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February 23, 1994

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NASHVILLE -- Executive Committee, Annuity Board make peace on abortion issue.

NASHVILLE -- Young 'laterals' SBC input, urges attention to cities.

WASHINGTON -- Murder of Baptists counted among examples of persecution.

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Exec. Committee, Annuity Bd.
make peace on abortion issue

Baptist Press
2/23/94

By Herb Hollinger & Art Toalston

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee and Annuity Board have apparently agreed: No investments are to be made in corporations which actively contribute to organizations involved in abortions, such as Planned Parenthood.

Paul Powell, Annuity Board president, made the commitment Feb. 22 during an Executive Committee meeting in Nashville. Prior to his written announcement, the meeting had been marked by tensions over Annuity Board investment policies, which make no reference to abortion-related stocks, and Executive Committee members' generally staunch stand against abortion.

Powell's full statement:

"The Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has long held a position of opposition to the wanton destruction of life inherent in the practice of abortions. Several years ago the trustees approved a staff recommendation to deny medical plan benefits for abortion.

"In our investment decisions we will avoid, or divest in orderly fashion, equities in any company that is found to have a service or product that is publicly perceived as uniquely aiding, supporting, or promoting abortion. This commitment grows out of a deep personal, biblical-based conviction that is shared by the president, the trustees, and the officers of the Annuity Board."

Powell's statement was read by Guy Sanders prior to votes taken on recommendations to the Executive Committee regarding the Annuity Board. After reading the statement, Sanders, a Florida pastor and chairman of the program and budget subcommittee, moved to strike a part of the recommendation which asked the board to use the \$1 million Cooperative Program distribution to provide relief for underfunded annuitants and a second part which said "that this policy remain in place until such time as the (board) approves a position on abortion-related activities that is consistent with that of the SBC." The Annuity Board already provides relief for underfunded annuitants with most of the funds provided from the SBC Cooperative Program budget.

In another matter, however, the Annuity Board was reprimanded by the Executive Committee for providing services outside the board's program statements. Program statements for SBC agencies are the convention-approved guidelines by which they function in the SBC, and the Executive Committee is given the responsibility to monitor agencies' adherence to their program statements.

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The Annuity Board was requested to "discontinue expanding its retirement annuity and insurance services beyond the denomination" The board currently provides those services to Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn.; Criswell College in Dallas; and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, based in Atlanta. Board officials said they were servicing those entities because they primarily are operated by Southern Baptists although admittedly they are not official SBC-related organizations.

A second request from the Executive Committee asked the Annuity Board to "discontinue expanding its client base in investment and related services which are not prescribed in the three programs of the Annuity Board." A flap occurred late last year when it became apparent the Annuity Board was providing investment services to some SBC-related agencies which provoked criticisms by the Southern Baptist Foundation and the association of Baptist state convention foundations.

After lengthy and intense debate in the subcommittee, the Annuity Board apparently agreed to the recommendations which would curtail those activities by the board until the "Program and Structure Study Committee, authorized by the Executive Committee . . . has completed its work and recommendations that result from its work."

The Annuity Board argued its \$4 billion base and related expertise could bring additional income to the agencies compared to the way they now invest their funds. However, board officials were willing to abide by the recommendations that this activity would be outside the parameters of their present program statement.

In other action the Executive Committee voted, without dissent and without debate, a subcommittee's recommendation asking its "officers and staff to study the impact of monies coming through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to Southern Baptist Convention entities . . ." and then recommend the "acceptance or rejection of said funds." The recommendation will come at the Executive Committee meeting just prior to the SBC annual meeting in June in Orlando, Fla.

The action came as a surprise to most observers at the meeting because discussion about CBF gifts to most SBC entities has been ongoing but was not on the printed agenda of the committee or its various subcommittees.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a group of moderate Southern Baptists critical of the leadership in the SBC. The CBF has been taking actions which appear to some to be the creation of a separate denomination.

