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88-55

Texan Says SBC Nominating
Committee Actions 'Unfair'N- (CO
(Texas Std.)
By Toby Druin

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--A Southern Baptist Convention Committee on Nominations member has charged his recommendations for new SBC trustees were treated unfairly because of SBC politics.

Jimmy Towers claimed in late March 60 percent of his recommendations were disregarded by the committee because he was nominated for the committee by George Harris, who has announced he will nominate Phoenix, Ariz., pastor Richard Jackson for SBC president in June.

Towers, pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, said three of five recommendations he made were either rejected outright or through procedural changes. Towers also said the sessions of the Committee on Nominations, which met in Nashville March 17-18, were marked by questions regarding whether nominees are "committed to the changes" and "the cause" that have dominated the convention since 1979, not whether they are dedicated to "Christ, missions and evangelism."

One of the changes, he said, substituted Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas and one of the leaders in the conservative movement in the denomination, for one nominee, dropping a Texas Baptist pastor from consideration.

The committee nominated more than 200 people to serve on SBC boards. Their meetings were held in executive, or closed-door, session. The recommendations are not expected to be made public until 45 days before the convention meets in San Antonio, June 14-16.

However, Towers spoke out against the committee action in late March. He broke the confidential nature of the committee's work, he said, only after confirming that it had already been done in several instances.

He said he was speaking only for himself. The other Texas member of the committee, Monte D. Lawlis of Jasper, declined comment.

Towers said he and Lawlis had 16 positions to fill. Six current board members who are eligible for re-election were renominated, and Towers and Lawlis divided the other positions, not necessarily along minister/layman lines as has been the custom.

Towers said they agreed to nominate people who were not involved in the major movements in the denomination. They met in San Antonio and agreed on their nominations and sent them on to committee Chairman Joseph T. Knott III of Raleigh, N.C., along with biographical sketches of each nominee as requested by Knott. Notations were made as to whether the nominations were from Lawlis or Towers.

Towers, in a prepared statement and interview with the Baptist Standard, Texas Baptists' weekly newsjournal, said personal conversations with other committee members led him to the conclusion his nominations were unduly scrutinized and altered because of his link to Harris. Three of his five nominees "were not acceptable," he said. One was removed by the committee at large, and two were removed by procedural decisions.

One of the alterations nominates Patterson to the SBC Foreign Mission Board. Patterson was not recommended by Towers and Lawlis. To make room for Patterson on the FMB, Towers said, a "widely known Texas Baptist pastor" was shifted to the SBC Home Mission Board and another Texas pastor, labeled "very bad, unacceptable" by Knott, was dropped from the list of recommendations.

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With the exception of Patterson's nomination, Towers declined to identify any of the people involved in the discussions or recommendations. The Baptist Standard has learned from another source that the "widely known Texas Baptist pastor" shifted to the HMB from the FMB in favor of Patterson was Texas Baptist convention President Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

The motion to place Patterson on the FMB and to shift Gregory to the HMB came from the floor from a committee member from another state, not from Towers or Lawlis and seemed to be part of an "orchestrated" scenario, Towers said.

The man who made the motion said Patterson was not simply recommended in place of Gregory "because Joel is too popular to remove. What we had to do was to find somebody that we could bump off that would be not so offensive," Towers reported.

That move and other parliamentary procedures that caused other changes in the recommendations of the Texas members of the committee he now believes were prompted by his link to Harris and Harris' plans to nominate Jackson, Towers said.

He reported one committee member from Indiana -- and later another from Oklahoma -- told him before the committee meeting began that because of Harris' plans to nominate Jackson and the fact Harris also had nominated Towers, Towers' recommendations were scrutinized for loyalty to "the commitment to change" in the denomination and "the cause" -- the conservative effort that has dominated the convention since 1979.

That scrutiny was confirmed, Towers said, when early parliamentary changes prompted him to retrieve the biographical sketches of his and Lawlis' recommendations from Knott.

The biographical information on Towers' recommendations had several notations on them, indicating Knott had made inquiries about them prior to the meeting, Towers said. The sketch of the pastor who subsequently was dropped in the floor motion had the notation, "very bad, unacceptable." Knott told him he had made the notations, Towers said.

