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Exec Committee to study disputed fund,
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**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee**

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Executive Committee will recommend that the Southern Baptist Convention end its 53-year relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee but has not decided who should get a \$380,000 capital-needs fund earmarked for the religious-liberty agency.

A committee will study that issue and report in February. Meanwhile, the Southern Baptist Foundation, which handles the fund, reportedly has refused to give the money to the Baptist Joint Committee.

During the Southern Baptist Convention in June, messengers voted to eliminate all SBC funding of the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious-liberty coalition made up of nine Baptist bodies.

But the loss of funding did not resolve the long-simmering issue of Southern Baptist participation in the Baptist Joint Committee, which still allowed SBC representation on its board.

"Elimination of the budget item did not kill the relationship at all," explained Harold Bennett, president of the Executive Committee, during the group's Sept. 16-17 meeting in Nashville, Tenn.

Committee members moved quickly to take care of that formality by approving a motion to "terminate the convention's participation" in the Baptist Joint Committee.

However, the motion does not prohibit the Christian Life Commission from relating to the BJC "in any manner it might deem appropriate." Two members of the 77-person committee voted against the motion, which must be approved by the Southern Baptist Convention in June.

The move to sever ties with the BJC, which was a matter of vigorous debate at several previous Executive Committee meetings, was approved with almost no discussion by the 77-member board.

But members weren't so sure what to do about the request to turn the capital-needs fund over to the Christian Life Commission, which in June inherited the BJC's traditional assignment of representing Southern

Baptists on religious-liberty issues in Washington.

Both the CLC and BJC have laid claim to the money, which was set aside 27 years ago to purchase an office for the Baptist Joint Committee but never used for that purpose.

The fund is in the name of the Baptist Joint Committee, which has received interest on the money annually since the late 1960s.

But now that CLC trustees represent Southern Baptists on religious-liberty issues, they claim they are the rightful owners. They want to use the money to purchase an office for the CLC's new Washington staff. They point to a footnote attached to the 1964 allocation that says it is "subject to conditions approved by the Executive Committee or the Southern Baptist Convention."

The Baptist Joint Committee, which signed a \$345,000 contract to buy a Washington office building Sept. 9, now says it has met the only condition placed on the funds -- purchase of a building.

In a letter to the Foundation Sept. 12, BJC attorney Oliver Thomas said the Foundation's delay in releasing the money "could have disastrous consequences for the Baptist Joint Committee. "If additional conditions are placed on this account as a result of this delay," Thomas wrote, "we will look to the Foundation as one of the parties responsible for our financial loss."

It is unclear if the Executive Committee has the power to reassign the money to the CLC or put additional restrictions on the fund.

Ray Fuller, chairman of the administrative committee, presented the recommendation to study the dispute "because we need that further information and we need that further legal advice."

The committee includes the lawyers on the Executive Committee, the officers and three members of the administrative committee -- Larry Otis of Tupelo, Miss., Bob Parker of Lake Mary, Fla., and Danny Crow of Pittsburgh, Pa.

The Executive Committee declined to get involved in another potentially volatile matter -- a request for the SBC Christian Life Commission to take over Family Concerns Inc., an Atlanta-based ministry that organizes family-advocacy groups in local churches.

The request, which came from Nancy Schaefer, the CLC trustee who operates Family Concerns, was referred with no discussion to the Sunday School Board, the agency that carries the SBC assignment for family ministries in the local church.

Family Concerns seeks to educate and mobilize church members on social and legislative issues affecting the traditional family. If adopted by the CLC, the ministry would directly involve the moral-concerns agency in local churches for the first time.

The CLC voted Sept. 11 to study the proposal, which Schaefer offered as a motion during the Southern Baptist Convention in June.

Jimmy Draper, newly elected president of the Sunday School Board, said he is "concerned" about Schaefer's motion.

"What she wants to do is make the Christian Life Commission a political action committee," Draper told a group of reporters Sept. 17. "I question whether the Christian Life Commission needs to become a political action committee that writes to Southern Baptists and says, 'This is your position. Now do it.'"

He also opposed the Sunday School Board taking that approach. "Political activity is something the Sunday School Board is not going to do," he said.

Draper said he would like to sit down with all parties involved and try to work out a "cooperative solution" that does not duplicate efforts. "I'd like very much not to have to reinvent the wheel," he said.

The Executive Committee breezed through its business with little

discussion and no rancor, adjourning the meeting half a day early. Forty-one of the 43 recommendations were approved unanimously, and only three negative votes were registered during the entire meeting.

