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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 5, 1990

90-17

January remains 'typical'  
for Cooperative Program

**NASHVILLE (BP)**--January maintained its typical best-month-of-the-year status for the Southern Baptist Convention's unified budget.

The Cooperative Program received \$14,580,510 in January, announced Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee.

That makes January 1990 the third-best month in the Cooperative Program's 65-year history. January 1988 tops the list, with more than \$15.5 million, followed by January 1989, with almost \$15.1 million. In fact, five of the budget's six best monthly totals have been set in January.

"Generally speaking, January is a good Cooperative Program month," Bennett said. "Perhaps this is due to the fact that gifts to the churches are often greater in December. Then the state conventions send Cooperative Program funds to the Southern Baptist Convention in January.

"All of us are grateful for those faithful Baptists who give to their churches and the churches to world missions through the Cooperative Program.

"However, I must express concern that mission funds are not increasing at a greater rate. As Baptists, our main task is missions. My prayer is that God will help us remain faithful."

The latest January receipts bring the budget's year-to-date total to \$47,722,201 after four months of its October-through-September fiscal year, Bennett reported.

That amount is \$480,060, or 1.02 percent, more than the Cooperative Program received during the first four months of the 1988-89 fiscal year, he said. The U.S. inflation rate currently is about 4.5 percent.

The Cooperative Program's basic operating budget goal is \$134,787,543. This year's Cooperative Program also includes a \$2.5 million capital needs priority item, designed to pay off the debt on the SBC Building in Nashville, which is five years old this month.

Cooperative Program monthly receipts must average \$11.2 million for the balance of the fiscal year for it to reach the overall goal. The program has eclipsed that mark 15 times in the past 24 months.

The Cooperative Program helps support 18 SBC organizations that conduct evangelistic, missionary and educational ministries worldwide. It is funded by contributions from individual Southern Baptists. Their gifts are processed through the budgets of local churches and state Baptist conventions before reaching the Executive Committee for distribution to the receiving organizations.

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Agency leaders want  
what convention wants

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press  
2/5/90

**NASHVILLE (BP)**--Executives of the two agencies most affected by the newest Southern Baptist Convention budget proposal say they want what the SBC wants.

The object of their desire is the convention's religious liberty voice in Washington.

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Richard D. Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, said the commission will abide by upcoming votes on whether to give the agency the authority to address religious liberty and to increase its budget by almost \$300,000.

But James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said Southern Baptists repeatedly have opposed reductions in his committee's budget and its right to speak for Southern Baptists on religious liberty.

The SBC's religious liberty dispute -- which has occupied most of the last decade -- should be settled by this summer, if events go according to schedule.

Briefly, here is what has happened and what is set to happen:

-- Conservative Southern Baptists have been at odds with the Baptist Joint Committee, saying the nine-denomination organization in Washington is too liberal for them.

Since 1984, the BJC has been the object of numerous Southern Baptist attempts to reduce its budget and has been examined by three special committees.

-- Some conservatives have wanted to create a Southern Baptist-only religious liberty agency in Washington. Others have supported an expansion of the budget and scope of the Christian Life commission, a Nashville-based moral concerns agency, to cover religious liberty.

-- Last month, the SBC Executive Committee's program and budget subcommittee proposed a 1990-91 allocation plan for the Cooperative Program, the convention's unified budget.

That proposal would reduce the BJC's allocation from the current \$391,796 to \$50,000. It would increase the CLC's allocation from \$897,508 to \$1,191,236. It also would hike the budget of the SBC Public Affairs Committee, through which the convention has representation on the BJC, from \$23,704 to \$96,600.

In a companion move, the subcommittee also approved a proposed change in the CLC program statement, which would allow the commission to "promote religious liberty in cooperation with the churches and other Southern Baptist entities." And the subcommittee approved five guidelines for the Public Affairs Committee that define the realm of its function and powers.

-- The full Executive Committee will meet in Nashville Feb. 19-21. The first two items of business will be changes in the assignment of the convention's religious liberty program and the Cooperative Program budget.

-- The Executive Committee's recommendations will be presented to messengers to the SBC annual meeting June 12-14 in New Orleans. The messengers ultimately will decide both the program assignment and budget issues.

The Christian Life Commission's Land stressed that his agency did not initiate the proposed changes. Dunn, meanwhile, called the proposals irresponsible.

"If the Executive Committee approves this, and if the convention approves it in June, we would take that to mean that the SBC wants us to take our new religious liberty assignment very seriously and that they want us to significantly enhance our Washington office," Land said. "If they don't approve it, we will continue to do what we are doing now.

