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NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
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RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

May 27, 1993

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SBC leaders voice enthusiasm
for Rankin as FMB nominee

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
5/27/93

NASHVILLE (BP)-Jerry Rankin is a solid nominee as president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board, leaders of several key SBC entities said in statements released after the FMB presidential search committee made its announcement May 24.

Morris Chapman, SBC Executive Committee president, noted: "I have known Jerry Rankin since we were students together at Mississippi College," a Mississippi Baptist Convention college in Clinton, Miss. "His whole life has been characterized by his love for our Lord and his genuine heartfelt desire to obey God," Chapman said of Rankin.

"His missionary zeal will bring a fresh, new excitement to foreign missions for Southern Baptists," Chapman continued. "He is a visionary leader who not only knows about missions, he has lived missions for 23 years. I am convinced the search committee is recommending the man most qualified and best prepared for this strategic position in Southern Baptist life."

Rankin, currently FMB area director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, will be interviewed and voted on by FMB trustees during a special meeting Monday, June 14, in Houston prior to the June 15-17 annual meeting of the SBC there.

Rankin's nomination to lead an agency with 3,900 missionaries in 129 countries caps a 14-month search by the FMB trustees' 15-member search committee led by Joel Gregory, former pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas. Rankin, if approved by the 75-percent margin needed for election by trustees, will succeed R. Keith Parks, who retired last year over various differences with trustees on missions policy.

Chapman, in his statement, also offered kudos to Don Kammerdiener, FMB executive vice president who served as interim president during the search process. "Don Kammerdiener also deserves tremendous thanks from Southern Baptists," Chapman said, "for his extraordinary leadership during a difficult interim period."

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Other leaders of SBC entities voicing enthusiasm for Rankin were:

-- Larry Lewis, SBC Home Mission Board president, said Rankin is "a good choice, a very positive selection. It is very positive to have someone leading who has years of successful missions service which will give him strong credibility with missionaries and the staff. I think he will be readily accepted by a broad spectrum of Southern Baptists and will be a unifying force in our denomination."

-- James T. Draper Jr., Sunday School Board president: "I have strong confidence in Jerry Rankin as the nominee for president of the Foreign Mission Board, first of all because of the prayerful and careful approach of the search committee. While I have not met him personally, I am impressed with his strong missionary credentials and his proven track record of innovation in missions philosophy and practice. His commitment to world evangelization and missionary enterprise is clear. I affirm the committee and am confident Dr. Rankin will make an excellent president."

-- Kammerdiener: "I'm delighted that the committee has chosen a person with extensive missionary experience. My concern from the beginning has been that we have continuity and that we have a Foreign Mission Board in the future that will have deep roots with its past heritage. I feel confident that that's what has happened."

-- Dellanna O'Brien, Woman's Missionary Union executive director and a former Southern Baptist missionary to Indonesia with her husband, Bill: "We served briefly with Jerry and (his wife) Bobbye in Indonesia. I know him as a very effective missionary and as an excellent administrator. He and Bobbye are good people, wonderful Christians, completely dedicated to the missions cause. My congratulations to the search committee for an excellent choice. I'm very pleased the search committee listened to the requests that they choose someone who has missionary experience and that it's not what might be perceived as a political appointment. I know of Jerry's appreciation of the work of WMU and look forward to continuing that relationship and working together effectively."

-- James Williams, SBC Brotherhood Commission president: "Jerry Rankin is a seasoned missionary and a gifted administrator. The news of his selection at the Foreign Mission Board will have a unifying effect on missionaries, Foreign Mission Board staff, agency leaders and should be welcomed news for all Southern Baptists." Williams also credited Kammerdiener with "strong and effective leadership" during the interim period.

H. Edwin Young, SBC president and pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston, and Bill Wakefield, FMB vice president for Asia who has been Rankin's supervisor, were unavailable for comment.