As part of the ritual of the committee's fall meeting, members heard funding requests from 19 Southern Baptist agencies and institutions that receive money from the Cooperative Program, the denomination's primary channel for funding its missions and ministries.

The agencies requested a total of \$150 million for fiscal year 1992-93, \$10 million more than is budgeted for 1991-92. The agencies asked for one-year increases averaging 13 percent, ranged from the 79 percent increase requested by the Stewardship Commission to the 0.03 percent decrease suggested by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The committee will adopt its own allocations for the agencies at its next meeting in February.

Large increases are not likely since committee members were told the 1990-91 Cooperative Program is running 0.59 percent behind the pace of last year for the first nine months. The three-quarters report -- \$105.6 million this year -- has shown a steady decline for at least five years. The SBC will close the books on the 1990-91 fiscal year Sept. 30.

The need to encourage more Cooperative Program support was the reason given by the Stewardship Commission for its unusually large budget request.

Committee members also demonstrated their concern about the lack of growth in CP contributions by agreeing to host a conference on the subject. The meeting will involve leaders from the Executive Committee and its staff, Stewardship Commission, Inter-Agency Council and state Baptist conventions "in analyzing the nature of the Cooperative Program as it is now being interpreted and in developing proposals for the future enhancement of the Cooperative Program," the proposal said.

Cooperative Program giving also was on the mind of SBC president Morris Chapman, who delivered his president's report during the committee's opening session.

Chapman complained that the way some state Baptist conventions are interpreting the Cooperative Program allows churches to be considered cooperative even if they withhold contributions from SBC agencies they dislike.

"Exclusions within the Cooperative Program is a dangerous precedent and will contribute to the unraveling and ultimately to the dismantling of the Cooperative Program," warned Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas.

In Texas, the state with the largest annual CP contributions, Baptists will vote in November on a proposal to allow "cooperative" churches to exclude up to five SBC causes. In Florida, churches are considered cooperative if they support the state Cooperative Program, even if they contribute nothing to the SBC. Other states and individual churches have supported the alternate-funding plan developed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Such approaches threaten to further deplete Cooperative Program funding.

"If exclusions become the order of the day," Chapman warned, "what prohibits local churches from excluding state conventions?"

Also in his speech, Chapman announced plans for "Crossover" evangelism campaigns in seven New York cities in 1993 and a Watchman on the Wall National Prayer Alert, a nationwide intercessory prayer strategy for Southern Baptist churches.

Several Executive Committee members said privately they consider Chapman a likely choice to succeed Harold Bennett, who will retire next year after 13 years as president-treasurer of the Executive Committee.

The 10-member search committee assigned to find Bennett's replacement presented a list of criteria it will use to evaluate nominees for the position. Search chairman Julian Motley of Durham, N.C., said the criteria closely parallel those used in the selection of Bennett in 1979.

The new president should be "doctrinally sound (and) theologically conservative with openness to all segments of Southern Baptist life," the two-page description said. And the person should possess administrative competence, relational skills and "a dynamic vision for the Lord's work among Southern Baptists."

The search committee announced no timetable for completing its work.

Committee members unanimously endorsed the election of Art Toalston, staff writer for the Foreign Mission Board, as news editor of Baptist Press, the denominational news service operated by the Executive Committee. Toalston, 40, replaces Dan Martin, one of two Baptist Press employees fired last year in a dispute over editorial freedom.

Toalston was interviewed and elected by the administrative subcommittee, which questioned him about his method of handling controversial stories and his view of Scripture; he said he believes in inerrancy.

The Executive Committee also tackled the thorny issue of seminary accreditation, which has been a cause of concern since actions by fundamental-conservative trustees and administrators at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary landed the Wake Forest, N.C., school on accreditation "warning."

The Executive Committee's program workgroup discussed accreditation for two hours Sept. 16 with officials of the Education Commission, which deals with accreditation at SBC schools, and the Association of Theological Schools, one of the agencies that accredits the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

Arthur Walker, executive director of the Education Commission, reviewed the findings of a commission task force, which concluded that formation of an SBC-only accrediting agency is neither warranted nor desired by most Baptist schools.

The Executive Committee has had a task force of its own studying accreditation. The group took no action and was disbanded after Southeastern Seminary avoided probation from the Association of Theological Schools this summer.

Workgroup members, however, still expressed a desire to "hold ATS accountable" for what they consider to be mistreatment of Southeastern. Yet members of the program workgroup were dissatisfied with the results of the Sept. 16 meeting, which was held under background rules that forbid direct quotation.