The Executive Committee will recommend to the SBC at the June 14-16 annual meeting a 1994-95 SBC Allocation Budget of \$136,539,730 which is the same as the 1992-93 fiscal year actual receipts. The action follows a policy of the committee to recommend a budget not more than the receipts of the last year of record. In the budget all SBC entities were given the same decrease of 1.23 percent from the 1993-94 budget of \$138,234,735.

Information released at the meeting from the convention's audit showed the SBC Op rating Budget Fund had \$99,001 more expenditures than revenue for fiscal 1993. Operating reserves were tapped to take care of that amount as officials said extra expenses for the shuttle bus service at last year's annual meeting and reduced contributions to the convention operating budget by the Baptist Sunday School Board were the primary reasons for the deficit.

In other budget-related deliberations during the program and budget subcommittee meeting, a motion was made to reduce Baptist World Alliance funding by \$20,000, down from a proposed \$397,639, in protest of R. Keith Parks being a featured speaker at a recent BWA conference in Cyprus on evangelization of unreached peoples. Parks is the CBF's missions coordinator and former president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board who left that post in disagreement with conservative trustees' stances and missions philosophy.

Several subcommittee members objected to reducing BWA funds over who addressed one of its conferences, and the motion was defeated when it won only three votes.

Mark Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., reported on the work to be done by the seven-member "Program and Structure Study Committee" he chairs, which held an initial meeting in January.

Describing the committee's thrust, Brister said, "We will maximize the effectiveness of our denomination to reach our world for Jesus Christ ... in this time of culture war in the history of Western civilization." It will recommend to the Executive Committee and then to the Southern Baptist Convention "what we should do programmatically and structurally as a denomination as we look into the next millennium," Brister said. The effectiveness of the committee's work, he said, will "ultimately" be measured by "the number of disciples born into the kingdom of Jesus Christ."

Morris H. Chapman, Executive Committee president, in his address said, "We talk much about vision but I pray that God will help us ... identify the overarching vision for Southern Baptists as we prepare for the 21st century.

"I'm not interested in an accidental falling into the 21st century," Chapman said, but rather "marching or running into the 21st century -- not ahead of God but with God."

With the help of the Holy Spirit and a renewal in which "we will learn and take to heart the great doctrines of the faith," Chapman said he prays Southern Baptists will "carve out a new denominational era" in what otherwise may be a post-denominational era when "America is on its way to losing its soul."

In other business, the Executive Committee:

-- affirmed 1995 goals marking the SBC's 150th anniversary of \$100 million for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and \$50 million for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions. The offerings' 1993 totals were \$79,748,263 for Lottie Moon and \$35,926,839 for Annie Armstrong. Also, the committee approved a goal of \$150,000,000 in SBC Cooperative Program receipts for 1994-95 in recognition of the 150th anniversary.

-- approved St. Louis as the site of the 2002 SBC annual meeting, pending "satisfactory contract negotiations with the convention center and area hotels." The committee also delayed until its June 13 meeting further discussion of confirming Atlanta as the 1999 site of the SBC annual meeting or selecting another city.

-- heard a report that a contract has been renegotiated with C. Barry McCarty for another year as SBC parliamentarian. Chapman said the new contract, for the same services, will be less than what the parliamentarian has been paid for each of the last five years. McCarty is pastor of Lakota Christian Church in Cincinnati.

-- declined to act on a motion referred from the 1993 annual meeting in Houston to enact a registration fee for the annual meeting.

-- authorized representation from the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention, having reached 15,000 members, on the SBC Executive Committee, the Committee on Committees and Committee on Nominations.

-- approved a 3 percent increase in Executive Committee staff salary structure effective Oct. 1.

-- approved continued study of a proposed half-hour SBC news program, "News Matrix." Administrative subcommittee members voiced enthusiasm for a pilot they viewed, which cost \$20,000 to produce. At \$20,000 per week, yearly production costs would total more than \$1 million. Funding for such a program, several committee members said, would have to come from advertising or private donors.

-- approved the painting of a portrait of Chapman with the cost, not yet determined, to be charged to the SBC Operating Budget.

