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89-31

'Performance-oriented' guides
hold budget to \$134.8 million

By Marv Knox

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--Operating under new "performance-oriented" guidelines, the Southern Baptist Executive Committee has proposed a 2.05 percent decrease for the convention's next budget.

The new guidelines link Cooperative Program budget goals to previous receipts. Consequently, the 1989-90 goal has a ceiling of \$134,787,543, the amount received during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, 1988.

The current Cooperative Program basic budget, set according to "goal-oriented" procedures, has a \$137.6 million target. Following the same budget-setting procedure, Southern Baptists have not met the overall Cooperative Program budget for most of this decade, have built a backlog of capital needs commitments and have fallen below the pace of inflation.

The Executive Committee approved new budgeting procedures and the 1989-90 Cooperative Program goal during its Feb. 20-22 meeting in Nashville. Both actions are subject to approval by messengers to the convention's annual business session June 13-15 in Las Vegas, Nev.

The proposed Cooperative Program budgeting procedure has two parts:

First, it mandates that the goal for the Cooperative Program's "basic budget" -- operating funds distributed to 18 convention organizations, which conduct evangelistic, missionary, educational and church-starting ministries worldwide -- be "no greater than the Cooperative Program receipts for the last fiscal year of record."

For example, the goal for the 1989-90 budget, which begins Oct. 1, could not be larger than receipts for the 1987-88 budget.

Second, it directs that from 1990-91 forward all Cooperative Program income received in excess of its basic budget be distributed equally between its "program advance" and "capital needs" budgets.

To illustrate, suppose the Cooperative Program received \$2 million more than its basic budget goal. Of that excess, the program advance budget would distribute \$1 million to the 18 recipients according to the percentages by which they received the basic budget. The capital needs budget would distribute \$1 million between previously approved building projects for various SBC organizations.

The new budgeting procedure was initiated in January by the SBC Inter-Agency Council, comprised of the executives of convention entities. The IAC proposed the measure as part of a comprehensive plan to ease the SBC's growing capital needs deficit. The new procedure was designed to enable Cooperative Program recipients to set their budgets more accurately and to allow the convention to pay off its capital needs commitments.

The Executive Committee's program and budget subcommittee approved the new procedure during its meeting Jan. 18-20. The subcommittee ratified the final language of the proposal without debate Feb. 21, and the full Executive Committee approved the proposal without discussion later that day.

The budgeting procedure will benefit the convention, predicted William F. Harrell, chairman of the program and budget subcommittee.

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"It's good economic procedure to have your budget based on past performance," said Harrell, pastor of Abilene Baptist Church in Martinez, Ga. "Goal-oriented budgets have not worked. Common sense indicates we need to go to a procedure that will work."

"We will let the people of the Southern Baptist Convention set the goal by demonstrating good stewardship year to year. The more we give one year, the greater our budget can be later."

The procedure puts the responsibility for the convention's financial future where it should be, he added: "We do not have a committee establishing goals that are unattainable. The challenge shifts to the people, not a committee."

Although the process has not yet been approved by the convention, the Executive Committee's proposed 1989-90 budget abides by its restrictions. The 2.05 percent decrease is borne by 15 of the 18 recipients.

Agencies with proposed gains are Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., \$193,109, part of the first installment of a five-year, \$1 million special allocation to provide endowment for faculty-staff housing allowances; the Christian Life Commission, \$37,358 to help establish an office in Washington; and the Stewardship Commission, \$19,895 to help promote the SBC's Planned Growth in Giving campaign.

With most SBC entities expected to take budget cuts, the proposed 1989-90 budget is even tighter than its initial goal, set by the Executive Committee last fall. The committee then proposed a zero-growth \$137.6 million basic budget goal, the same as the current budget's.

Committee Chairman Charles W. Sullivan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tenn., urged Southern Baptists to pray for the SBC's unified budget: "I would encourage all of the churches of our convention to earnestly pray for and study how they can increase their contributions and support of the Cooperative Program. This is tremendously important in light of the great needs which we have with our foreign missions program and our home missions program."

Presidents of the SBC Foreign and Home mission boards echoed Sullivan.

"Unless something happens to change the trend, and we cannot send the missionaries who want to go and have to draw back on the work that we're already trying to do, these will be the worst of times in Southern Baptist history," said R. Keith Parks of the Foreign Mission Board.