Among others asked for comment about Rankin's nomination were:

-- Eloise Cauthen, wife of the late Baker James Cauthen, FMB executive director from 1954-79: "I'm really grateful that a man who has had missionary experience and is highly regarded like Jerry Rankin is the one they have come to. I'm thankful they made a good choice. The Lord must have directed them."

-- Cal Guy, distinguished professor of missions, emeritus, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas -- who was Rankin's missions professor during the 1960s -- said he is "absolutely delighted" with Rankin's nomination, describing him as someone "with a heart for the Lord. I have been praying for someone who could get the ear and heart of the denomination and lead us back to a positive approach. I think he (Rankin) is uniquely qualified to do that. He and (his wife) Bobbye are a superb couple and the kind of leaders we need. They will provide true spiritual leadership."

Guy, who has been nominated to serve as an FMB trustee, said he remembers Rankin as a student who "did everything he could to prepare to be a good missionary. He took every missions course available."

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-- Daniel Hatfield, missionary-in-residence at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and an FMB missionary to Panama working in theological education: "Jerry Rankin represents the best of both worlds. He is an accomplished missionary and FMB administrator plus he is well respected by the trustees and churches. People across the denominational spectrum will be encouraged to participate in the missions enterprise. Jerry Rankin is an adept communicator and will represent us well to the convention and churches."

Asked whether it is important for the FMB president to have missions experience, Hatfield replied: "Without sounding prejudiced, I believe that it is important for the president to have significant missions experience in order for that individual to identify with the life and work of missionaries. Another key factor is the ability to present missions to the SBC at large and to make our case across the denominational spectrum."

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Medical journal editorial
sparks CLC ethicist's concern

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
5/27/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Health care reform must not victimize the most vulnerable persons in society, says C. Ben Mitchell, director of biomedical and life issues for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, in response to the May 19 editorial in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The editorial says, "... major savings can be realized by eliminating futile care and limiting unneeded care or medicine at the margins." Futility is defined in the editorial as "serving no useful purpose; completely ineffective; occupied with trifles."

George D. Lundberg, a medical doctor and editor of JAMA, says, "... the medical staff of every hospital in America should define futile care in their environment and develop guidelines or parameters about how to identify it and eliminate it. These guidelines should take into consideration the wishes of patients, as well as the family and religious advisers, whenever appropriate."

In a May 19 press release, Burke Balch, legal counsel for the National Right to Life Committee, said, "Futility must be defined very carefully. Only care that is ineffective in preserving life or aiding health can properly be labeled futile, if the patient desires the care -- or else denial of 'futile care' will become a means to involuntary euthanasia.

"But too many so-called ethicists and doctors are calling care 'futile' that would preserve a life the patient wants, but with 'quality of life' which the provider -- or some government bureaucrat -- thinks is too poor."

In 1991, a Minnesota hospital unsuccessfully tried to get a court order to withdraw medical treatment for Helga Wanglie, an 87 year-old patient with brain damage. Wanglie had stated, and her family agreed, that she would want life-saving treatment, including food and fluids if she became disabled. Though the hospital lost the case, many ethicists say the Wanglie case was a pioneering effort to establish that they can involuntarily deny effective treatment to patients who want it because they consider the patient's quality of life poor.

"Some form of medical care reform is clearly needed," says Mitchell. "But that reform must protect the most vulnerable and not make them double victims -- victims of their disease or disability and victims of a compassionless system.

"The unborn, the disabled and the dying must not be sacrificed on the altars of arbitrary 'quality of life' judgments and/or claims of 'financial savings.'

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"On the other hand, Christians must be involved in discussions of curbing medical costs in a sane and intelligent fashion. We have as much responsibility to suggest ways of cutting costs and assisting in the management of our own care as any other Americans. We should ask about unnecessary X-rays and expensive procedures. If we are able, we should keep a daily journal of our treatment and check it against a detailed itemized billing at the end of our stay in the hospital. We should encourage good value for our medical care dollars. Unfortunately, there is no quick-fix option to the present crisis. Eliminating those who are living lives deemed 'not worth living' by an ailing medical care system is certainly not the answer."

