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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, 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) 741-1998
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of a change in the computer system, Baptist Press did not publish Jan. 23 or 26. The following story was made available electronically on Jan. 23, and is now being included in the regular mailing schedule.)

Witnesses Laud, Censure
Baptist Joint Committee

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Witnesses lauded and censured the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs during hearings by a special fact-finding committee in late January.

The hearings were conducted by a nine-member committee appointed in September by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to study the relationship between the 14.6 million-member denomination and the BJCPA, a 50-year-old religious liberty advocacy organization composed of representatives of nine Baptist bodies in the United States and Canada.

The committee was appointed after an effort was made during the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC to sever the ties between the two organizations and establish "an exclusive Southern Baptist presence" in the nation's capital.

The man who made the motion, M.G. (Dan) Daniels of Mobile, Ala., was one of the 22 persons who offered testimony during the two-day meeting.

Daniels' criticism of the BJCPA centered around its opposition to the Prayer Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which Daniels said "is a matter which determines whether the nation stands or falls. I will give them (the BJCPA) full credit for the good they have done, but these things (the Prayer Amendment) can make or break America."

Daniels also said Southern Baptists "are sending the wrong message through the Baptist Joint Committee."

In addition to Daniels, 21 people gave testimony, 15 in support of the work of the Baptist Joint Committee and six in opposition to it.

Some who testified say they wish to keep the relationship and the funding intact and praised the BJCPA for its work in such matters as Equal Access legislation, opposition to an ambassador to the Holy See, clarifying Internal Revenue Service interpretations of "integrated auxiliaries" of churches, ministerial housing, double taxing missionaries and other matters.

Bill O'Brien, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, commended the BJCPA for helping more than 3,700 foreign missionaries in reference to the overseas earned income tax matter.

O'Brien said the expert help provided by the committee in clarifying the issue of double taxation of missionaries had saved Southern Baptists "about a million and a half dollars a year, more than triple the amount the SBC invests in the Baptist Joint Committee."

Others, such as Daniels, suggested a complete severing of ties.

One at-large SBC representative on the BJCPA, Albert Lee Smith, a former U.S. Congressman, now an insurance executive in Birmingham, Ala., promoted a complete break between the two organizations. Smith was critical of the BJC's opposition to the Prayer Amendment but was more critical of Executive Director James Dunn's participation in People for the American Way, an organization founded by television producer Norman Lear to promote First Amendment issues.

Dunn participated in PAW for three years (1981-84) as a director but declined to serve a second term after criticism developed toward the organization and its founder.

Smith said the views of Southern Baptists "are not being represented by the BJCPA," and added the SBC "is too big and too influential to have our voice diluted by participation in the BJCPA. We are the largest Protestant denomination and we ought to have a separate office (in Washington)."

Two other witnesses, both of whom support the Baptist Joint Committee, told of help provided by the BJCPA and estimated the worth of such services.

Paul Jones, executive director of the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, said he estimates the services provided to Mississippi Baptists by the BJCPA in providing research and information on issues of importance to his state amount to about \$12,000 per year.

Jones also expressed concern that, if Southern Baptists sever relations, "people like me will have no place to go for the kind of research and information provided by Baptist Joint Committee files." He added he fears it would take several years for Southern Baptists to develop the kind of files maintained by the BJCPA, thus creating a "gap."

Grace Langley, a homemaker and pastor's wife from Huntsville, Ala., told committee members the work of the BJCPA to restore the ministerial housing allowance tax relief has "saved my family \$6,000 per year."

She told the committee she had come to "commend the Baptist Joint Committee as heartily and thoroughly as possible," and, when asked what changes she would make, suggested giving "more money and more staff" to the Washington-based organization.

Another witness, Richard Land, vice president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, who will soon become a special assistant to the governor of Texas, Bill Clements, suggested retaining the relationship but on a reduced financial level.

He said Southern Baptists "ought not be a major contributor to any organization that is not fully accountable to the people of the SBC."

