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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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EDITORS' NOTE: (BP) is posting the following story at the request of several Baptist editors.

Messengers oppose Clinton's views,
urge him to 'biblical morality' By Chip Alford

Baptist Press

HOUSTON (BP)--Messengers to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention June 15-17 in Houston took a strong stand against Bill Clinton's policies on abortion and homosexuals in the military, then took time to pray for the president and his administration.

With only scattered opposition in a show-of-hands vote, messengers overwhelmingly approved a resolution separating the nation's largest evangelical denomination from the president's views and urging him "to affirm biblical morality in exercising his public office." SBC President H. Edwin Young then paused to pray for Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, both of whom are Southern Baptists.

The adopted resolution "On President William Jefferson Clinton" criticizes the president for repealing the pro-life policies of the previous two Republican administrations, directing the Food and Drug Administration to make abortion pills available in the United States, requesting funds from Congress to pay for elective abortions through the federal Medicaid program and supporting the repeal of the Kemp-Kasten Amendment so that money the United States gives to the United Nations could support nations that require abortions.

The document also criticizes Clinton's support for repealing the ban on homosexuals serving in the U.S. military, inviting leaders of the "homosexual lobby" to a meeting at the White House and appointing homosexuals and pro-choice supporters to high-level government jobs.

After introducing the resolution, Arkansas pastor Ronnie Floyd stressed the document was not a "personal attack" on the president, adding Clinton had once shared his personal testimony in Floyd's church while serving as governor of Arkansas.

"We love him and we are to pray for him. We respect his position as president of the United States of America," Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church of Springdale and a member of the SBC resolutions committee, said. Even so, Floyd said he believed passage of the resolution was necessary to "separate ourselves as a body from his policies on critical issues that are contradictory to the Word of God and what is best for America." Failure to pass the resolution, he added, would "jeopardize the future survival of our nation."

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Before a vote was taken, Don Wilkie, a messenger from Onalaska (Texas) Baptist Church, spoke against the resolution, claiming it "smacks of partisan politics" and represented "a lack of class on the part of this convention."

Another messenger, Cary Cambrell from Trinity Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La., proposed an amendment to the resolution that would have inserted a call for Clinton to "repent" for his views on abortion and homosexuality.

Speaking against the amendment, James Merritt, chairman of the resolutions committee, said: "The issue is not the person of the president, not the position of the president. It is the policies he is trying to put in place."

Following Merritt's remarks, the amendment was overwhelmingly defeated in a show-of-hands vote.

In a press conference after the vote, Merritt said about half of the 41 resolutions the committee considered dealt specifically with Clinton and/or Gore and their pro-choice, pro-homosexual stance. The ideas and concerns expressed in these documents were incorporated into the resolution that was submitted and adopted by messengers, Merritt said.

That resolution was "moderate in tone compared to many of the resolutions we received," Merritt said. It was not the committee's intent to "jump on the bandwagon" of critics who are "kicking the president," he added.

While resolutions committee members stressed the resolution was not a personal attack on Clinton, the adopted document apparently represents the first time Southern Baptists have approved a resolution specifically addressed to a president.

"We have criticized the views and actions of other presidents in the text of other past resolutions, but I know of no other resolution that was specifically addressed to a president," Timothy George, dean of the Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., and a member of the resolutions committee, said.

The only other resolution adopted during the resolutions committee's first report to the convention affirmed Jesus Christ as the only true way to salvation.

Titled "The Finality of Jesus Christs as Sole and Sufficient Savior," the resolution opposed the false teaching "that adherents of the nonChristian religions and world views can receive this salvation through any means other than personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ."

The resolution was written by George in response to what he described as a "growing trend" of universalism creeping into institutions of higher learning across the country, including Baptist colleges and seminaries.

Seven other resolutions were passed by messengers during the committee's second report on the final day of the convention.

Two of the those also dealt with abortion and homosexuals in the military. One affirms "the biblical prohibition on the taking of unborn human life except to save the life of the mother" and opposes the passage of "the radical abortion on demand bill, the Freedom of Choice Act." It also calls on Congress to maintain the Hyde Amendment and other pro-life policies which prohibit the use of federal funds to encourage, promote or perform abortions except to save the life of the mother. The resolution passed with only a handful of opposition.