-- changed the EC policy of rotating the annual meeting among selected cities to one which considers areas of the country "which provide adequate, cost-effective facilities" with consideration to "geographical location and accessibility to the numerically, significant population of Southern Baptists."

-- approved a 1994-95 SBC Operating Budget of \$4,088,786, compared to \$4,222,204 in 1993-94, to be recommended to the SBC meeting in Orlando in June.

-- honored A.R. "Rudy" Fagan, who will retire Sept. 30 after 20 years as president of the SBC Stewardship Committee, and J.B. Fowler, who retired in January after 12 years as editor of the Baptist New Mexican newsjournal.

Young 'laterals' SBC input,
urges attention to cities

By Art Toalston

NASHVILLE (BP)--Input for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention from nine study groups commissioned by SBC President H. Edwin Young has been handed over to the Executive Committee and other SBC agencies.

"Now I'm lateraling all of this to the Executive Committee," the Houston pastor said. In his comments to the committee during its Feb. 21-22 meeting in Nashville, Young noted the study involved 120 individuals in nine ad hoc groups formed in September 1992 who worked without any SBC funding.

"I'm not asking for any action on these, I'm not making any motion," said Young, whose second one-year term as SBC president will end with the convention's annual meeting in June in Orlando. "I'm simply saying these are some things I think and these study groups believe we need to look at."

In other comments, Young called for an SBC strategy to reach America's cities, challenged investigative reporting by religious journalists and criticized the Clinton administration.

Beyond the recommendations of the study groups, Young said, "We need to get a very clear, dynamic, prayed-through, dreamed-through strategy to reach our cities ... certainly the inner city, but the whole city, the suburbs, downtown, the different groups, up-and-outs, down-and-outs, all in between."

Young said he hopes the Executive Committee will appoint a group to work with the Home Mission Board to "come up with a strategy to reach the cities as we go to the turn of the century. That's where people are."

On investigative reporting, Young said, "I personally do not believe that those who are in the business of being editors of Christian papers, journals, etc., need to be in the business of investigative reporting. In other words, as a man who seeks to understand and live by the Bible, I should not in any way seek to uncover anything about your life and publicize it in a negative way, whatever you have done, whatever I have done. We are to cover our brother's nakedness. And when there's investigative reporting in the name of Christianity, I think you'll have a hard time justifying that if you read the Book and the spirit of brothers and sisters in Christ."

Young said he is "not being critical of what's happening, not going back and pulling out any old articles, etc., but there are too many great things happening in the kingdom of God for us to get upset or give headline attention to 15 people over here or 25 people over here or 75 people over there when thousands of people are coming to Christ every Sunday and hundreds of thousands of people are meeting in our churches hearing the gospel and so many fabulous things are happening in the kingdom. And we zero in on some little knot on a log over here and give it a prominent place in our religious Christian Southern Baptist publications. I hope that's behind us, but we still need to look at it. ... I really feel strongly about that. I really do. And I think we need to look at that and address that somewhere, somehow and some way and maybe tonight is more than sufficient."

Of President Bill Clinton, Young said he has "prayed faithfully for our president and vice president for the 40 days that I asked" in a January prayer effort coordinated by the SBC Brotherhood Commission. "And we still pray for these men. It's very important that we do this," Young said.

"But by the same token, I don't think we as individuals and as spiritual leaders can turn our back on the agenda that we see of free abortions, free condoms and free needles."

"And you go right down the line, it is anti-family, it is contrary to what I believe an honest reading of the Bible is all about," Young said.

Concerning the study group recommendations, Morris H. Chapman, Executive Committee president, told Baptist Press, "The study groups appointed by Dr. Young have done a superb job. The Executive Committee certainly will want to assist in giving leadership in areas within our convention where we may enhance our witness and expand our ministries."

James T. Draper Jr., who served as general chairman of the study groups, said input has been forwarded to each SBC agency addressed in the various recommendations.