"The Executive Committee ought to consider trying to work out a way we can retain membership in the Baptist Joint Committee but also establish our own office in Washington," he said.

The chairman of the SBC Public Affairs Committee, Sam Currin of Raleigh, N.C., said he favors the establishment of a separate office, "perhaps under the aegis of the Christian Life Commission," which would deal with moral and social issues, while letting the BJC focus on strictly religious liberty and separation of church and state.

During the two days of hearings, committee members heard discussion about the "accountability" of the Baptist Joint Committee to the SBC and listened as witnesses talked about both what they perceived to be the responsiveness and non-responsiveness of the organization to the wishes of Southern Baptists.

The study committee heard four basic plans suggested for the relationship of the two organizations:

— Retaining the current relationship, which stresses the advantages of coalition with groups representing 27 million Baptists across the nation rather than 14 million Southern Baptists. Some who favor this approach also favored creation of a Christian Life Commission office in the capital to deal with moral and social issues.

— Continuing to participate, but in a modified fashion. Suggestions included changing the membership of the SBC's Public Affairs Committee to include more at-large members.

— Continuing to participate, but in a reduced fashion, while, at the same time, establishing an exclusive Southern Baptist presence, perhaps through placement of a Christian Life Commission staffer in Washington.

-- Severing all relationships with the BJCPA and establishing an organization which will "better represent" the views of Southern Baptists to government leaders.

The committee also heard three major criticisms of the BJCPA:

-- The style of the executive director, particularly in political rhetoric related to the controversy over the Reagan Prayer Amendment.

-- The group's opposition to the Prayer Amendment.

-- Dunn's past participation in People for the American Way and what some perceive as a penchant to invite "liberal" speakers to BJCPA conferences.

Of those who testified, nine are employees of SBC or state convention agencies, four are pastors, four are homemakers, one is a seminary student, three are laymen and one is affiliated with an independent college.

Hearings Positive,
Negative: Chairman

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"I think this was the best meeting we have had, in terms of the information we received," said Gary F. Young.

Young, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Phoenix, Ariz., is chairman of a nine-member special committee studying the relationship between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The hearings, according to Young, had both a positive and a negative side:

"On the positive side, we have discovered many more facts, and it is the main duty of this committee to discover facts.

"On the negative side, I realize through the testimony more fully the great diversity of opinion among Southern Baptists concerning the Baptist Joint Committee and how strongly those opinions are held."

Young said he believes the facts gathered by the committee help the group "make progress toward possible solutions" but added, "We have not yet begun to formulate those solutions."

The diversity of opinion expressed, however, "points up the immense difficulty of our task," he said. "All of this makes me believe that ultimately the Lord is the only one who has the wisdom to reveal a solution for this complex challenge," Young said.

Young urged Southern Baptists "to continue to pray for us, particularly in our next meeting, Feb. 14, where we will begin to work toward our preliminary report."

The committee will report to the Feb. 16-18 meeting of the SBC Executive Committee. It will make its final report at the Executive Committee meeting June 8, on the eve of the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC in St. Louis.

Young expressed thanks to those who came to testify, "most at their own expense," and also to those who have written letters and sent information to the committee.

"So far we have received 202 letters, many with attachments and press clippings. Every item has been photocopied and shared with all committee members. I appreciate all of the responses we have received," he said.

Young added he has "not tried to count the numbers of positive or negative responses but have tried to examine the substance and weigh the evidence offered in each one."

In addition to its Feb. 14 meeting, the committee is scheduled to meet March 27-28 in Nashville, where the committee will begin formulating its report.

Hodo Picked To Lead
Houston University

HOUSTON (BP)—Edward Douglas (Doug) Hodo has been elected president of Houston Baptist University, announced Milton Cross, chairman of the board of trustees, and Marvin L. West, co-chairman of the board's succession committee. Hodo will assume the presidency June 1.

Outgoing President William H. Hinton has been named chancellor of the Texas Baptist school.

Hodo currently is dean of the college of business at the University of Texas at San Antonio, a position he has held since 1972. He has earned four degrees from the University of Mississippi.