"The Cooperative Program is not just a budget line," said the Home Mission Board's Larry Lewis. "It is the lifeline of our mission work, not only in America, but around the world."

Observers noted the new budgeting procedure should help the mission boards because of its mandate to divide receipts over the basic budget 50-50 between the capital needs and program advance budgets.

The FMB does not receive capital funds through the budget, and the HMB receives a limited amount. But together they get the lion's share of all other national Cooperative Program receipts -- 50 percent for the FMB and 19.54 percent for the HMB.

Previously, all capital needs have had to be funded -- a feat not accomplished recently -- before the mission boards could receive advance budget funds. Now they are to get in on the over-and-above money immediately after the basic budget is met. That benchmark should be easier to reach, since it is tied to past receipts instead of future goals.

Capital needs also were the focus of two other Executive Committee actions.

First, it made the debt on the four-year-old SBC Building in Nashville a "priority item" for the 1989-90 budget. The building is home to eight SBC entities and is the only convention-approved capital expenditure for which funds already have been borrowed.

The \$2.5 million initiative was proposed by the Inter-Agency Council. The SBC Sunday School Board, which does not receive Cooperative Program funds, has agreed to provide \$400,000. The balance will be paid in 12 monthly installments, off the top of Cooperative Program receipts.

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Program and budget subcommittee Chairman Harrell said the up-front effort to pay off the building debt makes economic sense: "This is the only thing we have borrowed money against with the promise of funds coming from the capital needs budget. We are spinning our wheels paying interest when we could eliminate the debt. It is a roadblock to any other capital needs."

Second, the Executive Committee voted to "reschedule" unfunded capital needs -- which were to have been paid during 1985-90 -- over a 10-year period, 1990-2000.

Those capital needs total more than \$22.9 million and are divided between the six SBC seminaries, the Home Mission Board and the Radio and Television Commission. Receipts are to be distributed annually on a prorata basis.

The rescheduling plan also was offered by the Inter-Agency Council. It is necessary because the SBC has been "falling more and more behind, getting in debt to ourselves," Harrell said.

The promised capital needs money has not been spent, he said, but added: "We are doing this to maintain the integrity of the process. If we did not honor these commitments, we would damage our credibility with foundations that provide matching funds. We would never get matching funds again."

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Executive Committee approves
Religious Liberty Commission

By Dan Martin

N-10

Baptist Press
2/24/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Creation of a new Religious Liberty Commission has been approved by the Southern Baptist Executive Committee on a 42-27 secret ballot vote.

The vote came during the Feb. 20-22 meeting of the 76-member Executive Committee after a seven-member study committee recommended creating the new entity as "an alternative to accomplish the program and funding" of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The action, however, specifies that the SBC "would continue its relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs through the Religious Liberty Commission."

In order to create a new entity, messengers to two consecutive SBC annual meetings will be required to approve the action by majority votes. Thus, messengers to both the 1989 annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., and the 1990 annual meeting in New Orleans must give their assent.

Members of the Executive Committee approved a package that includes the recommendation to create the new agency, along with a charter, program statement and preliminary bylaws.

Under the proposal, messengers to the Las Vegas convention will be asked to approve creation of the new entity. Then, messengers to the New Orleans annual meeting will be asked to vote on the matter again, and also ballot on a charter, program statement, funding, and election of 27 trustees to the new organization.

New Orleans messengers also will be asked to dissolve the 18-member Public Affairs Committee, a standing committee through which the SBC relates to the BJCPA.

All of the votes to create and organize the new commission will be simple majorities; only the vote to dissolve the PAC will require a two-thirds majority.

Members of the Executive Committee -- and messengers to the annual meetings -- were presented the total package "in order to give them a total view" of the scope and work of the new entity.

"We are providing the total package in order not to ask messengers to vote without having all of the information," said Harold C. Bennett, president of the Executive Committee.

The recommendation is the latest action in the stormy relationship between the SBC and the BJCPA. In recent years, three special committees appointed by the Executive Committee have looked into the relationship between Southern Baptists and the BJCPA, a religious liberty watchdog comprised of nine Baptist bodies in the United States and Canada.