Although some workgroup members favored pursuing other accreditation options, others said the Executive Committee should bow out of the dispute, since accreditation is assigned to the Education Commission.

The workgroup voted to accept an invitation to send three of its members to consult with the Education Commission's task force in hopes of making some headway on the issue by February.

In other seminary matters, Executive Committee members learned that Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary has decided not to sell its campus in Mill Valley, Calif., to move to a more affordable location.

Permission to sell the valuable San Francisco-area property was granted by seminary trustees two years ago as a solution to the school's financial woes. "It costs 37.2 percent more to live (in Mill Valley) than in any of the other five cities where the Southern Baptist Convention has seminaries," Golden Gate President Williams Crews told Executive Committee members.

However, Crews reported the seminary received "no substantive offer"

for the property, prompting the change of plans.

"It is our plan to remain in Mill Valley and aggressively pursue our assignment," announced Crews. He said the school will focus on recruiting significantly more students, which will automatically increase SBC funding of the school.

The Executive Committee is considering changing the formula that determines how much money each seminary gets from the Cooperative Program.

The committee declined to approve the amended charter of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary until the seminary deletes several provisions that allow for the removal of trustees. The committee requested the deletions last February in light of plans to revise the SBC constitution or bylaws to include similar provisions for all SBC entities.

In April, however, seminary trustees declined to act until the SBC bylaws are amended to include such powers.

James Guenther, attorney for the Executive Committee, said the provisions in Southern's charter are improper. "That is a loophole which I believe our polity cannot tolerate," he said. "It is our position that the convention and only the convention should have the right to determine when a (trustee) position should be made vacant."

In response to motions from the June SBC meeting, the Executive Committee turned back proposals to institute a system of voting from remote locations during the annual Southern Baptist Convention; to require that the SBC parliamentarian be a Southern Baptist; to require that all officers and trustees elected by the SBC come from churches that give a minimum percentage of their church budgets to the Cooperative Program; and to change SBC bylaws to allow mission congregations to send messengers to the annual meeting.

Among proposals that did receive approval was a motion to recycle waste during the annual SBC meeting.

Also approved were two new members of the 1991-92 SBC Committee on Nominations, replacing two who declined or became ineligible. The new members are John Greever, pastor of Pleasant Heights Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Ind., and Vera Morley, a pastor's wife from Belle Plaine, Kan.

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Most Fellowship money supports
traditional SBC causes, council told

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- More than three-fourths of the money contributed to the alternate-funding plan of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has been spent on traditional Southern Baptist ministries -- primarily the SBC Foreign and Home Mission boards.

That was the report given to members of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council, which held its first full meeting in Atlanta Sept. 12-14.

John Cothran, co-chairman of the council's finance committee, said 77.7 percent of the \$2.65 million received by the Fellowship since Jan. 1 has been spent on "business-as-usual items," such as the Foreign Mission Board (32.4 percent), Home Mission Board (11.3 percent), SBC seminaries (10.6 percent), other SBC agencies (3.8 percent), and state Baptist conventions (19.6 percent).

Only 15.1 percent, or \$399,587, has been spent on distinctive Fellowship projects, such as new mission ventures and the Fellowship's annual assembly.

Council members suggested such information should allay fears that the

Fellowship has abandoned traditional Southern Baptist causes. But they also said increased funding of Fellowship projects is needed.

"We're still sending our money to the same old places," noted Cothran of Greenville, S.C. More churches need to go beyond "the baby step" of routing their SBC support through the Fellowship, he said, and instead contribute to the Fellowship's new ventures "to make this operation what we want it to become."

Money sent to the Fellowship or to its funding channel, the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, is distributed either as designated by the contributor or according to the budget adopted last spring by the BCMP, a budget that includes most Southern Baptist causes.

The Fellowship's funding plan has received an average of \$332,000 a month since the first of the year and is expected to exceed \$4 million by year's end, said Jim Lacy of Midland, Texas, co-chairman of the finance committee.

According to Lacy, 328 churches sent money to the Fellowship between Jan. 1 and Aug. 31, including at least 187 churches that support the Fellowship through their budgets.

Another 56 churches have relayed designated contributions from church members and 85 churches have sent money without specifying if it was from the church budget or individuals. Additionally, 309 individuals have contributed directly to the Fellowship, Lacy said.

A majority of churches represented on the 82-person council contribute money to the Fellowship from their budgets, according to an informal survey conducted during the meeting.