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Achtenberg's confirmation
historic, both sides say

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/27/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--Proponents and opponents of Roberta Achtenberg's nomination to a senior post in the Clinton administration attached great significance to her recent Senate confirmation.

The Senate voted 58-31 to confirm President Clinton's nomination of Achtenberg as assistant secretary for fair housing and equal opportunity at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. She became the first avowed homosexual to be confirmed by the Senate for an executive branch position.

"The Senate vote is a major milestone in the history of the lesbian and gay community," said Tim McFeeley, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund. "Roberta Achtenberg's victory is a victory for every American who believes that public service should not be restricted on the basis of sexual orientation."

The Human Rights Campaign Fund is the country's largest homosexual political organization.

"This is a truly historic action, history which Christian Americans will live to regret," said James A. Smith, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's director of government relations. "The Clinton administration has broken a significant barrier with this appointment which will hasten our government's hostility towards morality."

"Ms. Achtenberg is not just a lesbian; she is an advocate for special rights for homosexuals which would equate that sexual perversion with immutable characteristics which are currently protected by civil rights laws," Smith said. "As the chief civil rights enforcement officer of HUD, she will be aggressively seeking housing rights for homosexuals, even over the religious convictions of homeowners who find homosexuality to be immoral."

The May 24 vote followed some contentious debate spread over three days.

Republican senators such as Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Trent Lott of Mississippi, both Southern Baptists, described Achtenberg as unsuitable for the post because of her advocacy of homosexuality, including her opposition as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to United Way and corporate funding of the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts have a policy excluding homosexuals.

"Her record is one of intolerance, discrimination and vendetta against those who do not share her values or beliefs," Lott said on the Senate floor.

Supporters of Achtenberg's nomination, led by Barbara Boxer of California and Donald Riegle of Michigan, countered she should be approved on the basis of her qualifications.

"We know what this is all about," Boxer said during debate. "It is not about qualifications. It is not about intolerance. It is not about demeanor. It is not about those things. It is about a private lifestyle that some feel disqualifies this woman."

The vote was not strictly along party lines. Voting against her were five Democrats: Robert Byrd of West Virginia; Ernest Hollings of South Carolina; Harlan Mathews and Jim Sasser, both of Tennessee, and Richard Shelby of Alabama.

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Supporting Achtenberg were 13 Republicans: Robert Bennett of Utah; Christopher Bond of Missouri; John Chafee of Rhode Island; William Cohen of Maine; Alfonse D'Amato of New York; Pete Domenici of New Mexico; Dave Durenberger of Minnesota; Judd Gregg of New Hampshire; Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, both of Oregon; Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas; William Roth of Delaware, and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania.

At her confirmation hearing before the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, Achtenberg introduced her homosexual companion, Mary Morgan.

In the 1980s, Achtenberg served as a civil rights attorney and law school dean, as well as executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and directing attorney of the lesbian rights project of Equal Rights Advocates Inc. She was elected to the San Francisco board in 1990 and was chairman of its Housing and Land Use Committee at the time of her nomination.

Achtenberg was one of several national co-chairs of Clinton's presidential campaign.

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First woman vice president
to leave Southern Seminary

Baptist Press
5/27/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Elisabeth E. Lambert, vice president for student services at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will step down from her duties July 31.

A member of the seminary staff since 1975, Lambert served the school as director of student services and then dean of students before being named to her present position in 1985.

Lambert is the fifth top-level administrator to announce plans to leave the seminary since the March election of R. Albert Mohler Jr. as seminary president. Mohler will succeed Roy L. Honeycutt who is retiring July 31. In addition to Lambert, others who have resigned are Larry McSwain, seminary provost, who will become president of Shorter College in Rome, Ga.; Milburn Price, dean of the school of church music, who will become dean of the school of music at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.; Bill Rogers, dean of the school of Christian education, who will return to full-time teaching; and David R. Wilkinson, vice president for seminary relations, who will become communications coordinator at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Atlanta.

