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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Student Files Complaint
Against Texan Pressler

By Dan Martin

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—A formal complaint has been filed with the Federal Communications Commission against Houston appeals court judge Paul Pressler, alleging the Texan secretly tape recorded a telephone conversation Sept. 1.

The complaint was filed in a notarized letter Sept. 14 by J. Stafford Durham, 28, a third-year student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and former driver for seminary president Roy Lee Honeycutt.

In the letter, Durham said he feels his "civil rights have been violated because information that was obtained illegally" was used as the basis of a "carelessly written" article in the Houston Chronicle Sept. 7.

The complaint grows out of an escalating "holy war" in the 14.1-million member Southern Baptist Convention over theology and denominational politics.

During a convocation address at Southern seminary Aug. 28, Honeycutt mentioned—but not by name—a student who frequently drives the seminary president's car.

In the speech, Honeycutt declared "holy war" against the "unholy forces, which, if left unchecked, will destroy essential qualities of both our convention and this seminary."

Honeycutt also told of efforts by leaders of the "Independent Fundamentalist Political Party" in the denomination to recruit campus subversives and told of efforts by a "Texas leader" of the party to contact the student driver. He identified "party" leaders as Pressler and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas.

Initially, Honeycutt declined to identify the student driver, but after Pressler denied any knowledge of the event, and telephoned Durham Sept. 1 on his church field, the student identified himself and filed the FCC complaint.

In his letter to the FCC, Durham says: "On Saturday, Sept. 1, 1984, at or about 9:30, EDT, I received a long distance telephone call to my residence in Stamping Ground, Ky., from Judge Paul Pressler, who was calling from somewhere in Texas.

"We talked for approximately one hour, during which time the conversation was tape recorded by Judge Paul Pressler without my knowledge, without prior consent and without a beeper to indicate a recorder was in use. Later, portions of that conversation appeared in the Houston Chronicle, Sept. 7, Page 6, in a story that was not accurately written.

"I had no knowledge the conversation had been taped until I read the article in which Judge Pressler admitted to playing our private conversation to the reporter..."

Durham sent the letter to Dick Lawson, whom he said is a legal official with the FCC. Lawson, according to a federal directory, is a public utilities specialist with the FCC. Durham's letter further says: "I do not know what course of action I can take to rectify this infringement on my rights. I would appreciate it if you would suggest exactly what I need to do to pursue this matter fully."

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Durham cited FCC 263 Section 2.6.1c in th letter. According to legal authorities, the section is part of the Tariff Agreement with American Telephone and Telegraph. The agreement requires AT&T to check out any complaints and to report to the FCC on its action.

"There is no criminal action involved, and it appears the most that could happen, if the complaint is investigated and upheld, would be that telephone privileges could be withdrawn from Judge Pressler," said a Washington attorney.

Durham, pastor of Long Lick Baptist Church in Stamping Ground, Ky., told Baptist Press he had intended to say nothing about the incident "until I read in the paper that Judg Pr sssler denied knowing anything about this."

Durham, a native of Pineville, La., said he met Pressler in Houston in October of 1979, while visiting a college friend. "I talked to him 10 or 15 minutes, just like you would when you had just met somebody," Durham said of this meeting.

Durham said he next met Pressler when the Texas jurist telephoned to invite him to attend the Heart of America Bible Conference in Louisville in November of 1979. "He wanted me to go with him and I did," Durham said, noting he spent about a day with Pressler.

"I had no idea who Paul Pressler was, but when we got there, he took me into a meeting with Paige Patterson, James Robison, Adrian Rogers and some others who were talking about who the next president of the convention would be and were trying to get some information about some professor," Durham said.

After he took Pressler to the airport, he said he neither saw the Texan, nor heard from him, until February of 1984. "I had not talked to this man for four-and-a-half years and all of a sudden he calls me up in February. I was living in Stamping Ground and I don't know how h knew to contact me there," Durham said.

During the February conversation, Durham said Pressler invited him to a meeting in Louisville. He declined because the event was on Sunday night. Durham said the conversation lasted about 10 minutes, and said Pressler "asked me if I knew anything that was going on on campus that he should know about. He specifically asked who 'they' were going to run for president and fished for anything else that was going to come up" at the Kansas City annual meeting of the SBC.

Durham maintains Pressler knew he occasionally drove for Honeycutt. "I am convinced he knew that," Durham said.

Shortly after the February telephone call, Durham told Honeycutt of the telephone call. Honeycutt told of the incident in the Aug. 28 convocation address.

Four days after the convocation address, on Sept. 1, Durham said Pressler telephoned again, talking for about an hour. The call resulted in the FCC complaint.