As expected, council members approved a plan to merge the Fellowship with the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program Inc., the non-profit corporation established in the spring of 1990 to receive and disburse funds from Baptist churches and individuals that wanted to bypass the Cooperative Program, the traditional Southern Baptist channel for funding missions and ministries.

Once the merger is complete, BCMP will go out of existence, leaving the Fellowship as the primary channel of alternate funding for Southern Baptists.

Duke McCall of Jupiter, Fla., chairman of the BCMP, described the BCMP as merely "a cup" used to hold money contributed by moderate-conservatives until an appropriate organization could be established. The merger with the Fellowship, he said, completes the BCMP's usefulness. "We always intended to give the cup away to whomever would use it," explained McCall, retired president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The merger won't be completed, however, until the Fellowship receives federal authorization as a tax-exempt corporation. Until then, BCMP will be operated by a 15-member board that includes eight BCMP directors and seven Fellowship members.

Council members heard that some Fellowship mission ventures are already underway. The Fellowship has authorized 12 mission projects and budgeted almost \$400,000 for them.

The council's global missions ministry group reported that on-site visits have been conducted for mission projects in Russia, Romania and Ireland, and that other visits are scheduled.

The Fellowship began work on missions even before the new organization was constituted. "We don't want people to think we're just talking about doing missions and not doing any of it," reported Jimmy Allen of Fort Worth, Texas, co-chairperson of the missions group and former president of the SBC Radio and Television Commission.

Allen lamented that only "a tiny percentage" of the Fellowship's budget currently is spent on new mission ventures, but he said spending a lot of money before a missions structure and philosophy were in place would

not have been appropriate. A November retreat is scheduled to develop a philosophy of missions and to set priorities.

Because the Fellowship is new, Allen said, it can do missions without bearing the weight of a large denominational bureaucracy. At the same time, he added, the group can preserve the best from 150 years of Southern Baptist missions work. "We've done a lot of things right in these 150 years," said Allen.

Council members also heard plans for the Fellowship's assembly next spring, the first since the group was constituted last May in Atlanta. The national meeting is scheduled for April 30-May 2 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas, and co-chairperson of the assembly committee, urged Fellowship members to put their best foot forward for the Texas meeting.

Fellowship leaders acknowledge the group is viewed with suspicion by many Southern Baptists, even some moderate-conservatives.

"Since this is the first time we will meet in the West, we feel it is especially important for people to understand what we're about," Wade told Associated Baptist Press.

The assembly is being held in Texas in part to try to bridge the gap between the Fellowship's East Coast constituency, which is viewed as more liberal, and its Southern and Western constituencies, which are seen as more conservative.

A scientific survey of people who participated in the Fellowship's May convocation supports some of those distinctions, although researcher Nancy Ammerman, a council member, said they are "overwhelmingly differences of degree, not kind."

According to the study, the estimated 6,000 people who attended the May meeting came from 1,555 churches in 34 states. About 20 percent of the SBC churches with 1,000 or more members were represented at the meeting, said Ammerman, a professor of sociology at Emory University in Atlanta.

While 32 percent of participants said they want to explore new alternatives for denominational participation within the Southern Baptist Convention, 59 percent said they would explore alternatives outside the SBC as well.

Tensions between the various moderate-conservative groups that comprise the Fellowship surfaced occasionally during the council's three-day session.

In an emotional appeal near the end of the meeting, Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, cautioned council members not to be distracted by any other agenda besides Baptist distinctives.

The "women's matter," generational differences and tensions between Baptists east and west each could potentially derail the fledgling Fellowship, he warned.

The Fellowship was formed last year to provide moderate-conservatives with an alternative to continued political fighting with fundamental-conservatives, who now control the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The living again of Baptist ideas...ought to be what separates us from the other group," Sherman said.

If Fellowship members become preoccupied with other agendas, the group could find itself with no constituency, he warned. Sherman cited as an illustration the fictional Don Quixote, whom he described as an idealist who followed his ideas but found himself standing alone.

"We cannot afford a mistake," Sherman said.

Although several council members were poised to voice reactions to Sherman's comments, Fellowship moderator John Hewett cut the discussion short.

He later explained his reasons to Associated Baptist Press.

"This is an administrative group," Hewett said of the Coordinating

Council. "What we have to do is make this thing work." Discussions about philosophical differences are better suited for a retreat setting, he said.

Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., predicted tensions will remain over the role of women and other issues, but he suggested those tensions already have eased somewhat. "We're in a much better place, a much healthier place, than we were 18 months ago," he said.