The resolution "On Homosexuality, Military Service and Civil Rights" also passed easily. It stated that "open and avowed homosexuality is incompatible with the requirements of military service" and opposed lifting the ban on homosexuals serving in the military. It also opposed all efforts "to provide government endorsement, sanction, recognition, acceptance, or civil rights advantage on the basis of homosexuality."

Fred Brown, a messenger from University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, attempted to amend the resolution by including the full text of a similar resolution he submitted on the subject. He felt the resolution submitted by the committee did not sufficiently stress that God loves homosexuals.

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Responding to the proposed amendment, Merritt read a portion of the submitted resolution which stated that "all persons, including homosexuals, can receive abundant, new and eternal life by repenting of their sin and trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord." Brown's amendment was then defeated by messengers and the resolution was adopted with little opposition.

After amending the document twice, messengers also adopted a resolution "On Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation." The original resolution deplored "ethnic cleansing" and urged President Clinton and other leaders of the international community to end the genocide in the Balkans. It was amended to read "to end genocide, wherever found."

A section of the resolution also called on federal, state and local governments to enforce fully civil rights laws. Messengers added the phrase "whenever such laws are in accordance with the word of God."

The four other resolutions approved by messengers criticized the Supreme Court's decision in Lee v. Weisman which banned public school commencement prayers which were faculty-initiated and directed; opposed diplomatic relations with the Vatican; affirmed the value of the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' channel for supporting national and international missions and ministry; and expressed appreciation to the city of Houston for hosting the 1993 annual meeting.

The committee disposed of other resolutions submitted by messengers as follows:

- requesting African American speakers be included in the Pastors' Conference and SBC program, forwarded to the Order of Business Committee.
- supporting evangelistic outreach to Jews, forwarded to Home Mission Board.
- calling for the passage of a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced federal budget and granting the president line-item veto power, no action.
- questioning the SBC's constitutional authority to investigate organizations, forwarded to SBC Executive Committee.
- affirming women's roles in ministry, no action.
- requesting the Annuity Board to identify any company in its portfolio that is contributing to Planned Parenthood or any other provider of abortion and divest itself of stocks in those companies, forwarded to Annuity Board.
- criticizing Freemasonry, forwarded to HMB.
- warning of dangerous "outcome-based education," forwarded to Christian Life Commission.
- supporting ministry to AIDS victims, forwarded to 1994 SBC resolutions committee.
- prohibiting any member of a church giving 10 percent or more of their mission budget to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship from being appointed to any Southern Baptist committee or board, forwarded to the Committee on Nominations.
- challenging professors at Baptist colleges and universities to share their faith with students, forwarded to SBC Education Commission.
- requesting city-wide revivals be held in SBC host cities, forwarded to HMB.
- encouraging SBC churches to begin Christian schools, no action.

Five resolutions dealing specifically with homosexuals in the military were incorporated into the resolution on the subject adopted by messengers, and one resolution supporting prayer in schools was dealt with in the resolution criticizing the Supreme Court's recent ruling related to religious expression in public schools.

In addition to Merritt, Floyd and George, other members of the 1993 resolutions committee were Charles W. Sullivan, executive director, State Convention of Baptists in Indiana; Robert Reccord, pastor, First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.; Dave Stillie, pastor, Seaman Baptist Church, Topeka, Kansas; Jim Wells, pastor Oakwood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.; Joel Gregory, member, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas; Charles Kelley, professor of evangelism, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; and Danny Akin, dean of students, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

EDITORS' NOTE: In the 6-22-93 (BP) story titled "FMB to weigh go-ahead of organizational study," please substitute the following for the 3rd paragraph:

Rankin told Baptist Press he was studying the proposal and would discuss its advisability and timing with trustees at the board's regular trustee meeting June 28-30 in Richmond, Va.

In connection with this, in the 4th paragraph, change the closing words of the first sentence to: "... June 29 during the trustee meeting."

