

# **(ABP) — ASSOCIATED BAPTIST PRESS**

January 18, 1991

ABP 91-2  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Embattled president to retire from board post**

ABP

By Dan Martin  
ABP interim news editor

NASHVILLE (ABP) — Lloyd Elder will retire as president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, a Jan. 17 special meeting of trustees, called to consider firing him, was told.

Elder's retirement announcement, which came amidst allegations of financial mismanagement, editorial bias and unethical tapings of telephone conversations, apparently caught supporters by surprise.

As late as the afternoon of Jan. 17, supporters said they expected the embattled president of the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention "to go to the wall" in refusing to give in to demands of fundamental-conservatives that he either resign, retire or be fired.

"He just caved in," said one moderate-conservative trustee. "We came to help him, but when he caved in, there was nothing for us to do but vote for it (the retirement agreement)."

The retirement also apparently caught other administrators off guard. "We expected him to fight it," said one, who added he went to the meeting with no knowledge of Elder's plans to retire.

Elder told ABP on Jan. 18 that when the review process began two months ago, he thought he had two options, "to rebuild trust or to provide for an orderly transition of leadership." When it became apparent he was not going to be able to rebuild trust, the "best alternative" was to reach the retirement agreement.

The agreement was announced to trustees, administrators, news media and about 400 board employees and friends soon after the 7 p.m. meeting began.

Bill Anderson, trustee chairman, said the meeting had been called at the request of "more than 15" trustees and was for the purpose of "evaluating" Elder's performance as president.

He announced Elder's intention to retire as the "best of a lot of alternatives" facing the president and trustees.

Prior to the presentation of the agreement, apparently signed about 5 p.m. Jan. 17, Elder made an abbreviated "presidential performance report" to trustees. When he concluded his 20-minute presentation, there was silence from trustees and observers, in contrast to loud and sustained applause from the audience as Elder had entered the board room just prior to the session.

"These have been difficult weeks, these last six or eight," Elder said in his presentation. "We have looked at options in good will. We had a process (of evaluation) that we had agreed on ... but we still found ourselves at an impasse."

Elder noted there were "significant organizational and management differences between the president and trustees."

He did not specify why he had changed his mind from a decision which became public Jan. 11, in which he said he could not "accept the option of committing my intention to resign quietly...."

Sources close to the board, however, told ABP Elder had been told if he did not resign, he would be fired and the entire management team would be taken out with him.

Elder would not confirm or deny the report to ABP, and said he would stay by his decision to respect the "executive privilege" of the committee process although the discussions had become "an open secret" in the deliberations.

He told trustees in the open meeting he wanted "some kind of orderly transition" and added he was aware the president "serves at the will of the board," and that "the president serves effectively at the good will of the board."

— more —

Elder said he wanted "what is best for the mission of the Sunday School Board ... what is best for Southern Baptists ... and what is best for Lloyd Elder's effective leadership."

He added he has followed what is "probably the closest to a motto I have: I have done the best I can with what I have, where I am for as long as I can for Jesus' sake today."

After Elder's comments, the retirement agreement was presented by Dan Collins, an attorney from Taylors, S.C., and chairman of the general administration committee which had met for most of Jan. 16 and 17 to hammer out some kind of recommendation.

Collins said a five-member presidential performance workgroup "had been in session for more than 30 hours ... and some of us for more than 70 hours" in trying to solve the leadership impasse.

He said the retirement agreement had been proposed by Elder's private attorney, William Harbison, a retired justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court.

The five-page agreement specifies Elder will retire effective Jan. 31, 1992, or 30 days after the election of his successor by the board. After his retirement, he will become an advisor and consultant to the board until April 1, 1993, shortly after his 60th birthday.

Elder will receive full salary and benefits as president and consultant. After his retirement, he will receive half salary.

According to board officials, Elder's salary and housing allowance is \$135,888 annually.

The agreement also specifies he will receive full benefits, plus an automobile and "certain office furniture."

It also notes that Elder "agrees that during the period he is receiving compensation or benefits ... he shall not make any statement or take any action not in the best interest of the board." If he does, it adds he "shall forfeit all amounts payable to him ...."

Collins repeatedly noted the settlement agreement was "generous." Another trustee, Gary McNanamy, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Lawton, Okla., said it was too generous, "almost indecent."