He acknowledged the difficulty of building consensus among the Fellowship's various constituents but added, "I think we're going to hold it together."

"I'm greatly encouraged by this meeting," he said.

The council heard reports from ministry groups working in several areas:

-- Ethics and public policy. The council has "entered into conversation with" the Baptist Center for Ethics, a new moderate-conservative agency based in Nashville, Tenn. "It's no secret they would like some official relationship (with the Fellowship), financial and otherwise," said Layne Smith of Fayetteville, Ark., co-chairperson of the ethics and public policy ministry group.

The ethics group has been invited to lead a session or workshop at the BCE's first seminar in February, council members were told. The ethics group was authorized to participate, although no decision has yet been made.

Council members discussed what relationship to pursue with BCE and other ethics organizations. Cecil Sherman said the Fellowship should have a special affinity for the BCE and other organizations that are products of "the same thoughts, sorrows and conscience decisions that have put us in this room."

"There are some people who are kin to us because they came from the same mess and mix as we..." Sherman said. Others argued the Fellowship should remain open to organizations that are not products of the SBC controversy.

-- Theological education. The Fellowship already has approved financial assistance to two theological schools -- the Baptist Seminary at Richmond, which opened this fall, and Truett Seminary, which is under development at Baylor University. Additional assistance will be proposed for Baptist students attending BTR, Truett and other divinity schools and non-SBC seminaries that offer "Baptist theological education."

The theological education ministry group proposed spending half of the Fellowship's scholarship money on BTR and Truett students, while distributing the rest to students at other institutions. A questionnaire will be sent to a variety of schools to determine what needs exist. Meanwhile, guidelines will be developed to outline the criteria and mechanism for awarding the scholarships, the obligations of the recipients and the accountability of the students and the Fellowship.

-- Literature. A two-pronged approach was adopted by the literature ministry group. The group will 1) develop a tool for churches to use in evaluating their education curriculum and 2) compile an annotated list of literature options.

"This is not to tell churches what to use but to tell them what is out there," said Peggy Haymes of Greensboro, N.C., chairperson of the literature group. "For so long we simply blindly did what came out of Nashville."

-- Laity. Council members heard plans for establishing a resource center, which would provide laity with information on the SBC controversy, Baptist distinctives and the Fellowship's three funding plans.

"The laity is not informed," said Carolyn Hale of Georgetown, Ky., co-chairperson of the ministry group for equipping the laity. "Many of the clergy have sheltered them from what's been going on."

The laity group also will encourage churches to form denominational relations committees, Hale said.

Council members voted to expand the five ministry groups, currently composed of nine council members, to include up to six additional people who do not serve on the council. Nominations were submitted by each ministry group and approved.

The council's search committee for an executive director gave a progress report of its work. After lengthy discussion, the council voted to use the job title of "coordinator" for the purpose of the search. The deadline for applications and recommendations was set as Nov. 1.

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Thomas declines full view
on free exercise of religion

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Calling religious freedom a value all Americans can agree on, U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas declined to take a definitive stand on free exercise of religion Sept. 13 during Senate confirmation hearings here.

Thomas, 43, also continued his refusal to talk about abortion throughout the four days of questioning by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Religious liberty questions were among many personal freedom questions raised during the hearings to determine if Thomas will become the 106th justice to sit on the high court.

Committee chairman Joseph Biden Jr., D-Del., pursued Thomas' view about free exercise on the fourth day of hearings.

Biden said the free exercise of religion is central to American life and deserves the highest level of support. Biden asked Thomas specifically about the Supreme Court decision in Oregon Employment Division v. Smith, in which a narrow court majority stripped away longstanding free-exercise protections.

In Smith, the court held that government no longer has to demonstrate a compelling interest before restricting religious practices. Writing for a 5-4 majority, Justice Antonin Scalia said government need only show a reasonable basis for its actions. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said she would have upheld the ban against the religious use of peyote -- the specific issue in Smith -- but not abandon the compelling-interest test.

"Do you agree with Scalia's approach or O'Connor's approach?" Biden asked Thomas.

"We all value our religious freedoms," Thomas said, and a departure from the traditional approach raises "an appropriate reason for concern." But he said he did not have a preference for either justice's approach.

"My concern would be the Scalia approach could lessen religious protections," said Thomas, a federal judge.

"Well, Judge, it does," Biden said, noting there is no question the Smith decision lessens religious protections.

Biden repeated his question.