Among several recommendations from the study groups recapped by Young:

-- the "cords and stakes" study group's call for, as Young put it, "a plan to reach independent churches of like mind and theology and invite them to join the SBC" and for an informational piece to explain how a church can affiliate with the SBC, which already has been developed by the Executive Committee's convention relations office.

"There are literally thousands of independent Baptist churches that are more Baptist than a lot of us in this room in doctrine, in theology, in everything they're about," Young said. "Many of these are looking for a place to really invest in worldwide ministry. Their pastors are lonely people. The days of bitterness that we felt so many years from all the independents of various splinter groups is generally over." Young said he has met with 300 to 400 of these pastors during his two years as SBC president and, "Many of them are already coming in, in a considerable number, and I think we've only just begun to see this happening in our denomination. They like where we are, they like where we're going and, really, they're ready to come home to a Bible-believing denomination."

-- the multi-ethnic advisory study group's call for ethnic and at-large full board members for all SBC agencies, boards and commissions, along with an ethnic and black task force to work with all SBC boards and agencies for formulating a unified strategy to carry out the Great Commission.

-- the reaching children and youth study group's call for a youth coordinator to work with all SBC agencies. "We are baptizing half the number of children that were baptized in the 1970s," Young said. "We are not even keeping up with biological growth."

Young also noted a need to broadly circulate the report of the theological study group's paper, which affirmed the SBC's traditional Baptist Faith and Message statement, the theological positions of the 1987 SBC Peace Committee report and the evangelical Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy.

"I think if we as Southern Baptists were alert" when the thinking of influential German theologians Bultmann, Barth and Brunner came to American theological circles "and we clearly identified what this was about in lessening the high view of God's Word, God's perfect truth, perhaps we would never have gotten the situation we found ourselves in a few years back as far as theological education is concerned."

Young said Southern Baptists "need to be alert" to each new wave of theological thought that could affect SBC life.

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EDITORS' NOTE: Baptist Press will carry a companion story 2/24/94 with various excerpts from the study groups' reports.

Murder of Baptists counted
among examples of persecution

By Marty Groll

Baptist Press
2/23/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--Religious persecution was the motive behind a mass murder of Baptists on New Year's Eve in Tajikistan, according to on-site testimony reported to a U.S. congressional commission.

An ethnic Russian Baptist, Vladimir Limorev, and eight others -- including his four children -- were brutally beaten, then killed or left to die in a burning home in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic in Central Asia. Limorev and his family were active members of Dushanbe Baptist Church.

During a Feb. 16 Capitol Hill briefing, a former Soviet political prisoner listed the nine victims among 16 people confirmed as Christian martyrs in 1992-93 in areas of the former Soviet Union.

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The briefing speaker, Boris Perchatkin, is president of the Russian-American Institute for Adaptation, which has offices in Portland, Ore., and Moscow. The institute serves as a voice for Christians in the former Soviet Union in danger for their faith.

Perchatkin named a total of 34 Christians severely beaten or martyred for their faith during the past two years.

"There is no doubt these particular murders were committed for religious motives," he said. "These are cases we have been able to document from eyewitness testimony, coming from close friends and relatives of the victims. There is no way of knowing how many others suffered the same fate."

The congressional commission Perchatkin addressed -- commonly known as the Helsinki Commission -- is a watchdog group appointed to enforce human rights accords hammered out by the United States and European nations.

Religious persecution in the Soviet region nearly stopped in 1989 because of appeals from the West but is coming back now with renewed vigor, Perchatkin said.

"Although the Empire of Evil has collapsed, still the evil has not only remained, but has taken on a more ferocious character," he said. "If earlier the most active of Christians were sent to prison, now they are robbed, tortured, crippled and killed. But in the pages of the Western press there is not one word about this."

Perchatkin told of other cases of mistreatment by opponents of Christianity. In one area of Russia, 7-year-old Anna Zhirinkova, a member of a Christian family, was kidnapped last October and has yet to be found. In Kyrgyzstan, two Christian women were deprived of medical attention while giving birth. Their babies were born dead.

