 9 the next morning we were at the registration desk. I gave the gentleman there all of the materials. The ballots had not been used."

Porter told Baptist Press the investigation is continuing. "I think we are going to uncover some more irregularities," he said.

Porter said the matter of registration "is a question of integrity. I am not playing political games or trying to politicize the registration. What I am trying to do is to insure the integrity of the registration and balloting process."

He said he is going to "follow through" with the registration investigation, and that if he uncovers other irregularities, he will "name names" and publicly cite churches.

Non-Profit Postal Hike
Likely In 1983 Budget

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist state papers and other non-profit mailers face another rate hike Oct. 1 if Congress funds a Postal Service subsidy at the level contained in the budget cleared for President Reagan's signature June 23.

The \$769.8 billion Republican-drafted budget sets initial spending targets for fiscal 1983. It contains \$400 million for the revenue foregone subsidy which permits the Postal Service to offer preferential rates to non-profit mailers.

The \$400 million is a compromise between the Senate version of the budget which included (\$813 million--an amount which would have allowed the Postal Service to put non-profit mailers at step 14 of a 16-year phasing process) and the House-passed version which contained no subsidy funding.

Exact figures on the amount of the increase the proposed level of funding would produce are unavailable but estimates range from five percent for some second-class mailers to nearly 50 percent for some third-class users.

Under the congressional budget process, committees with jurisdiction over the Postal Service retain the option of reallocating funds within their areas so that the revenue foregone subsidy might be funded at a higher level than \$400 million. However, spokesmen for both budget and appropriations committees told Baptist Press that adding funds to the postal subsidy would be "very difficult" since such a move would require taking them from somewhere else in an already tight budget.

On the same day, Congress sent to President Reagan an urgent supplemental appropriations bill containing a \$62 million amendment to restore non-profit mailers to step 13 of the phasing process for the remainder of fiscal 1982, or through Sept. 30. The amendment was added to the bill in the Senate by Sen. Quentin E. Burdick, D-N.D. and Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Ala.

Since the president is expected to veto the legislation because it contains what he considers a \$3 billion bailout for the housing industry it is uncertain when or whether an additional 1982 postal subsidy will be enacted. An aide to Burdick told Baptist Press she expects the measure to be passed sometime this summer.

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Congressional Views Mixed
On School Prayer Proposal

By Larry Chesser

Baptist Press
6/24/82

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment on prayer in public schools--introduced as S. J. Res. 199 and H. J. Res. 493--is drawing mixed reactions on Capitol Hill.

In the Senate the full Judiciary Committee is expected to hold hearings on the proposal in late July, according to a committee spokesman who said the panel will look at a "broad spectrum" of views on the issue. Senate sponsors of the measure are Judiciary Committee chairman J. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., and Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah.

However, no action is scheduled in the House of Representatives where Judiciary Committee leaders are opposed to the measure.

Rep. Thomas J. Kindness, R-Ohio, who is sponsoring the amendment in the House, is currently seeking to build support by gathering co-sponsors.

An aide to Kindness told Baptist Press that the Ohio congressman is aware of the difficulty faced in moving the measure out of the Judiciary Committee and is anticipating the use of a discharge petition to bring the proposal to the House floor. Such a move would require 218 members of the House to sign the petition.

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Brotherhood Commission
Names Advisory Committee

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Fifteen Baptist laymen have been named to a Brotherhood advisory committee to study ways Southern Baptist laymen can be more involved in missions.

The committee will meet with Brotherhood Commission staff, trustees and state leaders twice a year for input on lay involvement. The committee also will suggest ways to implement a recently approved Fellowship of Baptist Men.

"This advisory committee will render an invaluable service to the Brotherhood Commission," said James H. Smith, commission executive director. "The members of the committee will be able to take an objective look at what we're doing now as well as make specific proposals for involving more men in missions."

The objective of the Fellowship will be to promote witnessing and mission involvement among Southern Baptist Men, to help churches involve more men in witnessing and missions, to work with Southern Baptist Convention agencies and state organizations in involving more men in witnessing and missions and to encourage greater financial support in witnessing and missions by men through the Cooperative Program and other Southern Baptist channels. The Fellowship also will encourage the organization of vocation, interest/skill groups.

Named to the advisory committee were: Malcolm Barrett, Nashville, Tenn.; Bill Beshears, Stone Mountain, Ga.; Owen Cooper, Yazoo City, Miss.; Charles Crabb, Booneville, Miss.; Jack Deligans, Livermore, Calif.; John Farris, Laurens, S.C.; Don Gent, Evansville, Ind.; Joe Herndon, Duncan, Okla.; C. J. Humphrey, Amarillo, Texas; George McGuffee, Monroe, La.; C. E. Price, Pittsburgh, Pa.; William Rhodes, Atlanta; Fred Roach, Dallas; Matt Sugg, Morganfield, Ky.; and J. T. Williams, Tallahassee, Fla.

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CORRECTION: One page was inadvertently omitted in Baptist Press during the Southern Baptist Convention, June 17. Please add these graphs on page 6 after graph 7, which begins: "While the convention...."

Adopted without change after heavy debate was another resolution supporting teaching of scientific creationism in public schools, despite a motion to table the resolution and several others. The SBC-adopted statement claimed "evolution has never been proven to be scientific fact" and academic freedom would be enhanced by teaching the creation-science.

Messengers expressed vocal support for the State of Israel, but finally approved a motion to table a strongly worded resolution after the president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, Keith Parks of Richmond, Va., and the author of the resolution, James DeLoach of Houston, Texas, requested the action because of possible international repercussions.

Wording of the original resolution was softened with an amendment which acknowledged the resolution did not endorse Israel's recent invasion of Lebanon.

Altogether, 22 resolutions were adopted by the convention from the 47 proposed on the floor of the convention and referred to a conservative-dominated resolutions committee appointed by SBC President Bailey Smith of Del City, Okla.

Messengers also approved resolutions expressing opposition to tuition tax credits for parochial schools, support for world hunger efforts, opposition to the Ku Klux Klan, regret for early release by news media of a speech text by the SBC president, support for release through Baptist Press the names of nominees for SBC committees and trustees 30 days before the convention, and concern for the economic condition of the unemployed.

Five motions from the floor concerning bylaw and constitutional changes were referred to the SBC Executive Committee for further study and report to the 1983 convention in Pittsburgh.

Two of the motions called for release of the committee on boards report, which nominates trustees and directors for SBC agencies, 30 days prior to the convention. Another asked for release of members appointed by the SBC president, in consultation with the vice presidents, of the committee on committees resolutions committee 30 days prior to the convention.

This year, both the committee on boards and President Smith refused to release names of committee members and nominees for boards and agencies prior to the convention.

(Continue with "Another motion....")

Thanks, Baptist Press