Durham said Pressler "called under the guise of friendship and said he wanted to straighten this out." The student added that when he completed the conversation "I felt lik I had been on the witness stand with a prosecuting attorney questioning me."

Durham characterized Pressler's actions as "unethical and unChristian."

The student said: "If he (Pressler) did not know what Dr. Honeycutt was talking about, how did he know to call me out of 2,500 students at the seminary? If he did not know I was the 'student driver' mentioned, how did he know to call me on my rural Kentucky church field?"

Durham added: "His actions since Aug. 28 prove beyond doubt that not only did Judge Pressler know, but he knew in detail, what Dr. Honeycutt was talking about. By secretly tapping th telephone conversation, he incriminated himself."

The student added: "I am the pastor of a small church in a rural part of Kentucky. If I had not been telling the truth about this matter, it would hav been foolish of me to challeng an important judge who is widely followed and who could destroy my future if he wanted to."

Registration Analysis
Shows Low Participation

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Less than one in five churches in the Southern Baptist Convention participated in conducting the business of the nation's largest Protestant denomination at the 1984 annual meeting in Kansas City, Mo.

Lee Porter, registration secretary, said only 7,052 churches sent messengers to the annual meeting, representing 19.3 percent of the 36,000-plus churches affiliated with the SEC.

Porter, of Nashville, did a detailed statistical analysis of registration at the annual meeting in the wake of accusations of "packing" the annual meeting and rumors of massive bussing for political control. The process took two months since the registration system used at the annual meetings is not computerized.

Porter also kept an hour-by-hour record of registration, comparing the figures with records he has kept during the past five years.

Porter said convention "packing" may have occurred and there might have been a "freeway vote," but "the analysis neither confirms nor denies" them. Generally, in comparison to the past six years, and particularly the 1977 annual meeting, also in Kansas City, shows the 1984 meeting registration was "normal."

Porter provided the results of his study to Baptist Press and presented statistical data to state Baptist newspapers.

Porter said the detailed analysis is the latest in a series of efforts designed to protect the integrity of the registration process. The effort has coincided with increasing controversy in the 14.1-million member denomination.

"I knew at the Atlanta convention (1978) that we had serious registration problems," he said. The problems came to a head at the 1979 convention in Houston with charges of voter irregularities. At that meeting a group of inerrantists emerged, publicly saying their aim was to capture political control of the denomination in 10 years.

Porter said many of the registration improvements are beginning to show up.

In Kansas City, 92 percent of the messengers came with proper credentials. They had messenger registration credentials properly filled out. An additional six percent registered by letter; two percent used telegrams from their churches," he said.

"That is the same percentage we had in Pittsburgh (1973). That is a marked improvement over Houston, when only 48 percent of the messengers had properly filled out registration cards," he added.

The analysis of the 1984 registrations represents the first time such detailed information has been available on who was present, which churches participated and to what extent, and exact counts of state participation.

"The information should be very helpful in the various states as to exactly who is participating," Porter said.

In addition to determining that less than 20 percent of the churches of the convention actually participated, Porter said the analysis revealed:

--More than three-quarters of the churches participating (75.92 percent) were represented by less than two messengers. "It would appear that most churches were represented by one family: generally the pastor, his wife and/or one or more children," said Porter.

--Six states provided more than half of the participation: Missouri with 2,503; Texas with 1,856; Tennessee with 1,292; North Carolina with 1,251; Georgia with 1,022, and Kentucky with 996.

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--Only 521 churches had more than six messengers, and only 131 had the allowed 10 messengers.

--Only four states had more than 10 churches with their allowed number of messengers: Missouri with 36; Texas, 21; Tennessee, 16, and Kentucky, 11.

--Texas had the highest number of participating churches with 722 represented. That, however, was only 17.64 percent of the 4,093 churches in the state. Missouri was second with 711 (38.92 percent of the 1,827 churches); North Carolina, third with 601 (17.28 percent of the 3,479 churches); Tennessee, fourth with 519 churches (18.58 percent of the 2,794 churches); South Carolina, fifth with 446 churches (25.88 percent of the 1,723 churches); Georgia, sixth with 443 churches (14.84 percent of the 2,984 churches), and Kentucky, seventh with 430 churches (19.30 percent of the 2,228 churches).

--Kansas had the highest participation, with 56.57 percent of its churches sending messengers. Porter said 112 of the 198 churches in Kansas sent messengers. "Kansas, which usually has less than 100 messengers at any convention, was a big surprise," he said. Kansas had 414 messengers at the annual meeting.

Other churches with high percentage participation were Iowa with 49.21 percent (31 of 63 churches); Missouri was third with 38.92 percent; Indiana, fourth with 29.62 percent (85 of 287 churches); West Virginia, fifth with 27.91 percent (24 of 86 churches); and South Carolina, sixth with 25.88 percent.