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The BJCPA and its executive director, James M. Dunn, have been under fire from convention conservatives who charge the BJCPA is unresponsive to the wishes of Southern Baptists and is unaccountable to the SBC because it has only a third of the trustees while providing the majority of the funding. In recent years, the BJCPA has narrowly survived efforts to defund or withdraw the SBC from participation.

The action of the study committee that recommended creation of the new entity also is controversial, as Dunn protested not being invited to participate in the deliberations that resulted in the recommendation.

Dunn said he was not asked to provide input until the study committee met Monday, Feb. 20, and called the process that resulted in the recommendation "shabby, unfair, unethical and improper."

After the Executive Committee approved the recommendation, Dunn told Baptist Press, "The question before us is not whether Southern Baptists support the witness of the Baptist Joint Committee, but how they will sustain it."

He referred to action by state conventions to provide direct support to the BJCPA if the relationship or funding is significantly altered. He also noted a number of churches, as well as the moderate Southern Baptist Alliance, have pledged to support the organization if the relationship with the SBC is changed.

"The track record of BJC accomplishments, the tangible dollar savings to missions causes, the consistent witness to religious liberty cry out against this short-sighted and divisive action by the Executive Committee," he added.

"The BJC will continue its work outspokenly and specifically. The BJC stands more than ever for witness with the whole family of Baptists, African-American and all the rest.

"The BJC will not compromise historic Baptist convictions for a mess of politically-tainted pottage."

The recommendation to create the new entity involved action by all three of the Executive Committee's three subcommittees, and featured nearly an hour and a half of debate before the final vote.

It had been initiated in the committees's business and finance subcommittee in September 1988. Subcommittee chairman David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Lake Charles, La., appointed the committee to develop the alternate to continuing in direct relationship with the BJC.

At the time, Hankins told Baptist Press the committee "was to prepare should the Southern Baptist Convention want to do something different (than continue its direct relationship with the BJC). He added at the February meeting the recommendation is proposed as an alternate, and said the messengers "have two opportunities to vote it down."

During plenary session discussion, Executive Committee members questioned whether the body was acting properly in proposing an action.

Ann Smith, a homemaker from Greensboro, N.C., said: "It seems to me we have gotten the horse and the cart in the wrong places. It seems to me this Executive Committee should act in response to what the convention dictates and not anticipate it."

Sunnye Jones, a homemaker from Baton Rouge, La., said: "I do not feel we can continue to ignore the mandate of the Southern Baptist Convention. For four years in a row, the BJC has been supported by convention vote. We had better listen."

Member Ed Drake, an attorney from Dallas, agreed that "four times the issue has been submitted to the SBC," but pointed out the minority vote was from 48 to 49.4 percent. "Those people said they were dissatisfied with the way things were going ... dissatisfied with the interpretation of the First Amendment."

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Two efforts to modify the proposal were defeated.

James Morton, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Livermore, Calif., attempted to slow down the process, and to give messengers in Las Vegas an opportunity to express their opinion on whether they wanted to change the relationship. The effort lost 50-8.

Frank Ingraham, a Nashville attorney, proposed that the BJC relate to the SBC through the new commission, but that convention approved funding be channeled through the Executive Committee. That effort failed 40-19.

During discussion, R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said he believes creation of the new entity will be divisive and "is not a wise thing to do." He cited the cost to missions, the reduction in influence in Washington and the perception that we are not willing to cooperate, even with other Baptists."

As for the reduction of influence in the nation's capital, Parks commented: "We think Southern Baptists are pretty big stuff, but I don't think people in Washington share that impression."

He pointed out the SBC "is in a terrible budget crunch and everybody says the Cooperative Program (the SBC unified budget) is in terrible shape, plateaued at best and declining at worse." He then questioned the wisdom of establishing a new agency that will cost from \$500,000 to \$750,000 when the cost will be borne by missions agencies. "Half of it will come from foreign missions and 20 percent from home missions," he said.

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Baptist Joint Committee
survives budget attacks

By Marv Knox

N-10

Baptist Press
2/24/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs survived four attacks on its budget during the Feb. 20-22 meeting of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee in Nashville.

The Baptist Joint Committee is a Washington-based coalition of nine Baptist conventions. It focuses on the twin First Amendment issues of religious liberty and church-state relations.

