

(BP)

-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2200
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-2200
CompuServe ID# 7041220

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee**

November 9, 1994

94-183

WASHINGTON--Conservative Christians play role in Republican takeover in Congress.
TENNESSEE--Oregon's doctor-assisted suicide among post-election concerns.
WASHINGTON--Republicans control both houses first time in nearly 50 years.
ARKANSAS--Former Baptist pastor re-elected Arkansas lieutenant governor.
TENNESSEE--Baptist church member wins in South Carolina.
TENNESSEE--Christians' one-on-one touch can combat suicide, gambling.
FLORIDA--Key West pastor offers hope to detained Cubans.
TENNESSEE--Southern Baptists look anew at cooperation in diversity.

Conservative Christians play role
in Republican takeover in Congress By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/9/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Republican Party swept both houses of Congress Nov. 8, and observers from differing perspectives agreed conservative Christians played an important role in the effort.

Republicans gained eight seats in the Senate for a 52-48 majority. They added another member Nov. 9 when Sen. Richard Shelby, D.-Ala., announced his switch to the Republican Party.

In the House, Republicans had won at least 49 previously Democratic districts for a 228-199 advantage by midday Nov. 9, with seven races still undecided. There was one independent elected.

Republicans and some observers portrayed the dramatic shift in Congress as a rejection of President Bill Clinton and the policies of his administration and Democrats.

"I think this election was a repudiation of the Clinton agenda," said James A. Smith of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "The Republicans are beneficiaries of that repudiation. And if they fail to deliver on their promises, they may suffer themselves in the next election."

Surveys seemed to show religious conservatives played a significant part in rejecting what they considered as the liberal agenda of Democrats and giving Republicans control of both houses for the first time since 1946.

Exit polls showed evangelical Christians made up 25 percent of the electorate and more than 60 percent of those voted Republican, according to The Washington Post. In a survey commissioned by the Christian Coalition and done immediately after the polls closed, one-third of the voters identified themselves as religious conservatives. Among this group, 65 percent identified themselves as Republicans or independent Republicans, while only 21 percent said they were Democrats or independent Democrats.

While there were a number of reasons for the Republicans' sweeping victory, "I think that the Christian right can claim a part of the credit for the Republican success," said James Guth, professor of political science at Furman University in South Carolina.

--more--

At this point, "it looks like the Christian Coalition had some very considerable impact," said Guth, who participated in an in-depth study of the voting patterns of religious people in 1992. It will be a couple of weeks before he can more thoroughly assess the voting of evangelical Christians and other religious people, Guth said.

The Christian Coalition, which was founded by Pat Robertson, "played a central role in what happened Tuesday," said Interfaith Alliance Director Jill Hanauer in a prepared statement. "That means he is in a strong position to influence the legislative agenda. Given his extreme political agenda, all Americans, regardless of party affiliation, should be concerned."

The Interfaith Alliance was begun earlier this year as a counterpart to the Christian Coalition and other conservative religious organizations.

Baptist Press requested comments from Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed, but they were not received before the deadline for this article.

The Christian Coalition distributed more than 30 million voter scorecards in selected states throughout the country. Nearly all of the guides, which contrasted candidates on several issues, were issued in churches. In addition, Concerned Women for America, another conservative organization which appeals to evangelicals, distributed two million such guides. Pro-life/pro-family state organizations, some affiliated with Focus on the Family, also prepared voters guides.

The Christian Coalition said 44 of the new Republicans in the House and eight in the Senate are pro-life and pro-family.

Included are well-known evangelicals such as John Ashcroft, former governor of Missouri; Steve Largent, former record-setting wide receiver for the National Football League's Seattle Seahawks; and J.C. Watts, one-time standout quarterback at the University of Oklahoma and a Southern Baptist minister.

Ashcroft, a member of an Assembly of God church, replaced John Danforth, who was retiring, from Missouri, while Largent and Watts both won House seats from Oklahoma. Watts, an insurance commissioner in Oklahoma, serves part-time as youth minister at Sunnyside Baptist Church in Del City.

Another Southern Baptist to gain a new office was eight-term Rep. Newt Gingrich, R.-Ga. With the Republican takeover, Gingrich will become the speaker of the House in January. He is a member of New Hope Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Ga.

"It is extraordinary that the three highest positions of the federal government are now held by politicians who are members of Southern Baptist churches," said the CLC's Smith.