Where former communist officials still rule under different banners, evangelicals suffer administrative harassment much like they experienced during the heyday of Soviet communism, Perchatkin reported.

"In many parts of the former Soviet Union, all forms of evangelization are banned," he said. "This is nowhere official, but permits are simply not given, or the permit is given, but the Cossacks or the (Muslim) mullahs physically oppose evangelization."

The Cossacks of today are mostly former communists who defend Russian Orthodoxy and have singled out Protestants as infidels, he charged. They have teamed with Muslims in some areas.

Besides being denied opportunities to buy land and build churches, evangelicals in many areas have been denied the right to rent public places or meet on the street, he said.

"In effect, they have been driven back underground, meeting in private houses for worship," Perchatkin concluded. "In Tbilisi (capital of Georgia) the Baptist prayer house was simply burned down."

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Ark. proclamation sparks debate
between Baptist Lt. Gov., ACLU

By Tremnis Henderson

Baptist Press
2/23/94

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Christian Heritage Week, set for Feb. 27 through March 5 in Arkansas, has sparked controversy between Lt. Gov. Mike Huckabee and the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Huckabee signed the Christian Heritage Week proclamation earlier in February while serving as acting governor. The one-page proclamation, requested by attorney Brenda Vassaur Taylor of Altheimer, Ark., cites Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and other American forefathers as "Christian statesmen of calibre and integrity who did not hesitate to express their faith."

Huckabee, a former Arkansas Baptist pastor and former president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, said he never anticipated the proclamation would cause concern.

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"We are one of 14 states so far who have simply issued a proclamation acknowledging the contribution of Christians to this country," h explained. "To simply recognize that a certain segment of our society has contributed to that society and allow them the privilege of being acknowledged and heard in a completely voluntary manner is not only appropriate but it is unthinkable it would be objectionable to anyone except 'Christophobics.'"

Rita Spillenger, executive director of the ACLU in Arkansas, sees it differently. While acknowledging the proclamation does not violate the U.S. Constitution or state law, she questioned the proclamation's content and purpose. "I think it's misleading. I think it's distortion of history for a political purpose. I think it's especially misleading when it comes from the governor's office."

Charging that the proclamation "smacks of other kinds of efforts of the religious right," Spillenger added, "Government has to be very careful when dealing with religion. ... There's a difference between private celebration and state action."

Huckabee countered that the ACLU's opposition to the proclamation is an "obvious, blatant form of prejudice and bigotry toward mainstream Christians."

Huckabee said he informed Gov. Jim Guy Tucker of his plans to sign the proclamation several weeks before doing so, adding "there were no reservations expressed" by the governor.

Max Parker, Tucker's press secretary, said Tucker previously had declined to issue such a proclamation. "We do not issue proclamations favoring any specific religious group," Parker added.

During the past year, however, Tucker has signed proclamations recognizing National Catholic Daughters of the Americas Day and B'nai B'rith Day as well as National Day of Prayer, National Pastoral Care Week and Religious Freedom Day.

Noting proclamations "historically have served as a means of simply assisting individuals and organizations to call attention to activities of significance," Huckabee said proclamations are a "courtesy" which carry "no weight of law."

"I fully support the ACLU's right to exist and be heard," he emphasized. "But I resent their attitude that if views being expressed don't meet their test of political correctness, they believe the appropriate response is to silence those voices."

"I hope we would not get so paranoid that we would be afraid to welcome citizens of our state to participate and express their various interests," Huckabee said. "The best part of a free society is when the voices of many are heard and the voices of none are stilled."

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Baptist couple 'retires'
to 5 months in India

By Russell N. Dilday

Baptist Press
2/23/94

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Many people view retirement as a time to relax, take up new hobbies and enjoy grandchildren. By contrast, Norman and Kay Roberts of Park Hill Church in North Little Rock sold their house, stored their possessions and volunteered to do overseas mission work.

Roberts, who retired in June as senior vice president for the Baptist Medical System, and his wife, a homemaker and active member of Woman's Missionary Union, returned recently from a five-month assignment as International Service Corps volunteers in Bangalore, India.