The BJC has been criticized by Southern Baptist Convention conservatives for being too liberal, especially in its positions on school prayer and abortion. They also have said the BJC has failed to be accountable to the SBC, which provides most of the committee's funds.

BJC staff and supporters have countered that the organization has represented Baptists' historic stand on separation of church and state and thus was correct in not endorsing the school prayer amendment. They have said that the BJC's program assignment prohibits it from being involved in the abortion debate, which is not a religious liberty matter. And they have said the the BJC is accountable to its full 54-member board, on which the SBC has 18 seats.

During the past three years, the SBC Executive Committee has created three special committees to study the convention's relationship to and/or funding of the BJC.

The most recent committee reported to the Executive Committee at its February meeting. The committee suggested that the SBC create a new Religious Liberty Commission, which will represent the SBC in Washington and through which the SBC will fund and relate to the BJC. The Executive Committee approved that proposal and will present it to messengers to the SBC annual meeting this summer. Creation requires approval by messengers to two successive SBC annual meetings.

In the meantime, the SBC must decide how much support it will give to the BJC.

At its Jan. 18-20 meeting, the Executive Committee's program and budget subcommittee voted to recommend that the BJC take the same 2.05 percent budget cut to be incurred by most SBC entities. That would drop its allocation from the current \$400,000 to \$391,796.

But when the subcommittee reconvened during the full Executive Committee meeting, it entertained a motion to escrow the SBC's contribution to the BJC "until such time as they give accountability for the funds we provide."

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Supporters of the motion cited the accountability issue, noting Southern Baptist members of the BJC had been denied items a majority of them requested, such as staff expense accounts, correspondence and personal interviews. They also cited displeasure with BJC Executive Director James M. Dunn, particularly "inflammatory" comments he made in a Houston Chronicle article.

Opponents of the motion cited successful BJC support of SBC causes, such as problems with taxes levied on missionaries overseas and legal counsel for churches and agencies embroiled in disputes with the government. Opponents also cited the process already underway to start the Religious Liberty Commission and warned cuts in BJC funds would jeopardize the initiative.

The subcommittee then considered a substitute motion calling for the SBC to shift its First Amendment assignment to the convention's Christian Life Commission. It proposed that 1989-90 BJC funds be allocated to the CLC, that the CLC maintain the convention's relationship to the BJC and that the new CLC assignment be funded "from the present allocation to the BJC."

Supporters of the new proposal cited the cost advantage of expanding the CLC's program assignment, as opposed to creating a new First Amendment agency. They also expressed confidence that the CLC would handle First Amendment issues more to their liking than the BJC has done. Some said the CLC assignment could be an interim measure until the Religious Liberty Commission could be started in 1990.

Others expressed concern about making a major budgetary change while the Religious Liberty Commission is being considered. They said the proposal presented bylaw, charter and procedural questions that it did not answer. Specifically, they noted that the proposal made no provision for the future of the SBC Public Affairs Committee, the 18-member group that represents the SBC on the BJC and is assigned to represent the convention on First Amendment issues.

The subcommittee passed the CLC motion, 15-6. However, members continued discussing the technical and procedural problems of implementing the motion if it were to pass the full Executive Committee. Then they voted unanimously to rescind their vote.

Next they considered a motion to reduce the BJC's allocation from the proposed \$391,796 to \$50,000. The motion split the difference between the CLC and the Public Affairs Committee. It proposed raising the CLC allocation from \$897,508 to \$1,191,304, a 38.5 percent increase over its current \$860,150 budget. It proposed increasing the PAC allocation from \$23,704 to \$71,704, a 196.29 percent gain over the current \$24,200 budget.

Opponents expressed concern about moving more than \$300,000 around within the overall budget without providing additional support for other convention entities, such as the mission boards and seminaries. Supporters countered that the transferred funds all could continue to be used on First Amendment issues.

The subcommittee approved the proposal 16-6 and offered it to the Executive Committee.

But when the Executive Committee considered the full budget, subcommittee member Frank Lady moved to restore the three affected allocations to their original amounts: \$391,796 for the BJC, \$23,704 for the PAC and \$897,508 for the CLC.

"I voted for the establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission. We're going in the basic right direction," said Lady, an attorney from Jonesboro, Ark.