Clinton and Vice President Al Gore also are members of Southern Baptist congregations. In the line of succession, speaker ranks behind president and vice president.

--30--

Oregon's doctor-assisted suicide
among post-election concerns

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
11/9/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Passage of physician-assisted suicide by Oregon voters will have alarming consequences, said C. Ben Mitchell, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission consultant on biomedical and life issues.

With its Nov. 8 vote, Oregon became the first state in the nation to exempt doctors from prosecution for assisting in suicides of terminally ill patients.

The Oregon measure, Mitchell said, "is a rejection of over 2,500 years of Western medical tradition. Physicians have been healers, not killers. The very profession of medicine is at stake in this legislation."

Meanwhile, in outcomes pleasing to pro-homosexual activists, voters in Oregon and Idaho rejected measures to prohibit laws banning discrimination against homosexual men and women. Thus, localities in the two states remain free to enact such laws.

--more--

The measure in Idaho, which lost by less than 3,000 votes among more than 406,000 cast, also would have banned promotion of the homosexual lifestyle in public schools. The margin in Oregon was 53-47 percent.

Voters in Alachua County, Fla., encompassing Gainesville, moved in opposite fashion, dropping homosexual rights from that county's human rights law.

In other key ballots around the country:

-- In California, voters approved "Proposition 187," a measure to deny illegal immigrants access to public schooling, welfare and social services including non-emergency medical care. Several groups planned immediate legal challenges to the measure, which passed by a 51-49 percent margin. The proposition stirred debate over Americans' attitudes toward immigrants and an estimated \$3 billion annual cost to the state for services provided to illegal immigrants.

-- Voters in Wyoming voted down a measure to prohibit abortion except in case where the mother's life is in danger and in cases of rape or incest.

In state-by-state gambling issues, voters:

-- in Florida rejected by a 62-38 percent margin a proposal to permit casino gambling. Nearly 50 casinos were in line to open had the measure passed -- a total that would have made Florida second-highest in number of casinos in the nation.

-- in Rhode Island defeated a measure to permit casino gambling in five cities and towns, including the state capital, Providence.

-- in New Mexico approved a state lottery and legalization of video gambling by a 54-46 percent margin.

-- in Missouri legalized slot machines on riverboat casinos by a 54-46 percent margin. Voters had narrowly rejected a similar measure in April.

-- in Wyoming defeated by a 68-32 percent margin a measure to permit county-level votes on certain forms of gambling, such as slot machines, blackjack and poker with \$25 wager limits.

-- in Minnesota narrowly defeated a measure providing for off-track betting on horse racing.

-- in Colorado overwhelmingly defeated a measure to allow slot machines at commercial airports and to nullify a constitutional requirement that local voters decide on gambling issues in their communities.

-- in South Dakota amended the state constitution to allow a video lottery. A state Supreme Court ruling in June found the game unconstitutional and machines already in place were turned off in August, causing a state budget crisis over the loss of \$55 million in anticipated revenue.

And in county-by-county voting in South Carolina, only nine of 46 counties voted to ban cash payouts from popular video poker games.

Mitchell, assessing the Oregon vote to permit physician-assisted suicides, cited "the obvious consequence (of) tragedy anytime a person feels they must prematurely end their own life."

And, he said, "this is just the proverbial camel's nose under the tent. Even Hemlock Society founder Derek Humphry ... in the September 12, 1994, issue of American Medical News said, 'If this passes and the medical profession can become comfortable with this form of assisted dying, then in years to come, we may be able to go the second step.' The second step is active euthanasia."

Mitchell continued, "We need to brace ourselves and prepare for attempts to pass this type of legislation in other states. It will be unquestionably easier for other states now that they have Oregon as a mentor."

Christians should "get involved to pass legislation preventing assisted death before the pro-euthanasia forces prevail," Mitchell counseled.

Mitchell also cited concerns voiced by Oregon's Coalition for Compassionate Care that the measure invites premature deaths due to misdiagnosis, fails to require mental health evaluations of patients or notification of their families and provides blanket protection from legal liability for physicians who contend they are operating in good faith within the legal guidelines.