The conversations with the other committee members, Knott's notations and other floor motions that seemed to single out his nominations in particular convinced him his recommendations had been targeted, and he had to speak out against it, he said.

He also was disturbed that only "a particular mindset," not a prospective board member's qualifications, seemed to be uppermost in the minds of most of the committee members, he added.

One of the first questions asked in the meeting was if people on the Alabama slate of nominees -- the first to be considered -- were "committed to change," he said. Asked what changes were meant, the questioner almost indignantly replied, "Committed to the change that has been occurring in our convention since 1979 toward a fundamentalist, toward an inerrantist view," Towers reported.

The next question asked was if they were committed to "THE cause," he said. "No answer was given, but I thought it was a redundant question." The same questions were asked repeatedly about subsequent nominees.

"I wondered -- in fact I wrote myself a note in my diary -- when somebody was going to ask if they were committed to Christ, missions and evangelism," he said. "Nobody ever did. Qualifications didn't seem to be important, just commitment to a particular mindset."

Towers, who recently observed his 10th anniversary as pastor at Crossroads Church, said he was aware of the perception that most people named to the Committee on Nominations the last several years have been sympathetic to the conservative cause. He added he has agreed with much of the emphasis of the conservative movement since 1979 but has not been a "flag-waver" or a "card-carrier."

"I have agreed with the positive things that have occurred since 1979 as far as change," he said. "I am in agreement with most of that. But I just think the pendulum has gone way too far and think the halt of real or perceived liberalism, which is a worthy cause, has gone too far. I think we have abused some folks in the process. I hope Baptists will take a stronger look at what we know and what we do."

He has contacted the people he had recommended and told them of the committee's decisions, Towers said and related the pastor who was labeled "very bad, unacceptable" was "a little surprised he was singled out as unacceptable." The pastor is a veteran of 30 years' ministry and had not declared his positions in the denominational controversy.

"One thing he said was, 'I have not committed myself to a camp; maybe they are forcing me into a camp,'" Towers said.

He added he expects criticism for going public with his charges: "I am certain I do not understand all of the implications and ramifications of this action. I expect condemnation and criticism. I expect misunderstanding and misrepresentation. I believe, however, failure to speak will reap the same results from a different perspective. I would rather be condemned by the truth than by deceit."

Towers, who said he does not intend to speak to it on the floor of the convention, added, "But I think it is a shame that I spent as much time as I did, doing as much work as I did and the convention paid my way to Nashville and back for me to really be non-productive."

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Committee Chairman Says
Nominations Process Fair

N-10
By Dan Martin

Baptist Press
3/31/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Nominating Committee says he "is sorry" a Texas member thinks the committee was unfair "because I thought it was fair."

Joseph T. Knott III, an attorney from Raleigh, N.C., told Baptist Press Jimmy Towers, a pastor from San Antonio, "has a right to his own impressions, but I thought we (the committee) worked hard, did prayerful ... diligent work. I thought everyone was proceeding in good faith. I thought we had a good meeting."

Towers, pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church, told the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of Texas Baptists, three of the five nominations he made were disregarded by the committee because of SBC politics. He said he was told by several committee members his nominations were scrutinized and altered because he had been nominated by George Harris, a fellow San Antonio pastor who has announced he will nominate Richard Jackson of Phoenix, Ariz., for SBC president.

Knott declined to comment on any conversations Towers might have had with other committee members "because I wasn't party to them."

When asked if Towers had been discriminated against because of his relationship with Harris, Knott replied: "I don't know who George Harris is. I have never heard of him; I don't know anything about it. Also, I did not know Jim Towers before the meeting or that he had been nominated by George Harris, if I had known who George Harris is.

"I am a layman and I don't live and breathe all of this stuff. I don't know many Southern Baptists in North Carolina, much less in Texas."

Knott said: "As I recall, he (Towers) nominated two people from the Houston area to serve on the Southwestern (Baptist Theological Seminary) board as local members. The charter calls for local members to be from the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex area. Thus, the two people were ineligible. We reshuffled his list and tried to find places for these two.

"He (Towers) also nominated his wife for a place on a board. We passed a resolution at the beginning that said no spouse of any member would be nominated. We were trying to avoid any taint of nepotism. His wife was knocked off, and she was not placed anywhere else. She certainly was not the only wife who was not nominated."