"The effect of the (subcommittee's) change will absolutely destroy the budget of the Baptist Joint Committee," he said, noting he understood complaints against the BJC but urging fellow committee members to "recognize all the good things the Baptist Joint Committee has done."

Lady's motion was opposed by Jimmy Jackson, pastor of Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala. He protested that state Baptist conventions were sending contributions directly to the BJC and also criticized the BJC's accountability to Southern Baptists. "It's irrational to add to those (BJC-designated) funds when we don't know how much is going in," he said.

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David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., warned that a reduction in the BJC budget could hurt the Religious Liberty Commission proposal, "if people perceive this committee is more interested in punishing the Baptist Joint Committee than creating the Religious Liberty Commission."

The SBC needs a "referendum on how to do religious liberty work," with a clear choice between the Religious Liberty Commission and the BJC, he said.

Paul Pressler, a Houston judge, echoed Jackson. "I support the Cooperative Program fully and don't want anything that is going to break the Cooperative Program," he said, noting state convention and church designations to the BJC imperil the cooperative spirit of the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget. A failure to restrict the BJC's allocation would mean the convention is "rewarding these efforts to break the Cooperative Program," he said.

Pressler offered an amendment that would give \$71,704 to the PAC, \$241,000 to the BJC and \$1,000,304 to the CLC. He described his proposal as a compromise that would give the PAC money to operate, help the CLC with its Washington office and prevent the BJC "from profiting for breaking the Cooperative Program."

Responding to criticisms of the BJC's lack of responsibility, Dunn said six state conventions had "voted in various ways" to support the BJC, but that only Texas, Virginia and North Carolina had sent money. Several churches are considering support, and the moderate Southern Baptist Alliance gives money, he said, adding he would supply all donation information "except the names of anonymous donors."

Pressler's motion failed on a secret-ballot vote, 34-35. Lady's motion passed by secret ballot, 39-30.

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Resolution criticizes
Bill Moyers, TV series

By Dan Martin

N-10
Baptist Press
2/24/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--A three-part public television series, produced by Bill Moyers and shown on the Public Broadcasting Service, was criticized in a resolution adopted during the Feb. 20-22 meeting of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

Committee member Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge and one of the architects of the conservative movement in the SBC, introduced a resolution that expressed "concern about the biased content of the Bill Moyers special series, 'God and Politics,'" and the "use of federal tax dollars to support one faction in the Southern Baptist Convention controversy through the use of the Public Broadcasting System." (sic)

Pressler's resolution said:

"That the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention expresses concern about the biased content of the Bill Moyers special series, 'God and Politics,' and directs its officers and encourages individuals to express their personal concerns about it to its sponsors and to Public Broadcasting System concerning the timing of the showing of 'Battle for the Bible' and the use of federal tax dollars to support one faction in the Southern Baptist Convention controversy through the use of the Public Broadcasting System."

The resolution replaced a recommendation from the Executive Committee's public relations workgroup that "the Executive Committee ... encourage individuals to express personal concerns about the Bill Moyers special series, 'God and Politics,' especially 'The Battle for the Bible' to sponsors and to PBS concerning the timing of the showing and recommends that no further action be taken by the Executive Committee at this time."

Pressler's substitute was adopted 40-14.

Moyers, a former Southern Baptist, produced the three-part series on conservative religion and secular politics in the spring of 1988. One segment, "The Battle for the Bible," focused on the decade-long controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention.

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The segment on Southern Baptists was shown in North Carolina just prior to the 1988 annual meeting of the SBC in San Antonio, Texas and on a local San Antonio public broadcasting station on the Saturday night prior to the annual meeting.

Pressler, who was interviewed in the special, charged the presentation was prejudiced and that Moyers had manipulated questions in the presentation.

After presenting his substitute resolution, Pressler said:

"Let me give you an illustration of how bad the program was. Bill Moyers came to interview me with one camera. And all the shots that were taken of his asking questions were taken full face of me and over his shoulder. After I left, his staff remained and recorded him asking new questions front face of him. So, as you watch the program, all the photographs that showed him asking questions front full face were ones that were taken after I had gone.

"There were new questions which were then inserted before my answers. Now, they were somewhat similar questions, but there are certain nuances in questions and there are nuances in the manner of which you answer questions, so that you are directly responsive to the questions that are asked.