In a letter to Honeycutt, Lambert said she had been proud to serve at a seminary committed to academic excellence, the priesthood of the believer and open inquiry.

"It is therefore with great sadness that I feel I can no longer serve the seminary," she wrote. Lambert made the letter available to reporters, but she said she did not want to comment further about her decision to leave Southern.

Lambert, the first woman to serve in a vice presidential position at Southern, will move to Lafayette, Ind., to join her husband, Frank, who teaches colonial American history at Purdue University. The Lamberts have been maintaining dual residences in Purdue and Louisville.

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Academic dean warns MBTS graduates
against 'carving new tombs for Christ'

Baptist Press
5/27/93

By Brenda Sanders

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Ministers whose "hearts are full of convictions but heads are empty of any idea of how to share them effectively" may experience failure and frustration, "carving new tombs for Christ," said commencement speaker M. Vernon Davis during graduation exercises May 22 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Milton Ferguson, president of the seminary, conferred degrees on 105 individuals, bringing Midwestern's total number of graduates to 2,521.

Davis, the seminary's vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty, told Midwestern's 33rd graduating class that "the gospel of resurrection is not an easy word to hear and believe in the world where you go to minister ...

"People seem intent to fashion new crosses on which to crucify Christ and carve new tombs into which they can inter him. Tragically, this can be done by those who claim to be Christ's friends, as well as his enemies."

Davis noted, "We fashion new tombs for the Christ when we fail to use the best we know in the service of what we believe. In the marketplace of competing ways of life, how often we have reinterred the living Christ in work that is unworthy of him ... This is the day that demands competence in the handling of things holy, excellence in the doing of God's work."

"Shoddy workmanship" in the service of Christ can cause the world to wonder whether the gospel story is really true, Davis stated.

"We carve new tombs for Christ when in challenging times, we take refuge in a narrow dogmatism," he said. "Dogmatism closes too soon on truth and sweeps stubborn facts that will not fit my theory under the rug ... Dogmatism closes too soon on what is meaningful to me and denies me the fruit of another's discoveries of Christ."

Davis pointed out, "If the apostle Paul felt it important to say that he saw through a glass darkly, it is rather presumptuous for us from our vantage point to exclaim that we now have it all figured out for ourselves and for others."

The academic dean urged graduates to "read the Bible for all its worth, through a hermeneutic of the resurrection," adding, "When the Bible is read through the resurrection, it reveals a liberating gospel. We send you to use its words not to bind, but to set free."

Christians carve new tombs for Christ "when we fail to be good stewards of our own heritage," Davis continued. "We have a heritage of freedom, a legacy of liberty. It is not the gift of an easy way or one of pious permissiveness."

Instead, he said, "Our Baptist heritage calls us to self-sacrifice in response to the self-giving servant Christ, whom we follow. At the same time, it proclaims that the sacrifice we make must be our own and that we resist sacrificing others on our own altars -- however holy or worthy they seem to be to us."

Finally, Davis said, "We carve new tombs to inter the Christ when we seek to keep him in the church, rather than among all the people for whom he died.

"You have learned the language of the church. You have acquired the skills to lead in the work of the church. You have discovered security in the fellowship of the church." He warned graduates, "You will be tempted to live out your ministries inside the walls of the church and look out on the world through stained-glass windows."

Discipleship requires believers to "go into the world as incarnations of the love of Jesus Christ," Davis said. "The call to follow is a call to discover the path of Jesus into the world ... to incarnate the witness of the living Christ in the world for which he died."

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BSSB to provide VBS materials
for African American churches

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
5/27/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Baptist Sunday School Board has entered into a pilot partnership with an independent publisher to provide 1993 Vacation Bible School materials specifically designed for use in African American churches.