"In Dr. Hodo, Houston Baptist University is securing a leader with excellent academic credentials and strong administrative abilities," West said. "We look forward to those strengths helping carry HBU into the next century with the continued success and vigor such as we have experienced during the last 25 years with Dr. Hinton.

"Dr. Hodo and his family have a solid Christian commitment with strong emphasis in faith which he has always exemplified in his relationships academically and personally," he added.

Hodo has been on the Christian Education Coordinating Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Hodo is married to the former Sadie Branch. They have three children, Allison, 25; Doug Jr., 23; and Patrick, 17. They are members of Castle Hills First Baptist Church in San Antonio.

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Samford Launches
Law-Church Center

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—Samford University has launched its Center for the Study of Law and the Church.

The center will serve the rapidly developing needs of clergy, congregational boards and officials of church-related organizations at local, state and national levels, said Thomas E. Corts, president of the Alabama Baptist school in Birmingham. It will provide assistance and guidance through educational and service functions, counseling, research and publications.

"The needs to be served are generated by the growing complexity of society and the increasing exposure of all institutions to legal liabilities and limitations," Corts noted, citing a recent report that about 2,000 legal cases involving houses of worship, clergy and religious groups are pending nationwide.

"Until now, no central core of professionally prepared information and advice was available to guide and assist the persons and boards involved in these matters," he continued.

The new Samford center, authorized by the university trustees last year, will conduct an annual law and church conference to provide in-depth exploration of emerging trends in the field of law and religion, with presentations by recognized scholars in the field.

Director Chriss H. Doss will have offices in Samford's Cumberland School of Law. An incoming toll-free telephone line will be available for use by pastors and others who seek information from the center on church legal matters.

Parham Williams, dean of the Cumberland School of Law, said the center would "provide a basic form of counseling and would seek to complement the services of lawyers."

The center's staff, in addition to providing an informal advisory service to individuals and institutions, will produce a reference handbook of laws and regulations affecting the church, plus a monthly newsletter containing updated information.

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Doss also will provide instructional support in such courses as "Law and the Church," which would be available not only to students in law, but also to undergraduates in the department of religion and other appropriate disciplines in the university.

Corts called Doss a "Renaissance man" whose experience as a clergyman, lawyer, public servant and educator "makes him especially qualified to dialogue with both churchmen and legal professionals."

A graduate of both Sanford University and the Cumberland Law School, Doss also holds a theological degree from Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia and a master's degree in library science from Drexel University, also in Philadelphia.

He has been a pastor in Pennsylvania and Alabama and was law librarian at Cumberland. A member of the Alabama House of Representatives during 1970-74, Doss was chairman of the Jefferson County House Delegation for two years.

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Seminarrians Urged
To Dream, Imagine

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)—Dream and imagine that things can be better in the real world of hard rocks, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary students were challenged during their spring convocation.

"How do persons retain hope and faith when their dreams are shattered on the hard rocks of reality in today's real world?" asked T. Furman Hewitt, professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern.

"While all of us long for a 'perfect' life with an ideal mate, ideal children and an ideal career, real life presents us with accidents, human and natural evils and all manner of other than ideal circumstances," he said.

"People respond to this adversity in three ways: Some people judge and condemn their world and miss out on the grace and joy available to them. Others resign themselves to self-pity, and their visions, dreams and hopes are discarded forever. Others, like (the prophet) Isaiah, see their dreams living on in the lives of others in the promised land."

Hewitt emphasized how tenaciously Jesus "hung in" with imperfect people, loved them into growth and change and made them his own.

"Darkness cannot put out the light," he said, "so dream what might be. Dream again and imagine a Christian community of justice, mercy, trust and grace. Dream of a world that is one in Christ yet welcomes diversity, where there is freedom to disagree, where there are ample opportunities for not just white males but all of earth's peoples."

Hewitt concluded: "Christianity can give the world 'impulses of love' which lead to 'sublime madness.' This 'madness' disregards immediate appearances to claim the true, ultimate sanity found in the God who has made us his own."

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