"And, brother, it is not fair, to have a television program that then changes the questions that are asked of the person and you appear like you are answering questions that were never asked."

Pressler urged the 76-member Executive Committee: "I think we as a Southern Baptist Executive Committee ought to say, 'This isn't fair. This isn't right.' Please, make such an expression today."

He charged the commentary is prejudiced and cited quotations from a brochure produced by a group calling itself "Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention," and mailed to 34,000 pastors in advance of the 1988 annual meeting.

"This brochure has 13 pages of quotations. On five of these 13 pages, there are quotations from the Bill Moyers program," Pressler said. He read one quote from W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and a former president of the SBC, claiming its phrasing showed prejudice against Criswell and conservatives.

Pressler read the quote: "This is Bill Moyers: 'Early in his ministry, Criswell published a list of professors he said were interpreting the Bible in the light of new historical research and turning his Southern Baptist schools into infidel institutions. He called for their expulsion. Then, 10 years ago, Criswell's ideas about the Bible became the platform for organized political campaigns to take over the denomination and purify it.'"

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," Pressler told the Executive Committee, "if you cannot see prejudice in that commentary ... I don't think you understand journalism."

He continued his criticism by noting the Moyers show had been "touted twice in Baptist Press (the denomination's news service) before it came on. It was made with a grant from a public corporation. It was then shown on public television which is supported by public tax dollars.

"I certainly think that this is something that the Baptist Joint Committee should be concerned about because it is the interference of federal tax dollars intruding into an intra-denominational controversy.

"We have not done anything about it. And I think our failure to do something about it condones it."

The Houstonian also warned committee members that "if we do not express ourselves on this, we are inviting ... a repeat of what happened last year to be made prior to the Las Vegas convention, "the 1989 annual meeting of the SBC, June 13-15, in Las Vegas, Nev."

During discussion on Pressler's substitute resolution, one Executive Committee member spoke against the action.

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Terry Davis, pastor of Ocean City Baptist Church in Ocean City, Md., said: "It used to be you could just be Southern Baptist. I have tried very hard not to become part of any coalition -- conservative, moderate, liberal.

"I appreciate the judge's (Pressler's) concerns in some of the things that have happened to him in this, but I do not appreciate being put on the Executive Committee and then being forced to take a stand with one party or the other when our duty, I believe, is to represent all Southern Baptists and not take sides on one side of the issue or the other."

Davis added: "They told me when I came on (the Executive Committee) that I would have to take sides, but I don't want to take sides. I don't want to have to make this kind of decision. I can live with the first (original) recommendation; I can't live with the second (Pressler's)."

Three other members supported Pressler's substitute recommendation.

Eldridge Miller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Sallisaw, Okla., claimed the Moyers series "is still alive and PBS is going to rerun it." He encouraged the committee to "express our opposition to the fact that Bill Moyers ... and PBS were taking sides publicly ... and using tax funds to do it."

Guy S. Sanders III, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lake Wales, Fla., said, "PBS and National Public Radio and other such organizations are notorious for dealing with one set of facts," and added: "Something should be said. Certainly what we do may have very little effect, but I think it ought to be said."

William F. Harrell, pastor of Abilene Baptist Church in Martinez, Ga., said if the government in any way infringed on churches "we'd jump up and down and scream. I think we are dealing with a similar fact.

"I am centered on the root of the issue and that is that we need to make a statement that we do not feel like Public Broadcasting ought to get involved in our church relationships."

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Moyers challenges
committee action

By Dan Martin

N-10
Baptist Press
2/24/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Bill Moyers, producer of a public television series on religion and secular politics, has challenged a recommendation adopted Feb. 22 by the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

The committee adopted a recommendation proposed by Houston judge Paul Pressler expressing concern about the "biased content" of the series, particularly the middle section, "The Battle for the Bible" which deals with the decade-long controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Pressler's recommendation also expresses concern about the timing of the showings of the series and the use of "federal tax dollars to support one faction" in the SBC.

During discussion of the matter, Pressler claimed Moyers showed prejudice in his presentation of material on the shows and changed questions posed to Pressler during a televised interview.

In a response to Baptist Press, Moyers said, "Paul Pressler is not telling the truth."