Knott said one of Tower's nominations was placed elsewhere and that the other man was nominated for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board: "But a nomination from the floor arose to substitute Paige (Patterson) for him, and that carried. It was put to a vote and it carried."

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Towers told the Standard in order to make room for Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas and a leader in the conservative effort in the SBC, another "widely known" pastor was shifted to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Although Towers would not name him, the Standard discovered the "widely known" pastor is Joel Gregory, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

The Standard contacted Gregory, who said he had received no formal notification of his nomination. He said: "The whole incident speaks for itself. It is obvious that the elected leadership or the appointed leadership (of the SBC) did not want me to serve on the Foreign Mission Board. I can accept that.

"I am grieved that a very worthy Texas Baptist brother was removed from consideration for the Home Mission Board to accommodate me. I am in the process of appealing to the elected and appointed leadership to restore that brother to his rightful place on the HMB."

In his statement to the Standard, Towers said he retrieved from Knott the biographical sheet on the pastor who was not appointed to any responsibility. The sheet had the handwritten notation, "very bad, unacceptable," which Towers said Knott had acknowledged writing.

Towers said Knott had requested committee members to send nominations and biographical data to him prior to the meeting.

Knott told Baptist Press he had requested the information early because "we (the committee) had been requested to look for women and minorities to appoint. We also had to keep in the statute (bylaw) to keep a balance between pastors and laymen. I needed to know rather than wait until the last minute about the appointments and don't know any other way than to get advance information."

He added he "was scrupulous to make a notation" of any information he received about any potential nominee. "People called me endlessly about the committee," he said. "They made comments about people who might be nominated."

Knott said when "people from the states called making nominations -- using irregular channels -- I referred them to the state representatives. We had hundreds of names, and I had notes on lots of them." He added he had given Towers pages from "my own notebook," when the bio sheets were retrieved.

The North Carolina attorney said "in some cases" he did "call and check out the information I got, but usually I worked through the channels."

Towers "was not unique" in having some of his nominations replaced, Knott said: "It was not unusual for someone from another state to make recommendations for states other than their own. I had a recommendation I made defeated."

He said of the "knocking off" of two of Towers' nominations: "One of them was his wife, and the nomination from the floor knocked off the other. I don't think there was any ruthlessness about it. If he hadn't come up with those three ineligible people, there wouldn't have been any problem at all."

After Towers' charges were made public, the Standard asked Harris for comment: "I am just sorry that it has come down to this; that they would not let him (Towers) stand on his own without having to assume that my putting him on the committee was with any intent or intention of orchestrating anything.

"I put him on because I knew him to be a conservative, loyal Southern Baptist and never once met with him or talked with him about his nominations."

Harris, pastor of First Baptist Church of Castle Hills in San Antonio, was appointed to the 1987 Committee on Committees by SBC President Adrian P. Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn.

Under SBC bylaws, the sitting president appoints the Committee on Committees, which has as its primary function the nominating of the Committee on Nominations, formerly called the Committee on Boards. The nominating committee reports to the subsequent annual meeting nominations of people to serve as trustees of the 20 national agencies of the SBC.

High Court Hears Arguments
In Dispute Over Teen-Sex Law

By Stan Haste

N-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--Advocates and foes of a federal law that funds church-related and other organizations to fight premarital sex and abortion for teen-agers took their arguments over whether the law violates the Constitution's ban on an establishment of religion to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The case -- one of the current term's key church-state disputes -- pits the competing interests of organizations opposed to public money for sectarian teaching against those of groups contending teen-age pregnancy cannot be combated without church participation backed by federal funding.

At issue in the case is the 1981 Adolescent Family Life Act -- sometimes called the "teen chastity act" -- providing federal funds "to promote self discipline and other prudent approaches to the problem of adolescent premarital sexual relations, including adolescent pregnancy" and to encourage adoption as an option to abortion.

In addition, the law specifies these goals are "best approached through a variety of integrated and essential services provided ... by other family members, religious and charitable organizations, voluntary associations and other groups in the private sector," as well as those provided by government itself. Accordingly, the law requires all recipients of funds under the law to seek out active participation by churches and other religious organizations in all programs.

Administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, the law annually awards grants totaling \$10 million, including many grants to religious organizations. The law specifically forbids any funds to groups that provide abortion counseling or referral.