Thomas said any test that lessens those protections is a matter of concern, but the reason he is not being "absolutist" in his response is that as a sitting judge he would have to take time to think about the specifics of the case.

"The approach we should take," Thomas added, "maximizes these protections."

Frustrated at Thomas' repeated refusals to give a categorical answer, Biden said the committee will have a new standard during future

confirmation hearings. He pointed to Justice David Souter's refusal to answer questions about abortion as the "Souter standard," and said now there will be a "Thomas standard" because "you are answering even less than Souter."

"I don't think that is fair," broke in Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

Biden responded even Souter told the committee he agreed with O'Connor's approach in the Smith case. "That is all I'm saying," Biden said.

On the third day of hearings Sept. 12, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., again tried -- to no avail -- to get Thomas to discuss his abortion views.

Kennedy said Thomas openly commented about the Lemon test used in deciding establishment-clause cases, and the court is expected to review that standard in its next term. If confirmed, Thomas would be sitting on the court as it decides whether or not to maintain Lemon, and he talked about it the previous day, Kennedy noted.

Following that logic, Kennedy asked Thomas why he would not discuss the underlying test of Roe v. Wade, the case that legalized abortion.

Without commenting on Roe, Thomas said he had indicated in previous testimony that marital privacy is a fundamental right. He added that it is inappropriate to comment on the abortion issue because it would undermine his impartiality as a judge.

Repeated attempts to budge Thomas from his silent stance on abortion failed. Hatch said he thought the relentless pursuit for Thomas' abortion stance was "inappropriate." He noted the committee already had asked Thomas twice as many questions about abortion as it asked Souter during his confirmation hearings.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., asked Thomas' his views on free speech as related to the high court's decision in Rust v. Sullivan. In Rust, the court upheld Reagan and Bush administration bans on abortion counseling at federally funded clinics. While abortion was the specific issue in Rust, Leahy said a larger issue is at stake -- government's requirement that recipients of federal funds espouse only those views it deems acceptable.

Thomas said government's involvement today in virtually every aspect of its citizens' lives increases the potential for such a conflict. Noting free speech is a fundamental right, Thomas said the court would have to determine if the government had a compelling interest in restricting it.

For the most part, the fourth day of questioning was less intense, indicating Thomas' nomination could be gaining momentum.

The committee asked Thomas to return Sept. 16. Biden said he hoped the committee could finish questioning Thomas by mid-day and begin hearing other witnesses. The hearings are expected to continue through Sept. 20.

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Thomas' 'vanishing views'
trouble Democratic senators

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Clarence Thomas' assurances that he would bring no agenda to the U.S. Supreme Court did not compensate for his evasiveness or "vanishing views" during five days of testimony, several Democratic senators said Sept. 16.

Thomas, a federal appeals court judge in Washington, D.C., concluded his testimony before the 14-member Senate Judiciary Committee. The committee is expected to hear other witnesses through Sept. 20. If confirmed, the 43-year-old Thomas would become the 106th justice and second black man to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Speeches and writings that Thomas generated while in the executive branch have been a source of controversy during the hearings. Prior to being appointed to the court of appeals, Thomas served as chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and as assistant secretary for civil rights for the Department of Education in the Reagan administration.

During that time, he made several speeches and wrote articles taking staunch stands on issues such as abortion, natural law and civil rights. Senators repeatedly asked Thomas to explain those views.

Thomas asked members of the committee to recognize the different roles of the executive and judicial branches. He noted that making speeches with categorical assertions is acceptable behavior for a policy maker but not a judge. He said he has not taken public stands since he became a sitting judge.

Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, said the differences in roles is not sufficient explanation for his past statements. Metzenbaum said Thomas' supporters have pointed to his background -- overcoming poverty, segregation and discrimination to become a federal judge -- as vital to the kind of justice Thomas would be. Metzenbaum said he found it hard to count his childhood background as more relevant than Thomas' public service and tenure at the EEOC.

"Frankly, Judge Thomas, I have difficulty with that," Metzenbaum said. "Your tenure at EEOC is the major portion of your record. That is what qualified you for the court of appeals, and quite frankly, your tenure on the appellate court has been so brief that it gives us little indication of what kind of justice you would be on the high court.

"By your own admission you spoke out on a number of issues during your chairmanship at the EEOC," he continued. "Judge, I start from the assumption that public officials mean what they say. I do not think you are going around the country articulating views and advocating policy positions that you did not believe in."

Metzenbaum also said it is difficult "to accept the notion that the moment you put on that judge's robe, all the views and positions which you held prior to going on the bench just magically disappear."

