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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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March 28, 1984

84-50

**Mission Leader Resigns;  
 Admits Misappropriation**

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--N. Larry Bryson, director of the missions department for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, has resigned, citing "misappropriation of funds for which I was responsible," as the reason.

Ray P. Rust, executive secretary-treasurer and chief executive officer of the convention, accepted Bryson's letter of resignation and said it is effective immediately.

The letter of resignation was dated March 21, just nine days after Bryson was promoted to become director of the division of missions and evangelism under a major reorganization of the Baptist Building staff.

Rust presented the resignation to a special meeting of the convention executive committee March 27. After the meeting, Rust released a statement authorized by the 15-member body.

"The executive committee confirmed the action of the executive secretary-treasurer in accepting Rev. Bryson's letter of resignation which said he was resigning because of a 'misappropriation of funds for which I was responsible,'" Rust said.

The executive, who did not reveal the amount of money involved, said Bryson had "made full restitution of the funds in question."

A spokesman for the convention said the resignation was made during an investigation into the misuse of missions department funds. The discrepancy was discovered during normal functioning of the business affairs office through internal controls and balances, he said.

Rust said the firm of Clarkson, Harden and Gantt, certified public accountants, was called in to assist in the investigation, and are continuing to "assist with an audit review" of expenditures of the missions department "for purposes of full clarification."

According to the budget adopted by the convention in its annual meeting last fall, Bryson's department had a budget of \$348,314.

Bryson's biographical sketch described his position as head of the missions department as being "responsible for all matters related to Baptist centers, church community weekday ministries, youth and family services, migrant missions, military ministries, deaf missions, language missions, interfaith witness, associational missions, church building aid, pastoral salary supplements, resort ministries, student missions..." among other things.

Bryson, 49, joined the general board staff in 1974 as director of the missions department. Previously, he was a staff member of both the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta and the Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn., as well as pastor and director of associational missions in North Carolina.

He is a native of Trion, Ga., and a graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology, Furman University and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

Rust said Bryson's plans for future employment are "uncertain at this time."

A News Analysis

School Prayer: Reviewing  
22 Years Of Turbulence

By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Senate's decisive March 20 rejection of President Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment to return state-sanctioned prayer to the nation's classrooms marks a new watershed and potential turning point in the long and bitter debate over the proper role of religion in public schools.

Despite a 55-45 Republican majority in what is often called the most conservative Senate in a generation, the President was unable to convince enough senators of his own party to support his proposal. The result was an unexpectedly large defeat, 56 for and 44 opposed, causing the amendment to fall 11 votes short of achieving the necessary two-thirds majority.

Because 18 of the president's fellow Republicans in the Senate joined 26 Democrats in voting down the amendment, Reagan will be hard-pressed in the upcoming election campaign to pin blame on the opposition party.

The amendment failed in large measure because as the debate unfolded over how the practice of school prayer would work out on the local scene, more and more Americans began to see its possible abuses.

Until the Senate floor debate began three weeks before the vote, few pressure groups had asked the hard questions. Particularly deficient were New Right organizations, including leaders of Religious Right groups. Several years ago, they raised a furor over possible consequences of the ERA, but apparently were unconcerned about the impact of a school prayer amendment on the nation.

Furthermore, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut, a moderate Republican, fulfilled his promise at the debate's outset to turn the Senate floor into a classroom in order to educate senators and citizens alike about the real dangers attending passage of the amendment. The longer the debate went on the stronger the opposition grew.

On the Senate floor, momentum changed when Weicker and other opponents began to drive home the crucial point conceded by the Reagan administration itself that government officials at some level would become involved in setting the conditions and even determining the content of prayers to be recited. More than any other issue in the debate over the amendment, the question of how "voluntary" the prayers would be swayed the debate against the proposal.

The "voluntary" question turned out to be the key. Despite repeated claims by President Reagan that all he sought was a return to voluntary prayer, too many senators and citizens came to realize that in many, if not most instances, the prayers to be recited would have been anything but voluntary.

One key point that surfaced was the fact that the amendment's wording nowhere included the word "voluntary." Furthermore--and even more damaging to the president's cause--Sen. George J. Mitchell, D-Maine, pointed out during floor debate that Reagan's people purposely left out the key word because they feared its use "could be understood to mean only prayer initiated by students voluntarily."