--more--

Assessing the nation's gambling votes, Paul Jones, executive director of Mississippi Baptists' Christian Action Commission and a noted gambling opponent, said states where gambling is defeated at the polls are states where its opponents "are well organized and address the issue from the standpoint of failed economy, criminal activity and infrastructure problems (i.e., roads, utilities, sewer system and services) and its obvious addictive and destructive nature."

"When Christian people come to understand the negative impact of gambling on the poor, on families and on legitimate business, they realize that these negative consequences of gambling are moral issues to be addressed," Jones said.

The lesson from Mississippi, where numerous casinos abound, is twofold, Jones said: "1) We cannot let economics become the driving factor in our political and personal lives. When we do, we will buy whatever is set out as our salvation. 2) Other states need to learn from Mississippi that which one month is touted as successful can become the next month the failed, such as casino bankruptcies and employee layoffs."

Gambling opponents in Florida, Jones noted, "mounted a well-financed campaign and relied heavily on the Mississippi Gulf Coast experience on crime and family problems to win. The police chief of Gulfport was a centerpiece of the anti-gambling camp in Florida. They used his report of increased crime and family problems as a springboard to point to negative outcome of casino gambling."

In term-limit votes, measures won in Colorado (U.S. representatives, three terms; senators, two terms); Massachusetts (state constitutional posts, two four-year terms; state legislators and U.S. reps, four consecutive two-year terms; U.S. senators, two consecutive terms); Maine (U.S. reps, no more than six years in an 11-year period; senators, no more than 12 years in a 17-year period); Nebraska (U.S. reps, three terms; senators, two terms; state legislators and officials in towns with 5,000 or more residents, two terms); Idaho (U.S. reps, no more than six years in an 11-year period; senators, no more than 12 years in a 23-year period; limits also set for state and local officials); Alaska (U.S. reps, no more than six years in a 12-year period; senators, no more than 12 years in an 18-year period); Nevada (state constitutional posts and judges, two terms; state legislators, 12 years); District of Columbia (all offices, two consecutive four-year terms).

The only term limits measure defeat was in Utah.

In crime-related issues:

-- Voters in California approved a "three-strikes-you're-out" measure guaranteeing life in prison for three serious or violent felonies, while Georgia voters banned parole for murderers and people with two or more violent crime convictions.

-- Voters in Virginia extended the length of time for bringing civil child abuse charges, giving victims until age 28 to file suit.

In other ballot issues:

-- Massachusetts voters approved a change in state blue laws to allow the opening of retail stores on Sunday mornings and state holidays.

-- Colorado voters rejected a measure to force fathers to pay medical costs for children of welfare mothers.

-- Nevada voters passed a measure to abolish executive sessions of the Senate and to open all meetings to the public except those on personnel matters.

--30--

Tim Nicholas contributed to this story.

Republicans control both houses
first time in nearly 50 years

Baptist Press
11/9/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Nov. 8 election results gave the Republican Party control of both the Senate and House of Representatives for the first time since 1946.

--more--

Republicans picked up eight seats in the Senate for a 52-48 majority. They gained another member Nov. 9 when Sen. Richard Shelby, D.-Ala., announced his shift to the Republican Party.

In the House, Republicans had gained 49 previously Democratic districts for a 228-199 advantage by midday Nov. 9, CNN Headline News reported. Seven races remained undecided, and there was one independent elected.

The Senate races in which Republicans captured Democratic seats were:

- Two in Tennessee, where Bill Frist overcame Jim Sasser, a three-term senator who had hoped to be the new majority leader, and Fred Thompson crushed congressman Jim Cooper.
- Pennsylvania, where Rep. Rick Santorum edged incumbent Harris Wofford.
- Michigan, where Spencer Abraham defeated Rep. Bob Carr.
- Oklahoma, where Jim Inhofe topped fellow congressman Dave McCurdy.
- Arizona, where House member Jon Kyl defeated Sam Coppersmith.
- Ohio, where Lt. Gov. Mike DeWine handled Joel Hyatt, son-in-law of retiring Sen. Howard Metzenbaum.
- Maine, where Olympia Snowe routed fellow House member Thomas Andrews.

In high-profile races in which Democrats held off serious challenges:

- Edward Kennedy, a member of the Senate for 32 years, defeated Mitt Romney in Massachusetts.
- First-term incumbent Charles Robb, who thanked abortion and homosexual rights groups in his victory speech, edged Oliver North, the Iran-Contra figure who was a favorite of many Christian conservatives.
- Dianne Feinstein, a first-term incumbent, held off House member Michael Huffington.

