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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Public Affairs Committee  
Urges Bork Confirmation

By Dan Martin and Mark Kelly

NASHVILLE (BP)--The confirmation of Robert H. Bork as a United States Supreme Court justice has been "strongly urged" by the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee.

By a 7 to 5 vote, the committee -- which was expanded and re-constituted during the 1987 annual SBC -- adopted a resolution which commended President Reagan's nomination of Bork and strongly urged the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate to confirm the nomination.

The committee, which held its first meeting in Nashville Aug. 20-21, also strongly urged the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, "which receives 91 percent of its subsidy from the Southern Baptist Convention cooperative funds, to issue a similar recommendation and to direct its staff to lobby on behalf of the Bork nomination."

The resolution was presented by Les Csorba III, executive director of Accuracy in Academia, of Alexandria, Va., who was elected to the PAC in June.

In presenting his resolution, Csorba said the Public Affairs Committee "does have a responsibility to represent the convention on First Amendment issues, and adopting this resolution is consistent with that."

The resolution says Bork, "by all the historical judicial standards, including legal reasoning ability, high-quality legal opinions and scholarly writings and judicial temperament, is extremely qualified for the United States Supreme Court."

It cites SBC resolutions to show Bork "is consistent" with the SBC position opposing homosexuality and pornography and supporting traditional Baptist views on First Amendment guarantees and the presentation of the role of religion in textbooks.

It adds the "opposition of Judge Bork's nomination has come from extremist organizations such as the People for the American Way, which has taken out full-page advertisements in major newspapers across the country and has pledged to spend \$1,000,000 to defeat his nomination. Such organizations as the People for the American Way and the National Organization of Women are led and financed by individuals who have consistently opposed the very traditional moral positions that Southern Baptists have held."

It goes on to say: "Since Southern Baptists are concerned about the inordinate spending activities against Judge Bork's nomination by organizations who have opposed traditional morality, it is imperative that we, as the largest non-Catholic religious denomination in the United States, take a firm stand in supporting" the nomination.

Csorba's resolution also notes the nomination has been opposed by "other religious groups which are known to be on the far left end of the theological spectrum, and it is because of the actions of these groups that it is essential that members of the United States Senate know how the traditional mainstream American denominations feel about the Bork nomination. ..."

In addition, the resolution urges "each Southern Baptist to prayerfully consider his responsibility to fulfill his civic duty to support those principles clearly supported by Southern Baptists throughout our history which will greatly be promoted if Judge Bork is confirmed by the United States Senate."

Prior to the vote, committee members were told by Harold C. Bennett, president-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, they were departing from tradition.

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"I know of no time when either the convention or a convention-related agency has endorsed a person for office," Bennett said. "This is different from anything we have ever done."

Lloyd Elder, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, said the resolution "seems more ideological than First Amendment" in concern and urged the PAC not to endorse a candidate for election. "The process of confirming a judge is part of the political process. It is not running for office, but it is running for election," he said.

Following the vote, Elder requested that his negative vote be recorded in the minutes, and added: "If this is proposed for the agenda of the meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee, I will oppose it, and if it is placed on the agenda, I will vote against it. I think the Baptist Joint Committee has no more business dealing with this than do we."

Another member, J.I. Ginnings, a petroleum engineer from Wichita Falls, Texas, said: "I do not feel empowered to act on the issue of Judge Bork. While I am sympathetic to his nomination, I believe we should not become a body for endorsing candidates. ..."

During discussion on the resolution, Larry Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, asked Csorba if he had any information on Bork's religious affiliation or convictions.

"His resume lists 'Protestant,'" Csorba said.

"I understand he is an agnostic, and I just thought you ought to know that," Lewis said.

Bork, who has been judge on the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia since 1982, was nominated by President Reagan in early July to replace retiring jurist Lewis F. Powell Jr. Confirmation hearings will begin before the 14-member Senate Judiciary Committee Sept. 15. If the confirmation clears the committee, a vote is not expected until mid- or late October.

In addition to supporting the Bork nomination, the Public Affairs Committee also adopted resolutions supporting the Danforth "abortion-neutral" Amendment to the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 and opposing BJCPA "association" with People for the American Way.

Two other resolutions -- one supporting a prayer amendment and the other opposing the inclusion of humanism in school textbooks -- were postponed until the PAC's next meeting.

The resolution on the Danforth Amendment, presented by Richard Land, special assistant to the governor of Texas, parallels the resolution adopted by the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC, which said the Civil Rights Restoration Act "could be used in federal court to force pro-life hospitals to perform abortions."

The resolution, which was adopted without a negative vote, calls on the U.S. Senate to pass the Danforth Amendment and also urges "the trustees of the SBC Christian Life Commission and the BJCPA to adopt formal resolutions" in support of the amendment.

It also specifies the resolution "should not be construed as unqualified support for the Civil Rights Restoration Act, even as altered by the Danforth Amendment." In discussion, Lewis called the CRRRA a threat to religious liberty and called for a complete study of the act.