In fact, the president's amendment would not have excluded prayers mandated by state legislatures and written by local school boards. White House personnel admitted from the beginning, both orally and in writing, the amendment would result in precisely those actions.

The "voluntary" question has been at the center of the 22-year debate over the whole matter of religion in public schools. It was the central question in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1962 and 1963 decisions outlawing state-written, state-prescribed prayers and Bible readings.

In the 1962 case, the high court ruled in *Engle v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962), that a prayer composed by the New York state board of regents violated the First Amendment ban on an establishment of religion.

The New York regents' prayer failed the constitutional standard, the court held, because (a) government wrote the prayer; (b) government required that the prayer be part of the regular school program under the direct supervision of an agent of the government--a classroom teacher; (c) government determined the place where the required prayer was recited, and (d) government determined the time when the required prayer was recited.

One year later, in a pair of cases consolidated into one decision, the high court extended its previous ruling by striking down a Pennsylvania law requiring daily Bible readings and a Baltimore, Md., requirement that one chapter of the Bible be read daily and/or the Lord's Prayer be recited.

In this decision, *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963), the court held the challenged laws failed the establishment clause because (a) government required the religious exercises and made them part of the public school curriculum under the direction and control of teachers who are agents of the state, and (b) government, through compulsory attendance laws, required that students be present in the schools.

But besides invalidating the challenged laws, the Supreme Court also made these positive points:

- \* The Bible may be used as a reference for the teaching of secular subjects.
- \* The Bible may be studied for its literary and historic qualities.
- \* The study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization is legitimate.
- \* The recitation of historical documents which contain references to God is permissible.
- \* Anthems which include the lyricist's professions of faith in God may be sung.

Despite these positive actions by the nation's high court, some lower federal courts have appeared confused in some of their related decisions. Most notable is the checkered record of lower courts regarding the constitutionality of student-initiated religious groups that have sought to meet on school premises on the same basis as do other student groups.

One such case, *Bender v. Williamsport Area School District*, is very much alive. It involves the effort by a group of students at Williamsport (Pa.) High School to hold religious meetings twice weekly during a designated class period for extracurricular activities. A federal judge ruled last year that the local school board, which denied permission to meet to the religious groups, discriminated against the students' right of free speech.

That case has been appealed to a federal circuit court where a decision is pending. If and when it arrives for a final resolution at the Supreme Court, many observers are hoping the practice will be upheld.

Among these are the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a Cooperative Program agency of the Southern Baptist Convention which has been under a barrage of criticism for opposing the Reagan prayer amendment.

Since the 1962 and 1963 decisions, the Baptist Joint Committee has supported staunchly the high court's reasoning and findings. This was true in the current debate over the Reagan amendment, in spite of the 1982 SBC resolution endorsing it. What some Southern Baptists apparently have not recognized is that the BJC was bound, not by the SBC resolution (SBC resolutions have no binding effect on anyone), but by the unanimous action of the BJCPA trustees opposing any and all constitutional amendments on school prayer three months before the 1982 New Orleans convention.

But for the past two years the BJC has supported enthusiastically proposed laws to protect the right of students to hold truly voluntary, student-initiated religious gatherings on public school premises. From the BJC's standpoint the most promising of these are S. 815, introduced by Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, R-Ore., and H.R. 4996, introduced by U.S. Rep. Don Bonker, D-Wash.

In addition, the Baptist agency is a friend-of-the-court participant in *Bender v. Williamsport Area School District*, on the side of the students seeking equal access for their religious group.

The equal access approach appears to be the most promising avenue open to Americans concerned about the legitimate presence of religion in public schools. It will not satisfy everyone, particularly those convinced that the Supreme Court made a tragic mistake two decades ago. But for those seeking a healthy balance between "no establishment" and "free exercise," it seems the best alternative yet.

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Child Care Planned  
For Kansas City SBC

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Child care for preschool age children will be provided at the 1984 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, June 12-14 in Roe H. Bartle Hall of the Kansas City Convention Center.

According to child care chairman Linda Graham, adults from area churches will care for children of non-local conference participants each day of the convention. The child care center will be open 15 minutes prior to each session of the convention until 15 minutes following each session. Meals will not be provided, she said.