In the House, the most noteworthy losses by incumbent Democrats were those of indicted former Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski to Michael Flanagan in Illinois and chairman of the Judiciary Committee and 42-year member Jack Brooks to Steve Stockman in Texas.

In addition, Speaker of the House Tom Foley trailed George Nethercutt by 2,200 votes in Washington, but 21,000 absentee ballots remained to be counted.

--30--

Former Baptist pastor re-elected
Arkansas lieutenant governor By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press
11/9/94

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--While Arkansas voters bucked the national trend of ousting Democrats from office, Republican Lieutenant Governor Mike Huckabee bucked the state's tradition of electing only Democrats to statewide office.

Huckabee, a former president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, was pastor of Beech Street Baptist Church in Texarkana before resigning in February 1992 to campaign in an unsuccessful bid for a U.S. Senate seat.

He first became lieutenant governor last year in a special election after Jim Guy Tucker succeeded Bill Clinton as governor. This time around, Huckabee won a four-year term as lieutenant governor in a race against Charlie Cole Chaffin, a 10-year veteran of the Arkansas State Senate and also an Arkansas Baptist church member.

Preliminary reports indicate Huckabee won the lieutenant governor's race with a margin of about 58 percent to 42 percent. Acknowledging critics had considered last year's special election victory a fluke, Huckabee declared during his latest victory speech, "We proved tonight it is not a fluke, but a force."

Huckabee remains the only Republican elected to statewide office in Arkansas since Frank White was elected governor in 1980. White has described Huckabee as "one of the stars on the rise in the Republican party."

During each of his three campaigns over the past two years, Huckabee has faced critics' charges that he abandoned a higher calling when he resigned the pastorate to enter politics.

--more--

"The highest calling anyone has is to follow Jesus Christ, not to fill a particular ecclesiastical role," Huckabee responded. "To really be a Christian means that we are salt and light wherever we are and we never go off the clock as Christians Fulfilling God's will is discovering what it is he uniquely wants me to do now."

One week before his re-election, Huckabee welcomed Arkansas Baptist messengers to their annual meeting at Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, the home congregation of President Bill Clinton.

"What is happening here and what happens in some 1,300 churches across Arkansas who preach the gospel in the name of Southern Baptists every Sunday is where we're really going to find solutions to problems," he told fellow Baptists. "It's not in new laws and new legislation. It's in new hearts."

"Let us never forget that God still changes the world one heart at a time," Huckabee affirmed. "That's our hope. That's our only hope."

--30--

Baptist church member
wins in South Carolina

Baptist Press
11/9/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist church members elected to state offices Nov. 8 included the new governor of South Carolina.

David Beasley, the Republican nominee for governor and a member of Shandon Baptist Church, Columbia, received 468,417 votes, or 50 percent of the total, in a contest with Nick Theodore, a Democrat who garnered 445,686 votes, or 48 percent. Two independents also received a fraction of the vote. Beasley is a former parliamentarian for the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Meanwhile, Mike Huckabee was re-elected as Arkansas' lieutenant governor. Huckabee is a former pastor of Beech Street Baptist Church, Texarkana, and former president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

Nancy Schaeffer, a commissioner on the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, lost in a race for Georgia lieutenant governor against Democratic incumbent Pierre Howard. Schaeffer is a member of First Baptist Church in Atlanta and a pro-family activist. With nearly all precincts reporting, Howard had a 54-42-percent margin over Schaeffer. She lost a bid last year for mayor of Atlanta.

In other news of note from the election, George W. Bush, son of President Bush, ousted Texas Democratic Gov. Ann Richards by a 53-46 percent margin, while his brother, Jeb Bush lost to Florida Democratic Gov. Lawton Chiles by a 51-49 percent margin.

--30--

Christians' one-on-one touch
can combat suicide, gambling

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
11/9/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--No matter which way physician-assisted suicide and gambling votes go, Christians can make a difference in the lives of the terminally ill and addicted gamblers, according to two Southern Baptist spokesmen.

Commenting after Oregon voters passed a measure Nov. 8 to exempt physicians from assisting in suicides of terminally ill patients, C. Ben Mitchell, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission consultant on biomedical and life issues, advised Christians to "remove the physical, emotional and spiritual obstacles which keep patients from wanting to live."