The board meeting was restrained and almost somber. Several leaders, including Chairman Anderson, said the board wanted to conduct a restrained and open session, in contrast to the mid-summer called session of the SBC Executive Committee in which the director and news editor of the denomination's news service were fired in a closed session.

"We didn't want that kind of rancor," Anderson said.

The only real point of discussion during the called session was whether Elder's reverting to advisor and consultant status would occur immediately or according to the agreement.

Roland Maddox, a businessman from Memphis, Tenn., made a motion to put Elder on consultant status "immediately," which was discussed for more than an hour.

Maddox's motion was defeated on a roll call vote 41-31 with one abstention.

Both Elder and Collins agreed the retirement "is a result of honest differences of opinion ... with regard to management style, philosophy and performance," and is not "a result of or based upon political or theological differences."

However, trustees were told Elder had ignored warnings about several ventures which were failing, including the BTN television network and Genevox music publishing.

The most serious allegations — and the reported key cause of the impasse — concerned Elder's management of the manuscript of a centennial history of the board, written by Leon McBeth, a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

In August of 1990, trustees advised the administration not to publish the book, which they said was biased against conservatives.

Complaints about Elder's performance in regard to the book were recounted in a Dec. 13 committee meeting when trustee Larry Holly, a physician from Beaumont, Texas, spent more than an hour going over his complaints, which he documented with a 233-page report.

Holly told ABP his complaints "started the process" which resulted in the forced retirement.

Although trustees were told that under Elder's presidency, annual board revenues have risen from \$133 million to \$180 million, trustee Charles Wilson, a businessman from Somerdale, N.J., charged "real growth" has not occurred in four areas: church literature, Broadman Press, Convention Press and the bookstore operation.

Probably the most significant disagreement during the called meeting came over charges Elder secretly taped private telephone conversations.

Collins said affidavits had been obtained "only today" from people concerning the alleged taping. While he did not specify who the affidavits were from, ABP has learned they were from Anderson and board attorney Robert Thomas of Nashville.

Elder flatly denied he had secretly taped private conversations, but both Anderson and Thomas told trustees they had been taped.

Collins told trustees such tapings were not illegal under Tennessee law, but caused "ethical concerns."

When the retirement agreement was put to a vote, it was adopted by the board with only a few dissents.

Anderson told trustees they could not name a search committee to seek a replacement at the called meeting. It is assumed the committee will be named at the upcoming semi-annual trustee meeting Feb. 4-6 in Nashville.

Elder, 57, was elected president of the board in February 1983, became president-elect at mid-year and was installed as president in February 1984.

Previously, he was executive vice president of Southwestern seminary, 1978-83; assistant to the executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1975-78; and a pastor.

His wife, Sue, had heart bypass surgery in Nashville's Baptist Hospital Dec. 24. She was present for the called board meeting.

—30—

**Fund raiser named  
to staff of BJCPA**

ABP 91-2  
1/18/91

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) —John M. Womble has been named director of denominational relations and development at the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Womble, most recently vice president for university relations and development at Mercer University, Macon, Ga., succeeds Victor Tupitza, who recently retired as director of the religious liberty agency's denominational services offices.

The BJC is a religious liberty watchdog organization composed of nine Baptist bodies in the United States.

The position Womble accepted was expanded by the BJC board during its October meeting to include fund raising and development. The board took the action after messengers to the 1990 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention slashed the annual allocation to the BJC from \$391,796 to \$50,000.

Womble, who earned bachelor's and masters' degrees in business administration from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, has worked in development campaigns for four universities and a medical center foundation during his 14-year development career.

At Mercer during 1989-90, he directed public relations and alumni programs as well as fund campaigns that included an annual fund of \$1.5 million and total fund raising of more than \$10 million.

As vice president of development at Centenary College in Shreveport, La., during 1987-89, he implemented a \$15 million capital and endowment campaign. During 1985-87, he was director of foundation and corporate support at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

As assistant vice president for development and alumni relations for six years at Hardin-Simmons, Womble directed the annual fund campaign that produced more than \$600,000 annually and directed a \$1.9 million alumni campaign.

Prior to that, he was vice president of Hendrick Medical Center Foundation in Abilene during a \$5.5 million capital campaign.

Womble, 48, and his wife, Marilyn, have three children.

—30—