Porter said he was surprised by the low Texas participation. "Texas did not have as many messengers of churches as we anticipated. With 1,822 messengers from 722 churches, Texas participation is not very high. I anticipated they would have much more than 2,000 messengers," Porter said.

Texas, with more than 4,000 churches and 2.2 million members, was second among the states in participation, trailing Missouri. Texas, whose members comprise 16.45 percent of the aggregate membership of the SBC, accounted for 10.85 percent of the 1984 registration.

Of the Texas churches, 183 were represented by a single messenger, while 357 were represented by only two. Only 21 of the 4,093 Texas churches sent them full allocation.

Porter said the flow of registration was "basically normal. It was not out of proportion to other conventions."

By the close of registration Sunday, 3,539 persons had registered. By 3 p.m. Monday, the figure was up to 8,774. It had climbed to 11,283 by closing time Monday, the eve of the annual meeting. By 3 p.m. Tuesday, when the balloting in the presidential election is scheduled, registration was 16,132.

"We anticipated there would be a flood of registrations Tuesday," Porter said. "We were predicting Monday night we would hit 19,000. But that did not occur, and we reached only 17,101. From 3 p.m. Tuesday until the close of the convention Thursday night, we registered only 1,000 more. Registration generally 'dies' after 4 p.m. on the Tuesday of convention."

--Participation in the presidential election was the highest in the past six years. "At the time of the election, 16,132 messengers were registered. Of those, 14,822 cast ballots for almost 92 percent participation," Porter said.

--There is "very little difference" in participation levels by states between the 1977 convention and the 1984 meeting, both held in Kansas City.

"The registration at the two conventions, for all practical purposes, is basically the same," Porter said. "The 1984 meeting drew about 700 more messengers than did the 1977 convention. Missouri was up about 200, as was Texas. Kansas had a higher participation, but the variation in the other states was less than 100 either way," he said.

BSSB-N

Successful Preaching Matches
Texts To People

By Jim Lowry

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)—More than 60 Florida pastors attended the state's first Preaching Conference at First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., last week and heard advice, tips, dialogue and encouragement to aid in proclaiming God's Word.

One of the overarching themes of the three-day conference was the urgent need for pastors to match sermon texts to the needs of the congregation.

Joel Gregory, professor of preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, explained it by advising that preachers who start with biblical exposition during a sermon should move from Galilee to Orlando (their home town) as soon as possible.

Every point of a sermon needs to relate directly to the church members, noted Gregory, who warned pastors a theme for a sermon will not just materialize at 11 a.m. on Sunday without planning and thought.

"Effective biblical preaching must stand between the biblical world and the contemporary world," Gregory said. "Ineffective preaching results when the pastor knows the geography of Galilee but does not know the sins of the businessman in his congregation." However, he added "It is not the role of the preacher to make the Bible relevant. The Bible is relevant. Just don't stand in the way of the Bible—turn it loose."

Harold Bryson, professor of preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, told the pastors, "Preaching is a plea for relationships with God, self, and fellow human beings." These relationships have to be recognized as more in-depth than casual friendships, but long relationships developed over years between family and church members.

"People are being helped in churches all over the Southern Baptist Convention by pastors who are staying for years and helping members through crises," Bryson explained. "In many of these small churches pastors have endeared themselves by developing close relationships where their humanity has come out. Congregation members know he hurts also."

Sometimes these pastors are discouraged, Bryson added, because their churches are not having the statistical success about which they frequently read and hear. He encouraged the pastors to be faithful.

"The world's success standards have oozed into the pastorate," he explained. "We want to sell more cars and get more profits. The truth is Jesus shattered that success illusion with the parable of the sower. There are sowers on large and small plots. Success is not based on the effectiveness of the sower, but the ground and the seed."

"We can't override the human will to have more baptisms, and we can't force people to be baptized," he continued. "We just have to be faithful to sow. Jesus gave us permission to fail. It just should lead to more faithful and qualitative sowing."

In a session on pastoral authority, Joe Stacker, secretary of the church administration department at the Baptist Sunday School Board, said tensions can develop over the quest for authority in local churches. He said some pastors want to be in charge to appear successful and some church members want to be in charge to avoid change.

"The tension between power and service is a paradox," Stacker explained, "because power comes through service. Pastors need to understand that the ministry of Jesus was not to be served but a servant. Don't appear to be above hurt, pain and spiritual problems when in reality you face all of these," he said. "Don't be afraid to open up some to your congregation and you will gain authority."

"Also, be an encourager of people," he said. "We do too much beating people over the head with the hammer of guilt. Don't forget the grace of God. And don't forget that you can't be something in the pulpit that you aren't the rest of the week."