He recounted the interview with Pressler and said: "As I began to ask him questions about his ties to right-wing politics and the beer man Joseph Coors, he grew angry and flushed in the face, abruptly stood up, tore off his microphone, announced the interview was over and left the room in a huff, all of which we filmed but did not use in the commentary.

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"His unexpected departure meant that he was not present when, as is customary, we reversed the single camera and repeated the questions which my producer had taken down as the interview progressed. But the content of the questions was unchanged.

"For one thing, as a matter of professional practice, I do not treat my guests unfairly; one would not survive in journalism and do so. For another thing, we understood at the time that Mr. Pressler was recording the interview and would have his own transcript; I may have fallen from grace in his sight, but I have not taken leave of my senses."

Moyers told Baptist Press he sent a telegram Feb. 24, to Pressler, with a copy to Executive Committee Chairman Charles Sullivan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tenn.

The telegram to Pressler reads: "In light of your spurious accusations to the Executive Committee, we intend to repeat 'The Battle for the Bible,' on Sunday, May 21 so viewers can once more judge it for themselves.

"In the meantime, I respectfully request that you arrange for both of us to appear before the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in June in Las Vegas to compare notes, take questions and discuss these matters in a Christian manner."

Moyers told Baptist Press the quote regarding W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, was a direct quote from the former president of the SBC, taken from an article printed in the Dallas Morning News.

He added he had produced the series for the Public Broadcasting Service through his independent production company, Public Affairs Television Inc. and that major funding had come from Chevron Corp.

"We did get some grants from different places and got some funding from the challenge fund of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. There is a system set up so that any CPB (which is funded by the federal government) funds cannot be used by anyone to affect editorial content," Moyers said.

The production of the three-part series took "six to eight months," Moyers said. "We tried to be scrupulously fair and with the single exception of Paul Pressler, the comments we have received from all sides have underlined that fairness."

On other matters, Barry Chase, vice president of news and public affairs programming for PBS in Arlington, Va., explained the timing of the series, the use of federal dollars and charges that PBS interfered in internal affairs of the SBC.

Chase said the timing of the series "was done without any knowledge of the convention meeting. I am unaware that anyone in our department would have known how these broadcasts would dovetail with the SBC."

He added the unawareness "does not mean that had we known (when the convention was scheduled) we would not have chosen to use that as a good news peg. But, as a matter of fact, that was not done."

PBS officials said the decision to air the series was made in mid-summer 1987. It was distributed to member stations in December 1987 and was redistributed in August 1988.

Decisions to air the program in May in North Carolina and on the Saturday just before the 1988 annual meeting by a San Antonio, Texas, station "were local decisions," Chase added.

Stu Kantor, a spokesman for PBS, said PBS "is a private, non-profit membership corporation which has three main sources of funding: member contributions, which make up about 85 percent of the budget; "some self supporting services," which account for 10 to 12 percent; and CPB funds, which "average 2 or 3 percent a year."

Chase said "about 75-cents a year per person finds its way (from the government) to public television."

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"Legally speaking, we receive no federal dollars," he said, and added he rejects the implication that public television "cannot be free to explore topics producers feel deeply about, or broadcast programs that somebody might disagree with simply because you can trace a few dollars back to the federal treasury."

Chase noted many efforts have been made to keep public television independent, and said he "would not accept for a minute" the assertion programs critical of people in government, or with which some people might take offense should not be aired. "If we lose our ability to operate independently," he said, "we would become a domestic version of the USIA (US Information Agency) or a government broadcasting service. I do not believe most Americans would want to have that."

He paralleled Moyers' series to PBS broadcasts of conservative leader William F. Buckley.

"Just as we would not want to remove what Bill Buckley does and the flavor and spice put in by his personality and political leanings, so we wouldn't dream of curbing those same things from a different viewpoint that Bill Moyers brings to a broadcast," Chase said.

"It is clear Bill (Moyers) is giving you the conclusions he has drawn, just as Bill Buckley is giving you his. They explore the phenomena they care most deeply about. Bill Moyers is not merely a cipher for two sides of an argument, and that comes through very forthrightly.

"In Bill's case, these weren't quite straight reporting; they were essays based on reporting. We feel they were valuable. They may have interfered or affected the SBC, but that was not at the core (of why PBS did them). We did them for a general audience.

"But the fact they (the shows) may have had an impact (on the SBC) is not something that would have scared us off from doing them either," he added.