Roberts worked at Bangalore Baptist Hospital with Rebekah Naylor, a surgeon from Fort Worth, Texas, and the only resident Southern Baptist missionary in the Asian nation of 897 million people. The 143-bed hospital treats more than 74,000 patients per year.

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Describing his assignment as a "consultant and facilitator for the management of the hospital," Roberts said his professional experience prepared him well for the assignment.

"I've been working for Baptist hospitals since 1956. For 25 years I was administrator of Memorial Hospital in North Little Rock before serving the Baptist Medical System. All of my career has been with those two Baptist hospitals."

He said his workday in Bangalore "didn't change very much from a typical day at an institution here. The things I did were to assist Dr. Naylor in construction projects that were going on at that time, attend planning meetings and do project work at the hospital."

Mrs. Roberts also said her day-to-day activities also changed little. "I did what I have been doing a lot of my life: making a home for my husband and trying to make myself available, as they say in India, to 'do the needful.'" Mrs. Roberts characterized herself as "a WMU gal that had prayed for India and other parts of the world and been interested in India as a result of friendship with Rebekah." She taught several Bible studies with single nurses and students and also traveled with a team from the hospital teaching nutrition and public health.

The Robertses were familiar with the hospital's operation; they had previously visited India and worked with Naylor in 1985 and 1987. Roberts said the hospital "met my expectations. I think my expectations were to find a hospital doing well in many ways and that wanted help to improve its services and mission."

The Arkansas couple related that the decision to be missions volunteers was a long-term process. "As we were raising our children we always talked about when we retire, we might consider doing volunteer missions," Mrs. Roberts explained. "When we realized our nest was empty, we looked at our finances and thought it would be impossible."

She said they "asked the Lord to give us a sign. Rebekah wrote a letter and said she needed help with hospital administration. We applied with International Service Corps and when we received our acceptance letter, we felt it was the sign. We took Easter weekend to fast and pray and at the end of the day, we saw no reason not to go." When they put their house on the market and it sold the next day, they decided that "the Lord wanted us to go to India."

"Not all of our friends have understood us selling our house or the kind of commitment we've made," Roberts acknowledged. "But the most meaningful thing has been the prayers of our friends at church. We couldn't have made it without them."

They said many images of the country have remained with them since their return, including:

-- Rebekah Naylor's ministry. "Rebekah has made a long-term commitment to the hospital," Roberts said. "She has been there 20 years and for 10 years has led the hospital as well as being surgeon."

-- Other Southern Baptist missionaries in India. "Our greatest blessing came from going out and meeting both the career people and the volunteers," Mrs. Roberts said. Tight restrictions on licenses, work permits and visas have slashed the Southern Baptist missionary force from 18 in the 1980s to one. Some missionaries moving in and out of the country on a short-term basis.

-- Indian living conditions. "The most startling image of India is the crowds, the hordes of people. They're very crowded and spaces are very tight," Roberts said. Mrs. Roberts added, "Americans have no understanding of the terrible poverty that saturates the society."

-- The dominance of Hinduism. "As Americans we are not prepared for the totality of what that means to their family life, their laws and what they think," Mrs. Roberts noted. "I do know they need to see the light of Jesus The light of the Lord is just not there." She said Christians make up only about 2 percent of the population and there is religious persecution of Christians at work and in the family.

-- Participating in the Crossover India evangelism effort. "It has been exciting to observe this great moving of the Holy Spirit all across India," Mrs. Roberts said. "None of us will ever be the same." The Southern Baptist partnership evangelism project involved more than 70 teams of volunteers Nov. 3-10 sharing Christ. More than 45,000 people attended the church meetings and were visited in their homes, with 4,033 professions of faith recorded.

Mrs. Roberts said being missions volunteers also gave them "insight into what Southern Baptists are doing around the world. The commitment Southern Baptists have to tell the world about Jesus Christ is great. The volunteers are one part of that commitment and we're happy to be part of that."

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