Also, correct the SBC annual meeting dates in the last paragraph to June 15-17, not June 14-16.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Deadlocked school board vote
upholds decision to fire Duncan By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
6/23/93

FAIRBANKS, Alaska (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustee Rodney Duncan has failed in his first appeal to save a 17-year public school teaching career at North Pole High School outside of Fairbanks.

The local school board split 3-3 June 8 on a motion to reconsider its 5-1 vote in April to support the decision of the superintendent of schools to dismiss Duncan. The deadlock left the previous vote standing.

Duncan is considering taking the case to court and suing the Fairbanks-North Star Borough School District for defamation. A court appeal could take up to 18 months, said Duncan, who will begin teaching secondary English this fall at Lighthouse Christian Academy, a private school in Fairbanks.

Notably missing in the school board's written decision was any mention of the accusation that triggered widespread public speculation and a criminal investigation by Alaska state police.

That accusation stemmed from the complaint of a parent who implied Duncan had sexually abused young men from school. She accused Duncan of offering to buy pornographic pictures of her foster son and his girlfriend.

An investigation turned up no evidence, however, and no charges were filed against Duncan, a Foreign Mission Board trustee since 1988 and son of Bill Duncan, executive director for the Alaska Baptist Convention.

During a June 2-5 private hearing in which the parent's accusation and 11 other allegations were considered, school board members found the foster son's testimony contradictory and unconvincing, according to a board source who asked not to be identified. The board threw out the foster mother's allegation in their deliberations, the source said.

In the school board's decision, the board claimed to have enough evidence to dismiss Duncan for improperly relating to students as a friend and counselor. Duncan and other Christian teachers at North Pole High School have said they interpret a teacher's role in the lives of students differently than the district.

School officials in March launched an exhaustive investigation into Duncan's life as a high school English teacher and youth minister at Cross Roads Baptist Church. Duncan's supporters, many of whom were interviewed in probes by the school district or the state police, say investigators started a number of rumors by leaking incorrect information and expressing their own opinions about the case.

Accusations against Duncan centered around the way he practiced his faith outside of the classroom with students either involved in church youth activities or interested in spiritual counsel. School officials accused him of being too emotionally attached to students to stay professional.

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Christian legal sources say the freedom of public teachers to share their faith is becoming increasingly conditional. In 1991, for example, an Alabama professor was required by the U.S. Supreme Court to stop holding out-of-classroom optional meetings to discuss the evidences of God in human physiology, the subject he taught in the classroom.

"When you're a teacher who cares about kids, they'll come to you," said Debra Vanasse, a teacher at North Pole High School. After Vanasse defended Duncan in a letter to the editor of Fairbanks' Daily News-Miner, school officials filed a complaint against her with the Alaska state agency that licenses teachers. The agency took no action against her teaching certificate.

After the censure of Vanasse, Duncan said other teachers told him they were reluctant to testify for him in an open hearing. They feared the school district would take similar action against them, he added. On the advice of his lawyers, Duncan asked to close the hearing just days before it began, he said.

School board member Joy Cook of North Pole, who cast the lone vote in favor of Duncan in the 5-1 decision in April, told Baptist Press the "overwhelming" weight of evidence during the four days of testimony upheld Duncan's character and genuine concern for students.

Both school board attorneys and attorneys for Duncan filed a motion for school board members to reconsider their vote. That motion died June 8 after the 3-3 deadlock. School board President Gene Redden told Baptist Press he voted against Duncan the first time but refused to reveal how he voted June 8 or to discuss the case further.

The action against Duncan during the past months sparked a public outcry that Richard Cross, superintendent of schools, said he had not expected. A personnel matter officials usually keep private became a public spectacle, Cross told Baptist Press. Parents, teachers and students supporting Duncan staged three rallies -- and picketed school district offices. Cross negated two votes by North Pole High School seniors to invite Duncan to speak at graduation ceremonies as he had other times in the past.

"As far as I am concerned, this is a totally religious issue," Cook said after the decision. "Rodney Duncan isn't the first person in this district who has been railroaded, and he won't be the last one.

"The target is very popular people who are making a big difference. This man has devoted 17 years of his life to students and their families in this school district."