Members also commended the Christian Life Commission staff "for their actions in support of an abortion-neutral amendment."

The other adopted resolution, presented by Albert Lee Smith, an insurance executive from Birmingham, Ala., decries People for the American Way and its founder, TV producer Norman Lear, and a videotape circulated by the organization entitled "Life and Liberty for All Who Believe," which "is highly critical of Southern Baptist leaders."

It says the PAC believes "it is in the best interest of our convention and of the other eight Baptist denominations that the BJCPA cease and desist from any further association with People for the American Way because its record and objectives are thoroughly foreign to the objectives of our nine Christian groups."

Dispute Over BJCPA Funding  
Highlights Committee Meeting

By Dan Martin and Mark Kelly

NASHVILLE (BP)--A dispute over who will control the funding of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs highlighted the first meeting of the newly reconstituted Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee.

The committee, during its first meeting Aug. 20-21, voted to ask the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to provide a written clarification as to whether the \$448,400 allocated for the BJCPA in the 1987-88 SBC Cooperative Program allocation budget is to go directly to the Baptist Joint Committee or is to be channeled through the 18-member PAC.

"The question is whether the \$448,000 appropriation goes to the Baptist Joint Committee or comes to us for some say-so," said Chairman Samuel T. Currin of Raleigh, N.C.

Currin, who has been U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina, but who soon will become a state superior court judge, said he believes the revisions in Bylaw 18, adopted at the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC, created a Public Affairs Committee to "operate separately, but also as part of the Baptist Joint Committee."

Historically, the Public Affairs Committee -- one of three SBC standing committees -- has been a conduit through which the SBC names members and provides funding for the Washington-based BJCPA, a religious liberty coalition of nine Baptist groups in the United States and Canada.

Currin told committee members he had been chairman of the PAC for four years, but said, "I have been chairman of a piece of paper."

The chairman, who told the committee he was in Israel during the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC, also said, "I believe messengers at the convention thought they were funding the Public Affairs Committee and not the Baptist Joint Committee."

Messengers to the 1987 annual meeting in St. Louis adopted a revision of Bylaw 18, which governs the Public Affairs Committee. The revision revamped representation on the committee and encouraged the PAC to continue to function in relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee, while suggesting it operate separately, as well.

The bylaw change increased SBC members from 15 to 18, and reduced the number of agency executives serving on the committee from nine to five, while increasing at-large members from five to 12. The sitting SBC president retains a seat on the committee.

Confusion about the implications of the revision apparently centers on the action which instructs the Public Affairs Committee to function "separately" from the BJCPA and the listing in the Cooperative Program allocation budget for the Public Affairs Committee as the recipient of the \$448,400 allocation rather than the BJCPA.

Gary F. Young, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., who was chairman of a special nine-member fact-finding committee of the Executive Committee which proposed the bylaw change, briefed committee members about the work of the special committee.

Young said the fact-finding committee did not recommend or intend to recommend that funding go to the PAC. "Placing the funding directly in the hands of this committee would ruin the 'jointness' of the Baptist Joint Committee. Our report to the SBC concluded that there is enough strength in jointness that we should try to make it work. Coalition is essential to effectiveness, and it would ruin the 'jointness' if we had recommended that this committee control the funds," he said.

Despite Young's interpretation, committee members were divided over how the funds should be handled, and members returned to the issue several times during the two-day meeting.

Richard Land, special assistant to the governor of Texas, said some messengers, Executive Committee members and "even members of the special (fact-finding) committee" told him they thought they were funding the PAC. He added, "They (messengers) told us they wanted us to function separately, but they didn't tell us too much about how to do it."

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Norris Sydnor, pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Ft. Washington, Md., said: "This is a new day. (The bylaw revision) created a separate committee, and we are to operate as a separate committee. That is the way I voted."

Thomas E. Pratt, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Brighton, Colo., said a continuation of direct funding of the BJCPA was "not what I understood I was voting for in St. Louis. We understood we were voting for some control. Now, it seems we have no more control than ever."

"I do not believe we were organized to be toothless tigers, but to effect significant changes in the Baptist Joint Committee in order to preserve our participation in it," he said, adding that if the money did not flow through the PAC, then the SBC was providing "\$450,000 to support issues on which, in some cases, we are violently opposed to."

Robbie Hughes, a homemaker from Jackson, Miss., said: "It appears to me that the function of this committee is practically nullified if we have no say-so over the money. We (the SBC) provide a majority of the money and go to only one meeting (of the BJCPA) a year. Then they (the BJCPA) spend our money for the rest of the year and we have no say-so."

Three other committee members, however, said their understanding of the action in St. Louis did not coincide with that of the others.

"That (direct funding of the PAC) is not what I understood we were voting for," said J.I. Ginnings, a petroleum engineer from Wichita Falls, Texas. "I felt the funding was status quo."

Lloyd Elder, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, said he was not aware some people interpreted the bylaw change as meaning funds would go to the Public Affairs Committee. "The first time I ever heard that interpretation was at this meeting," he said.