"Most patients who say they want to die feel they are being a burden to their families or feel they have been abandoned by the medical profession," Mitchell said. "Christians can provide a cure for that sense of alienation and abandonment. We can spend time with and care for dying patients in such a way that they sense they are loved and wanted."

--more--

"The simplest gestures of compassion -- holding a hand, visiting with and praying for a patient, reading to a patient -- can keep persons from wanting to end their lives prematurely," Mitchell said.

Meanwhile, Paul Jones, executive director of Mississippi Baptists' Christian Action Commission, commenting on gambling-related initiatives in nine states, noted the appeal of a casino "is not about money." For most people who gamble in one of Mississippi's numerous casinos, Jones said, "it is a place where they can be accepted, affirmed and treated as appreciated individuals. The gambler who experiences the warmth and welcome of the casino will become the frequent player of the games.

"Perhaps the church needs to learn that people are looking for that which accepts and affirms this and does not depreciate their value as persons," Jones said.

--30--

Key West pastor offers
hope to detained Cubans

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
11/9/94

KEY WEST, Fla. (BP)--Although U.S. policy may change overnight, Tomas Diaz believes Cubans detained in Guantanamo Bay may be there for two to three years. And it was his responsibility to tell them so.

For 35 days, Diaz, pastor of the White Street Church in Key West, served in Guantanamo Bay as an interpreter and liaison between the 24,000 Cubans detained there and the Department of State and U.S. military.

Not only did he translate the language, Diaz was also called upon to interpret U.S. policy. It was not always a pleasant task.

The refugees often became angry at the message and the messenger, Diaz said. But over and over again, he was able to diffuse the situation by telling the Cubans their only hope for real peace in this situation is Jesus Christ. And he reminded them that many people were praying for them.

"The people responded because I carried the message that even more important than going to the United States is the perfect hope found in Jesus Christ," said Diaz.

The calm that came over the people after Diaz had spoken was so obvious that on one occasion, Joseph Bracken, head of the State Department Joint Task Force governing program, asked the pastor what had been said in Spanish.

Bracken later praised the efforts of Diaz as "an interpreter and a spiritual advisor. His linguistic ability, cultural knowledge and pleasant disposition have made him one of the most valued employees in the Cuban camps."

Diaz, a missionary funded jointly by the Florida Baptist Convention and the Home Mission Board, was chosen for this assignment on the strength of his work with the Cuban rafters in Key West. For months as the refugees escaped to Key West, Diaz would greet every group, share the gospel message and send them to Miami. Dozens were led to the Lord.

In Guantanamo Bay, Diaz spent hours translating for Bracken, physicians and the military, being available wherever they needed him. Every day offered a new set of challenges.

"Regardless of the heat, the dust, or the crowded conditions, he always maintained a sympathetic attitude and an unfailing translation," Bracken said. "Tomas was an important part of the U.S. Safe-Haven program as he facilitated the government's attempts to inform the Cuban immigrants about U.S. policy and to improve the quality of lives in Guantanamo Bay to the extent possible."

After he established his credibility with the chaplains, Diaz was given the opportunity to preach three revivals for the Cubans. As many as 2,300 came to one meeting.

--more--

Jokingly, Diaz said the crowd was "the biggest congregation I will have in my life."

"The people wanted to go to the revivals. Thousands of people came and listened to the Word. We sang together, we preached together and heard the word of the Lord."

Many indicated they were making professions of faiths, Diaz said.

Diaz took and distributed 1,500 Hispanic Bibles provided by the Florida Baptist Convention and counseled with many of the Cuban refugees.

Several shared that they were carrying AIDS or were HIV positive. In Cuba, Diaz said, they lived in a sanatorium but the military police had forced them to board rafts to the United States saying there was no medicine on the island to treat them. Others had active cases of tuberculosis.

Many of the refugees feared reprisals should they ever return to Cuba, said Diaz.

Acknowledging the people are sad, Diaz said he is not ready to blame the United States for their detainment. "It's hard to see the people and what they are going through, but at the same time, I see that the U.S. is only trying to help."

"The most important thing is that we share the gospel. People will receive Christ and he will give them support they need in a political crisis."

--30--

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the sixth article in "The Spirit of Southern Baptists, 1845-1995" series. The Historical Commission, SBC, will release one article each month from June 1994 to May 1995.