Cook said evidence alone was too weak to lead school board members to reach the decision they did. "There were lines drawn early on," she said. Those who have trusted Duncan "need to be patient and need to be in prayer that truth will prevail and justice will be done," she added.

Cook was referring to Duncan's expected appeal of the school board "administrative" decision in court. During that trial, details about the investigation, the administrative hearing and the allegations would become public.

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Baptistry on wheels boosts
witness of Baptist missions

By Harrison McCoy

Baptist Press
6/23/93

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--When Phillip the evangelist encountered an Ethiopian eunuch who wanted to be baptized, the New Testament Book of Acts states that the only available water was a small wadi beside the road.

Such an encounter today might find missionary Richard Farley lurking with a portable baptistry in the back of his van, giving new meaning to the phrase, "See, here is water."

Farley is a newly appointed Southern Baptist Home Mission Board church starter strategist for the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans. In that role, the former missionary to Bangladesh finds the baptistry in great demand among the metro area's many missions and preaching points.

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The portable baptistry is the brainchild of associational director of missions Fred Dyess. Formerly the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Houma, Dyess saw that many of the association's missions were reporting numerous professions of faith but relatively few baptisms.

"I asked myself why?" Dyess says. "Many of our missions are located in storefronts and other locations where a baptistry is simply not available.

One of the association's missions, located in a housing project in one of the city's high crime areas, had yielded 50 professions of faith but no baptisms.

Most mission pastors solve the problem by making use of borrowed baptistries in sponsoring or nearby churches. However, such baptisms are often done on Sunday afternoons in empty sanctuaries and the public witness of baptism is sometimes lost.

Not only that, but there is an obvious cultural dilemma for some, Dyess points out. "It's not always easy, for example, to get a member of a downtown ethnic mission to walk through the doors of a large church like First Baptist Church of New Orleans no matter how friendly the folks at that church are."

The portable baptistry offers an answer to the dilemma.

However, getting used to such modern convenience has not been without its stranger moments.

One of the first mission pastors to use the baptistry was the Fisher Housing Project's Thomas Glover. Glover was instructed to allow the baptistry's heating element to warm the water for "a while" to make sure it was not uncomfortable. Not realizing only three to four hours were required, Glover's members allowed the water to heat overnight. The next morning the steam and humidity had curled posters on the walls and turned the sanctuary into a steam bath.

The portable baptistry was purchased with state mission funds and is stored at Gethsemane Baptist Church, which is a regular user of the device. Farley transports the baptistry in the back of the minivan to other sites.

Dyess frequently points to the contribution that missions make in helping the New Orleans association surge in baptisms. In fact, the association has set a goal of 10 new works begun each year, a goal that has been met two straight years. During that time, baptisms have increased 30 percent.

Dyess explains that such aggressive goals often demand unconventional and creative strategies. However, New Orleans is a city that has long understood the meaning of unconventional and creative, he adds.

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McCoy is a correspondent for the Louisiana Baptist Message newsjournal.

Baptist executive dies
of heart attack at Glorieta

Baptist Press
6/23/93

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Truman Kerr, assistant to the executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, died June 22 after suffering a massive heart attack at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center in New Mexico.

Kerr, 63, was attending the Church-Growth Sunday School Leadership Conference with his wife, Faye. He suffered the attack early Tuesday morning after jogging around the Glorieta campus. He was able to make it back to his hotel before collapsing.

Emergency medical personnel from Pecos, N.M., ministered to Kerr on the scene and later transported him to St. Vincent's Hospital in Santa Fe, where he was pronounced dead at approximately 8 a.m.

LBC Executive Director Mark Short was in Glorieta at the time of Kerr's death.

"Louisiana Baptists have sustained a tremendous loss in the death of Truman Kerr," he said. "He was a dedicated worker who brought tremendous organization skills to whatever work he was doing. He has done a wonderful job heading up our prayer work in Louisiana."

Kerr's body was to be flown back to Louisiana June 23. His wife also was expected to return to the state June 23 with her daughter and son-in-law who were vacationing in Colorado.

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