"We want to do what the convention wants us to do, and we want to be responsible to the desires of the convention."

However, the proposals would allow the CLC to address religious liberty dimensions of moral concerns, Land said in a prepared statement presented at the program and budget subcommittee meeting. "These changes, if approved, would give the Christian Life Commission 'a' religious liberty responsibility, not 'the' religious liberty responsibility, in relation to the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

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In an interview, Land reiterated that the CLC did not solicit a religious liberty assignment. "The most important point I want to stress is that we have not been the initiator in any of this process and that we only want to do what the convention wants us to do," he said. "We did not initiate the proposed program change. We responded to a formal motion of the Executive Committee."

The CLC will not enter the debate over its budget, he said: "Anything we have to say about this issue between now and June is intended to be explanatory and not advocacy. We're going to do our very best to be strictly neutral."

The CLC's budget request asked for an increase of \$310,850, and it got \$293,728 of that. However, the request only asked for \$50,000 to expand its Washington office, with the remainder to be used for such needs as hunger relief, computer replacement, an increase in the frequency of its newsletter and basic price index adjustments.

If the proposed program change and budget are adopted, the CLC would need to adjust its budget accordingly, Land noted. "My commissioners and our staff clearly understand that the budget allocation and appropriation that has been proposed is one, if voted by the convention, that intends for the bulk of that money to be used to fulfill the expanded program assignment in the area of religious liberty and to significantly expand our Washington office in order to do that," he said.

The proposed changes will not necessitate a move of all CLC offices to Washington, he added. "The vast majority of what we have done and will continue to do is educational in nature, and that is best done in Nashville," he explained. "We have had some discussion about how we might structure a Washington office that had such important religious liberty implications. Two of our highest priorities would be an attorney with religious liberty experience and a news person."

The CLC would be able to balance its moral concerns and religious liberty portfolios, Land predicted. And the commission would continue to work with the Baptist Joint Committee and the Public Affairs Committee on common concerns, he added.

Dunn, however, charged that the proposals defy the expressed desires of Southern Baptists.

"The dealing with the Joint Committee and the Public Affairs Committee budgets is another manifestation of the irresponsibility of this present Executive Committee's failure to recognize what the convention has repeatedly affirmed -- its support for the Baptist Joint Committee," he said.

"Five times in the past six years the convention has refused to do what under background press rules (which limit the extent of news coverage) this program and budget subcommittee has attempted to do. The background rules conceal back-room politics. The tactics practiced under background rules cannot stand the white light of exposure."

The proposed changes are not good for Southern Baptists, he claimed: "This proposal is unwise. It is unproductive stewardship. It is unbaptistic polity. It is unresponsive to the convention. It is ineffective use of the Baptist witness to religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

"It is highly questionable whether Southern Baptists will suddenly and precipitously reverse themselves on what has been a united Baptist witness in Washington over the past 53 years."

Furthermore, a Southern Baptist-only presence in Washington will be counterproductive, Dunn said. "It champions self-sufficiency rather than jointness. That approach will be identified with the right-wing political agenda, such as an unwillingness to support the Civil Rights Restoration Act and the endorsement of Robert Bork for the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The policymakers in Washington, D.C., are not fooled or misled about whom this small group with a narrow agenda really speak for. The overwhelming majority of policymakers understand the voices of the Public Affairs Committee are not representative of Southern Baptists."

Public Affairs Committee Chairman Albert Lee Smith said the budget increase to his committee is vital to bolster its support for good government.

"My experience in Congress is that 60 percent of congressmen are in the mushy middle, and they tend to go with the flow," said Smith, an insurance executive from Birmingham, Ala., and former congressman. "You've got to have an inside strategy in Washington and a grassroots strategy, and it takes the two working together to be effective in bringing about good legislation and trying to prevent bad legislation.

"Our budget is to educate and motivate grassroots Southern Baptists and also communicate with members of Congress and their staffs. Most of the money is to be spent for newsletters -- four a year -- trying to keep them up to date and informed."

The Public Affairs Committee, Christian Life Commission and Baptist Joint Committee already have worked well together on common issues, such as pending child-care legislation, he said, predicting they can continue to cooperate.

The convention's strength should be used to support the cause of religious liberty, Smith said.