Southern Baptists look anew
at cooperation in diversity

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
11/9/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Although conceived in schism and born in diversity, the Southern Baptist Convention was bred on cooperation.

The SBC endured a traumatic delivery in 1845, when Baptists split over slavery and the right of Southerners to chart their own course. Still, Southern Baptists cooperated from the beginning.

Their charter proclaimed they created the SBC "for the propagation of the gospel." So, they immediately founded foreign and domestic mission boards. Later they formed 18 additional agencies to do other work. And they created their Cooperative Program unified budget in 1925 to fund the lion's share of state and national ministries.

Even before they launched their convention, Southern Baptists were a diverse people.

Early Baptists in the South divided into at least three theological subgroups, observes Walter Shurden, head of the Christianity department at Mercer University. He and Albert McClellan, a longtime SBC executive and historian, also categorized Southern Baptists according to state/regional strains, each with its own polity and style.

More recently, 20th-century societal shifts have provoked diversity. These diversities have been compounded by the focal points of recent SBC controversy, particularly Scripture, the role of women in the church and the authority of the pastor.

Still, Southern Baptists received and extended a rich legacy of cooperation.

--more--

Before Baptists created organizations beyond churches, congregations cooperated to ordain ministers, Shurden reports. Later, they worked together in organizations of various sizes and purposes. District associations formed within small geographic boundaries and with theological purposes. In the 18th century, societies pooled resources for common tasks. Then state conventions arrived, organized primarily to do missions. Finally, the SBC formed in 1845. Despite its name, it retained much of the societal structure until 1925, when the SBC centralized funding through the Cooperative Program and codified beliefs in the Baptist Faith and Message statement.

The "grand compromise" made such cooperation possible until about 15 years ago, says Bill Leonard, chair of the religion department at Samford University. "Southern identity, denominational loyalty and a sense of universal mission combined to create an institution built on compromise and motivated by the rhetoric of pietistic, populist triumphalism," he explains.

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, emphasizes Leonard's final point and adds another: "Southern Baptists have a singular purpose -- to fulfill the Great Commission in preaching Christ to a lost world. ... (But) we've cooperated on the basis of a common bond of belief. Southern Baptists are a Bible-believing, Christ-honoring people."

What Chapman touts as a path to cooperation -- uniform belief -- SBC moderates have decried as a road to division. They have argued doctrinal uniformity has not been part of the Southern Baptist consensus and will be achieved only as a byproduct of denominational purging.

As the SBC approaches its 150th anniversary, Southern Baptists ask, "What is the role of cooperation in our future?"

"The 'grand compromise' (is) so far gone now," Leonard says, reflecting on erosion of denominational loyalty, dissipation of a cohesive Southern culture and loss of common ground between moderates and conservatives.

Chapman sees a rosier future: "The thread of cooperation running through the denomination will help us remain intact, with perhaps few exceptions. ... We have struggled in recent years, but we struggled before. It may take time, but the convention will emerge much stronger in order to reach the world."

The new "struggle" will involve determining how to expand cooperation with integrity, predicts Ike Reighard, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Ga.

"Most young conservative pastors were educated at Southern Baptist seminaries and are committed to being Southern Baptist and emphasizing the Cooperative Program," Reighard notes. "They'll be asking: 'How can we reinvolve these people? How do you bring them in without compromising your own convictions?' That's where the tension lies."

The key, he adds, will be achieving a balanced focus on "reaching people for Christ and making an overall impact on society."

And at the grass-roots level, Southern Baptists are reasserting their intention to cooperate.

At Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, pastor Jim Johnson says he feels "like a man without a country," between political poles of the SBC.

But the church decided to cooperate broadly. "We are going to cooperate with any Great Commission church or organization that invites us to or we sense God leading us to," Johnson explains. "We're not in competition with anybody if we're trying to lead people to Christ. We're going to work with both groups and others as well."

--30--

A longer version of this article is available in the SBCNet News Room under the file name: SOUDIV.HC. To receive free guidelines and to purchase resources to help celebrate the SBC's 150th anniversary, write the Historical Commission, SBC, at 901 Commerce Street, Suite 400, Nashville, TN 37203-3630, or call toll-free 1-800-966-BAPT.

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, TN 37234

F
I
R
S
T

C
L
A
S
S

Southern Baptist Library
and Archives