Republican senator Orrin Hatch tried to distance Thomas from his speeches when he off-handedly commented to Thomas, "I'm sure that some of those speeches were written by ardent and well-intentioned staff."

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., said he still has "serious concerns" about Thomas' nomination.

Kennedy said Thomas praised civil-rights leaders in his opening statement during the confirmation hearings, but in five different speeches he condemned those same leaders. For example, Kennedy quoted a 1985 Thomas speech as denouncing "a civil-rights community wallowing in self-delusion and pulling the public with it."

Kennedy asked Thomas what he meant by that statement.

Thomas said he has made many other speeches in which he extensively praised the civil-rights community.

"The difficulty that we had during the '80s was an important difficulty and that was this," Thomas said. "That there was, to my way of thinking, a need to begin to debate anew some old problems and to begin to look at them with fresh ideas.

"What you see in those speeches...is frustration that that debate never took place...," Thomas continued. "Rather than ultimately sitting down in the beginning to try to work out the problems, we were spending our time yelling across the table at each other."

Kennedy said: "You've taken many strong positions, but again and again you've asked this committee to ignore the record you've compiled over a decade.... You ask us to believe that an intelligent and outspoken person, like yourself, has never discussed *Roe v. Wade* with another human being....

You've trashed the leaders of the civil-rights movement in many speeches, but now you emphasize your debt to them.

"The vanishing views of Judge Thomas have become a major issue in these hearings," Kennedy said.

On the abortion issue, Metzenbaum said Thomas' past record also conflicts with his current testimony. For example, Metzenbaum said Thomas previously criticized a key constitutional argument supporting a woman's right to choose. But before the committee, Thomas said he has no opinion on abortion, Metzenbaum said.

"To the millions of American women who are wondering where you stand on that critical issue, your answer is, 'Trust me. My mind is open. I don't have a position or even an opinion on the issue of abortion,'" Metzenbaum said. "Judge Thomas, that's just incredulous."

Thomas virtually had no public record on church-state issues prior to the hearings. While he described the "Jeffersonian wall" separating church and state as an appropriate metaphor, he declined to take a definitive stand on free exercise of religion.

Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., told Associated Baptist Press that Thomas' answers in the church-state area were "satisfactory" but not "rock solid."

"If I were to make a choice only on that issue," Simon added, "I would not find his answers unacceptable."

While some Democratic senators voiced concern about Thomas' testimony, Republican members seemed satisfied, generally yielding the floor to Democratic colleagues who still had questions on the fifth day of hearings.

Thomas seemed to be gaining ground on the fourth day of hearings when questioning was less intense.

If Thomas receives a favorable recommendation from the committee, his nomination is expected to come to the Senate floor early in October.

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Senate votes to lift
abortion-counseling ban

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate approved a bill Sept. 12 that would block enforcement of an abortion-counseling ban at federally funded family planning clinics.

The bill appropriates \$204 billion for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and related agencies for the fiscal year 1992.

The House approved the appropriations bill (H.R. 2707) June 26. The bill will go to a House-Senate conference committee to iron out differences.

The spending bill, approved 78-22 in the Senate, may cause a showdown between Congress and President George Bush, who has promised to veto any legislation that weakens abortion regulations. Bush already has made good on that promise once, vetoing the District of Columbia spending bill because of an abortion provision.

The abortion-counseling ban became a hot issue in Congress when the U.S. Supreme Court last May upheld the constitutionality of administration regulations forbidding Title X clinics from providing information on abortion.

Supporters of the Rust v. Sullivan decision say family planning should involve information about conception, not termination of pregnancy. On the other hand, opponents say bigger issues, such as freedom of speech, are at stake.

The abortion issue is expected to surface in several bills before Congress, and it is uncertain if either house has enough votes to override

a presidential veto. Bush has not had a single veto overridden.

The appropriations bill also contains a parental notification provision and a motion to take \$10 million earmarked for national sex surveys and use in an educational program.

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--By Pam Parry

U.S. education in trouble,
religious leaders warned

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- American education is in trouble.

Speakers at a Religious Leaders' Briefing on Education here Sept. 12 generally agreed with that gloomy assessment but disagreed about why that's true and how to remedy it.

A Bush administration official defended the role of private schools in American education and praised the "choice" provisions in the administration's "America 2000" education-reform package.

The choice proposals would encourage states and local school districts to provide vouchers for parents to send children to private and parochial schools as well as public schools. The plan also calls for national competency testing, the creation of 535 New Generation schools and efforts to combat adult illiteracy.