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According to Jay Wells, manager of the BSSB black church development section, the board secured the materials from Urban Ministries, Inc., of Chicago. A predominantly African American-owned publisher, UMI produces VBS and Sunday school lessons specifically designed for African Americans.

"These materials portray African American culture in a positive way, which is important in building self-esteem," Wells said. "We are excited about the opportunity to provide culturally relevant products to our African American customers, both Southern Baptists and non-Southern Baptists."

Wells said the BSSB/UMI partnership is a "pilot" project, adding similar ventures are possible in the future, but no specific plans have been made.

"Let's Go With Jesus" is the theme of the new VBS materials, which stress salvation, Christian growth and service. Materials are available for all age groups, from preschool to adults and can be used in five- or 10-day schools.

The types of products available include introductory kits, teacher and student manuals, resource kits, craft packets, videos, record books, certificates, t-shirts and publicity items. The materials are being stored and shipped from the BSSB Nashville warehouse and will not be available in Baptist Book Stores.

Additional information is available from the BSSB customer service center, 1-800-458-2772.

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Embrace the future with faith,
Gregory urges BSSB employees

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
5/27/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Look to the past and embrace the future as people of faith, believing God will reveal the where, when and how of questions that seem unanswerable, Joel Gregory told employees and retirees of the Baptist Sunday School Board during the May 25 service celebrating the institution's 102nd anniversary.

Gregory, a well-known preacher, writer and former pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, cited the board's founding in 1891 as an example of God working with unlikely people to achieve impossible results.

"Who would have believed a century ago that a primarily rural, agrarian, Southern people would give birth to an institution which would have the magnificent, world-embracing, global ministry of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board?" Gregory said. The board was established by a vote of messengers attending the 1891 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Birmingham, Ala.

Gregory described the Old Testament patriarch, Abraham, as the "first to embody the principles of life lived with faith in the future."

In concrete terms, Gregory said, "... the life of faith always belongs to those willing to go without knowing next or where. Oftentimes, God calls on us to take risks in doing things for which there are no precedents."

Faith for the future also waits on God without knowing when he will act or speak, he said.

"This idea that faith is always an immediate word from the Lord is not biblical," Gregory noted. "Faith is living out of the last word you had from God until he gives you another."

Christians who are able to live in faith without knowing where or when God will lead them next are able to view life as a pilgrimage, he said.

"When I look at the history of God's Southern Baptist people and see those halcyon years of building and growing and conquering and triumph, there is some sense of the pilgrimage, 'We're on the way with the Lord,'" Gregory said. "We're at our best waiting for God's when."

Faith also enables the Christian to believe God without knowing how, he said.

"It is the belief that in my time, in my ministry, in my office, in my responsibility, God knows how, when I do not," Gregory said. "Faith is always faith in the face of facts to the contrary."

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On a personal level, "in the life of every one of us there are cracks in our armor, Achilles heels, besetting sins, impediments, frustrations, those things that retard us and set us back, doors over which there are written no exits, resolutions that we make and break, relationships that seem to be insoluble. It seems that they hang heavy with the word 'impossible.'

"Individual Christians, denominations, institutions, movements live or die, breathe or suffocate by whether or not we are always willing to be those pioneer heroes who go with God without knowing where, wait on God without knowing when, believe in God without knowing how," Gregory said.

More than 200 BSSB employees celebrating anniversary milestones were recognized during the service. Louise White, senior manuscript assistant in the church growth-Sunday school division, was cited for 40 years of service to the board, the largest tenure milestone observed in 1993.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.

EDITORS' NOTE: The photo line at the end of the May 25 story titled "Jerry Rankin nominated as next Foreign Mission Board president" promised a candid photo in addition to a mug shot. The additional photo, however, was not of sufficient quality to be released, so only the mug shot was mailed that day. Additional photos will be distributed as soon as they are obtained.

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