"Southern Baptists have 14.8 million members and are strategically located in southern and southwestern states to have a tremendous impact on legislation," he explained. "If we will make the effort to become informed on the issues and will communicate the concerns, not only to senators and congressmen but also to the administration, I feel we can have a profound effect for good on legislation in the United States."

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Conservatives considering  
SBC presidential candidates

By Toby Druin

Baptist Press  
2/5/90

DALLAS (BP)--The next conservative nominee for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention will be revealed in Jacksonville, Fla. Feb. 12, Fred Wolfe told the Baptist Standard, and the process of elimination indicates the choice might well be Wolfe himself.

Or John Bisagno. Or maybe Bisagno will nominate Wolfe. Or maybe it will be Morris Chapman.

Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala.; Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston; Edwin Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Houston; and Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Wichita Falls, Texas, were listed by current SBC President Jerry Vines recently as the men most often mentioned among conservatives as likely nominees at the SBC annual meeting in New Orleans June 12-14.

Vines named the four in an interview with Jim Jones, religion editor of the Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram during the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in late January.

The Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, contacted the four men by telephone to inquire about their intentions. All have been considered potential nominees in past years.

Although he did not say who was doing the considering, Wolfe said he, Chapman, Young and Bisagno were indeed under consideration and that the decision would be announced Feb. 12 at the Pastor's Conference sponsored by First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, where Vines is pastor. Many conservative leaders attend the annual school, which is in its seventh year.

Wolfe is scheduled to address the conference the evening of Feb. 12, following former SBC president Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn. Young is scheduled to speak the following night.

Asked to comment by the Baptist Standard, both Young and Chapman ruled out the possibility of their nomination for 1990, citing commitments to their local churches.

Young said, "Permitting my nomination for the president of the Southern Baptist Convention is not on my agenda."

Chapman said the possibility of his allowing his nomination has been mentioned to him, "but I have no word from the Lord that I should be nominated for president of the Southern Baptist Convention, as of now. I just don't have a sense of the Lord's leading me to be nominated, but I am appreciative that people have mentioned my name."

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Bisagno, contacted Jan. 31, said, "No comment," to the suggestion he might be the nominee, but also said the decision would be announced Feb. 12.

Asked if he might nominate Wolfe, Bisagno also said, "I have no comment on that."

Wolfe, told of Chapman's, Young's and Bisagno's remarks, said the SBC presidency had not been on many people's agendas before they were confronted with the possibility.

"Anything can happen," he said. "There is no question that I am being considered. There is no question John is being considered, and, to be honest with you, the door is not closed on Morris.

"I am being considered, but I am not going to say to you I am going to do it. I am going to pray about it along with John and Morris.

"I know one thing. A decision will be made by the 12th. At that time we will know who it is."

Wolfe, 52, has been pastor of the Mobile church for almost 18 years. He had been there seven years when he was called to the pastorate of First Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas, in December 1979. He resigned the Lubbock pastorate and returned to Mobile after only five months in Texas, and has remained at Cottage Hill Baptist Church since.

He has been president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference and currently is secretary of the SBC Executive Committee.

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Texas pastor announces  
for presidency of SBC

Baptist Press  
2/5/90

DALLAS (BP)--Saying he wants to try "to encourage people like myself in smaller membership churches," Pastor Dan Bates of 155-member Millican Baptist Church in Southeast Texas has announced he will be nominated for president at the Southern Baptist Convention June 12.

He may ask "an old friend from Missouri" to nominate him, Bates said, or he may just nominate himself as did evangelist Anis Shorrosh in San Antonio in 1988. Shorrosh got 81 votes out of the 31,291 cast.

Bates told the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, he has no illusions he will be elected, but will be nominated at the annual meeting in New Orleans and at following conventions "until the Lord tells me to quit."

"I have no agenda but to try to be faithful to God and an encourager of people like myself in smaller membership churches. I want to encourage those who have given up or are about to (give up)," he said.

Bates, 45, has been pastor of the Millican congregation since December 1987. When he became pastor, Sunday school attendance was 10, but now is up to 60, he said.

In the last two years he has baptized more than 30 people and the church was among those recognized at the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in late January for baptizing 50 percent of its average Sunday school attendance.

Out of undesignated receipts of \$25,897 in the 1988-89 church year, the church gave \$2,605 to the SBC's unified budget, the Cooperative Program, according to the Uniform Church Letter.

Bates has led the church in some innovative ministries, including collecting old stamps and selling them to stamp collectors and using the money to aid the hungry.

Bates, a native of College Station, Texas, is a graduate of Houston Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

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