Parents of children to be kept at the child care center are requested to personally deliver and pick up the children at the child care center.

Preschool preregistration forms are available. Persons desiring to use the child care service are asked to obtain the preregistration forms by writing to Linda Graham, 9307 E. 80th Terrace, Kansas City, Mo. 64138, or by telephoning Graham at 816-358-1347, or the Blue River-Kansas City Baptist Association at 816-524-5328.

Cost for the child care will be \$9 per day per child if preregistered or \$12 per child per day if registered at the convention.

The deadline for preregistration is May 31, Graham said.

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Dole, Wright Address  
Federal Budget Deficits

By Larry Chesser

Baptist Press  
3/28/84

WASHINGTON (BP)--Addressing Christian citizenship from Republican and Democratic perspectives, two influential Capitol Hill figures urged the nation's federal government to reduce growing budget deficits.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Robert Dole, R-Kan., and House of Representatives Majority Leader Jim Wright, D-Texas, both declared the nation's budget deficits must be dealt with as they addressed a national seminar on Christian Citizenship sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission.

Dole, whose Finance Committee recently completed action on a tax bill expected to increase revenues by \$48 billion, called budget deficits "the most single important domestic problem" facing the country.

According to Dole, the current national debt of \$1.4 trillion will hit \$2.5 trillion by 1990 if Congress fails to reduce the annual flow of red ink.

"The fastest growing program in this town is interest on the national debt," Dole said, pointing out the nation is currently spending more than \$130 million annually on interest payments to finance the debt.

"That doesn't create one job," Dole said. "It doesn't help one farmer. It doesn't help one unemployed American or one disadvantaged American."

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Dole reminded participants Republicans control the Senate and the White House while the Democrats control the House of Representatives, and said, "If we are going to reduce the deficit, we have to find a bipartisan solution."

Recently, Republican Senate leaders and administration officials reached tentative agreement on a package of spending cuts and tax increases Dole said would reduce federal deficits by approximately \$150 billion over the next three fiscal years.

In addition to the tax hikes approved by Dole's committee, the package also would include \$40-50 billion in reduced military spending and additional cuts in domestic spending.

Dole, a leading critic of federal deficits, admitted he had been "fussing" with the White House over federal deficits "for months," adding, "My wife (Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth H. Dole) spends a lot of time down there explaining me to the President."

Wright joined Dole in saying Congress and the Administration must "be very diligent" in efforts to reduce the deficit. But in dealing with the deficits, Wright insisted Congress must look at the causes.

The Texas congressman said \$135 billion of the approximately \$200 billion annual deficits result directly from the tax cuts enacted in 1981, most of which he said went "to the benefit of the wealthy people of the country who least needed a tax cut."

During the past four years, Wright said, the nation has added more to the national debt than in the 35 post-World War II years under seven Republican and Democratic administrations.

Both leaders questioned whether significant deficit reductions can be accomplished through further cuts in domestic social program spending.

Wright said 60 percent of the budget cuts passed during the Reagan administration have occurred in the "one-fifth of the budget that goes to the hungry, the handicapped, the needy, the disadvantaged, the homeless, the elderly and the young who want to get an education.

"We have already reduced that one-fifth so substantially we can scarcely squeeze more out of that lemon," he added.

Similarly, Dole said there is only so much Congress can take out of areas such as food stamps and nutrition programs for women, infants and children.

"I think we have about reached that point," he said.

Wright contrasted social program cuts with one area he said has not been touched by spending reductions--military spending. Defense spending, he said, has grown from \$148 billion in 1980 to \$313 billion proposed by the Reagan administration for fiscal 1985.

"And for the next three years," he continued, "in budgets he (Reagan) has submitted, he is asking Congress to spend slightly more than \$1 trillion in military spending alone."

Wright insisted he is not calling for a reduction in military spending but to simply hold the rate of increase to three and one-half percent.

"Nobody's even suggested we reduce it below last year's level," he said.

In addition to his comments on federal deficits, Wright told participants the Christian mission in the world is one of "reconciliation."

"When we should have been building bridges of understanding, we have built walls of separation between the nations, between the ethnic races, between the social classes and between the generations of men and women," he said.

Practically speaking, he said, Christian citizenship involves standing for the political liberties of individuals, a sense of compassion of human needs and a responsibility to make peace in the world.



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