Harold C. Bennett, president-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee and treasurer of the SBC, briefed the committee on its status according to the bylaws and the business and financial plan of the convention.

"This committee is a standing committee, and standing committees do not have program money or program assignments," he said, adding, "You have the authority to meet once a year and, if additional meetings are desired, a request must be made to the Executive Committee."

Bennett said the PAC is funded through an item in the Executive Committee budget and added that the committee has no funds of its own. "If you take action that requires funds, there are no funds for this year or next year," he said.

He added he did not interpret the SBC annual meeting action as funding the PAC rather than the BJCPA. "This committee is not a legal entity. I am not about to send you any money unless I am specifically instructed to do so," he said.

The committee, during its Thursday session, agreed to report to the Executive Committee that it was divided over the intent of the bylaw change. However, during the Friday afternoon session, Roy Gean Jr., an attorney from Fort Smith, Ark., said: "I personally think we ought to make a stronger statement (to the Executive Committee). I think we should tell them we feel very strongly about this and urge them to direct that the money be channeled through our committee."

Pratt moved "that this committee express its strong sentiment to the Executive Committee that we believe funding for the Baptist Joint Committee on Oct. 1, 1987, should be funneled through this committee," but later modified it to indicate the BJCPA should be funded "with the approval of this committee." The action was adopted by an 8-2 vote.

In the discussion Land specified the effort to channel the money through the PAC was not a "back door" attempt to defund the BJCPA, and said the amount going on to the Washington organization "would not necessarily be changed in amount."

Land also requested that the Executive Committee provide "written notification" of "all procedures necessary to make budget adjustments at the earliest possible opportunity," should the committee decide the PAC would not be given control over the funds.

Public Affairs Committee  
Requests Extra Meetings

NASHVILLE (BP)--Two extra meetings -- one in October and the other early in 1988 -- have been requested by the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee.

During its first meeting in its revised form, the 18-member committee requested that it be given funds for the two additional meetings so that it could fulfill its responsibilities under the revised Bylaw 18, which was adopted during the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC in St. Louis.

The revision expanded the committee from 15 to 18 members and reduced the number of agency executives sitting on the committee from nine to five. It increased at-large membership from five to 12, and retained the sitting SBC president as a committee member.

As a standing committee, under SBC bylaws, the committee is authorized to hold one meeting per year, with requests for additional meetings channeled through the SBC Executive Committee.

The action requesting additional meetings specifies the committee wishes to meet in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, scheduled Oct. 5-6, in Washington, and to hold an additional meeting to formulate its report for the SBC Book of Reports in January or early February.

During the two-day meeting, Albert Lee Smith, a Birmingham, Ala., insurance executive, was elected vice chairman. Chairman Samuel T. Currin of Raleigh, N.C., who was elected by the messengers to the 1987 SBC as part of the Committee on Nominations report, appointed Les Csorba III, executive director of Accuracy in Academia of Alexandria, Va., as recording secretary.

Currin also appointed two subcommittees, one a long range planning and policy committee and the other a BJCPA staff evaluation committee.

Richard Land, special assistant to the governor of Texas, will chair the planning and policy committee. Named to the committee are J.I. Ginnings, a petroleum engineer from Wichita Falls, Texas; Landrum P. Leavell II, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; Larry L. Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board; and Mrs. Dudley J. (Robbie) Hughes, a homemaker from Jackson, Miss.

Currin said the planning and policy committee "will look at this committee and how it should be functioning." He also added he "jotted down" a few items the committee should study, including "what we might want as bylaws, whether we want our own staff member or staff members, whether we want our own newsletter or publication, how often we should meet and what our budget should be."

Named to the BJCPA staff-evaluation committee, which Currin said would look at current staff members of the BJCPA, are Smith as chairman; Csorba; Roy R. Gean Jr., a Fort Smith, Ark., attorney; Thomas E. Pratt, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Brighton, Colo.; and Norris W. Sydnor Jr., pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Fort Washington, Md.

During the meeting, two items were referred to the staff-evaluation committee, both concerning publications of the BJCPA.

Land requested an evaluation of two Baptist Press news stories, written by a staff member whom he declined to name, and Csorba and Pratt both voiced displeasure with the "lack of balance" in Report from the Capitol, the magazine published by the BJCPA.

The committee also heard an address by Curran Tiffany, an attorney affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals and the Christian Legal Society, who told the committee he was authorized to "bring to you an offer of every cooperation you might wish from the NAE."

The committee is scheduled to meet again Oct. 4, in advance of the annual meeting of the BJCPA. If another meeting is authorized by the SBC Executive Committee, the Public Affairs Committee also will convene for its second meeting Oct. 6-7.

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(The coverage of the PAC was written by Dan Martin, news editor of Baptist Press, the news service of the SBC, with assistance from Mark Kelly, managing editor of the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine, newsjournal of the Arkansas Baptist Convention. Kelly attended the meeting as a representative of the Southern Baptist Press Association.)