Challenged on First Amendment grounds by the American Civil Liberties Union in 1983, the law was struck down last year by U.S. District Court Judge Charles R. Richey, who ruled the law violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment in that it "has the primary effect of advancing religion and fosters excessive entanglement between government and religion."

U.S. Solicitor General Charles Fried, the government's top lawyer, told the Supreme Court Richey was wrong.

Although he acknowledged instances of improper religious indoctrination in the program, Fried argued the lower court went too far by striking down the statute itself. The law is not "pervasively sectarian," Fried said and is consistent with a principle of church-state partnership that runs "throughout our history."

Fried insisted "there is no reason" for courts to conclude "that churches are pervasively sectarian" in carrying out the provisions of the challenged law, adding the lower court set forth "a novel and very dangerous proposition" that religious groups may not act upon their religious convictions with support from government.

In the government's view, Fried concluded, "the statute is plainly constitutional on its face."

An attorney for United Families of America -- a second party in the dispute -- also defended the law and asked the justices to uphold it.

Michael W. McConnell of Chicago said the question before the court is whether "otherwise qualified" organizations "may be excluded solely because they are religious." To do so, he argued, would deny the constitutionally guaranteed right of free exercise of religion.

Asked by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor if his free exercise argument would extend to funding of parochial schools under the law's provisions, McConnell first hesitated, then answered in the affirmative. "It is the conduct of grantees, not their beliefs," he said, that should determine whether religious organizations receive the funds.

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The Chicago attorney told the justices they had to answer the question, "Does the program, taken as a whole, favor religion over non-religion or non-religion over religion?"

On the other side, ACLU attorney Janet Benshoof pointed to 1,215 "undisputed material facts" showing violations of the law by participating religious organizations. Among the most noteworthy of these, she said, were instances when young people were told that "condoms cause birth defects" and young women were admonished to "pretend that Jesus was their date."

Benshoof compared the challenged law to Patrick Henry's bill in the colonial Virginia legislature to pay the salaries of Christian ministers in order to ensure Christian morality in the commonwealth. Henry's bill was opposed by James Madison, "father" of the U.S. Constitution, who penned his "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments" in response. Madison's arguments were instrumental in adoption by the first Congress of the First Amendment's religion clauses.

Among friend-of-the-court parties in the case is the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which in February filed a brief asking the high court to uphold the lower ruling that struck down the law. Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel Oliver S. Thomas told the court programs such as the one mandated in the Adolescent Family Life Act are "constitutionally impermissible."

"While we commend Congress for combating teen pregnancy, this daring attempt to use religious education to accomplish the secular goals of government must not be allowed," Thomas wrote. "The record in this case is dramatic evidence of the insurmountable constitutional problems created by a grant program that pays religious organizations to teach sexual morality. While we commend these and other religious organizations for aggressively combating sexual promiscuity and teen pregnancy, their efforts necessarily involve the promotion of religion."

Churches are free to teach sexual morality from a religious perspective, Thomas told the court, but not with government money.

A decision in the case is expected by the conclusion of the current term in late June or early July.

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Gay Activists Threaten Church
When Orchestra Member Ousted

By Orville Scott

N-TEXAS
Baptist Press
3/31/88

DALLAS (BP)--Second Baptist Church of Houston became embroiled in a controversy with Gay Rights activists after a hired orchestra member with tuberculosis and AIDS was asked not to perform in a Palm Sunday service at the church.

Gay activists said they hoped to have from 75 to 200 AIDS patients in the church's Easter services, as one said, "Just to see how Christian Second Baptist will be."

The controversy revolves around a member of a union orchestra hired by the church several months ago, said Second Minister of Music Gary Moore.

"We discovered he had tuberculosis -- we didn't know he had AIDS also -- and felt we should not take the risk of infecting other people with tuberculosis," said Moore. "We told him we would pay him for his services without his performing and would wish him well."

Most of the other union players walked out in support of the orchestra member, said Moore.

Then the union orchestra members announced the man had AIDS and they would make an issue of it, Moore added.

In preparation for the attendance of AIDS patients, Moore said church leaders planned to have people available to host the visitors in the church's 5,000-seat sanctuary, part of \$34 million in facilities dedicated by Second Church on its 28-acre site nearly two years ago.

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