"The administration is seeking to launch a popular movement based on dissatisfaction with the status quo," said Michelle Easton, acting executive assistant, Office of Private Education at the Department of Education.

The administration wants to broaden the definition of public schools to include any school open to the public and held accountable to the public, including both public and private schools.

She challenged criticisms that private schools are "for rich kids," are country clubs for elite students and promote racial isolation.

Asked how private schools receiving tax dollars would be held accountable, Easton said she hopes governmental oversight would be in the areas of health and safety, as well as assurances that the students are learning and achieving. She said she prefers that government not become involved in areas such as admission standards, religious values or hiring standards.

A contrasting assessment was provided by a House of Representatives education specialist, who told the participants the choice plan is a gimmick that will not improve education.

John Jennings, general counsel for education with the House Education and Labor Committee, said the debate about choice is a "diversionary debate. It is not a debate about essentials."

"Choice is not about education. Choice is about politics," Jennings said. "It's an effort to get Catholic ethnics and Southern fundamentalists into the Republican Party."

Another blast at choice was leveled by Sen. Ernest Hollings, D-S.C., who said the primary need of public schools is additional funding. He called for strengthening such programs as Head Start, Title I (remedial education), and Women, Infants and Children.

"These are working programs," he said. "We're wasting money by not putting money into early (childhood) programs. That's what we need in education, not choice. That's nonsense."

Hollings said the duty of government "is to leave private schools

alone."

He told the religious leaders he was headed to mark up an appropriations measure, and he assured them restrictions would be attached to every dollar appropriated.

"If you want regulations in private schools, call on me" for funds, Hollings said.

The ranking Republican member of the House Education and Labor Committee, Rep. Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania, offered a more cautious assessment of the administration's proposal.

Goodling, a former school administrator, said he favors a plan that would let states choose from among elements of the Bush proposal.

"I don't care if you spend billions and billions, if you don't find a way to get the family unit back together to encourage excellence in their children, nothing is going to change," he said.

He warned choice proponents to make certain they know what they are getting when they seek tax dollars for private schools.

"I would be very cautious," he said. "I wouldn't jump on a bandwagon because some federal dollars are involved.

"I see some real pitfalls. If I were operating a private school I would guard against losing my rights to operate it as I saw fit," Goodling said. "You cannot do that with federal money."

Jennings also criticized the limited scope of the administration plan, saying it would spend money to improve education for half of 1 percent of all U.S. students during the next five years, while a plan expected to be introduced in the House would spend the same dollars for system-wide reform.

"Education is in very serious trouble in this country," Jennings said. "That's true of both private and public education. If we don't get as serious about education as we are about sports, we'll never compete with the Japanese and Germans."

Nancy Amadei of Washington, D.C., a professor at the University of Utah, told participants that general public opinion, business leadership attitudes, the political climate, media receptivity and strength of advocacy groups are all in place now to take positive steps to help children and education.

"What we have got to do is make sure that they don't nickel and dime around."

She told the religious leaders their input in the process was important.

"When the faith community sits something out, it sends a signal that it's not important," she said.

The briefing, attended by about 40 religious leaders, was sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the Washington office of the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Washington office of the National Council of Churches, the Public Affairs Office of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Religious Action Center of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

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Estonian professor sees freedom
of Baltics as mixed blessing

By Pat Cole

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Estonian Baptist Tonu Lethsaar sees a free Estonia as both a blessing and challenge for churches in the Baltic

republic.

"Independence is God's miracle," said Lethsaar, a new student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. "I had always hoped we would be free. It came so quickly and easily and without bloodshed. God protected Estonia."

Churches in Estonia now have unprecedented freedom and are experiencing substantial growth, said Lethsaar, an associate professor of psychology at Estonia's Tartu University.

"The challenge for us now is that a lot of people are coming to church as a reaction against communism," he said. "Some of them have no interest in Christianity."

Religious freedom has permitted New Age movements and a variety of occult practices to vie for the spiritual yearnings of the Estonian people, he said.

Lethsaar is studying pastoral care and psychology of religion this year at Southern Seminary. When he returns to Estonia, he will teach on the theological faculty at the university.

The university's theology department, which re-opened this year, was closed 50 years ago when the Soviet Union annexed the nation. "When I return, I will be the only professor of psychology of religion in Estonia or the Soviet Union," he said.

Lethsaar's teaching load also will include pastoral care and courses on the new religions recently introduced to Estonia. In addition he will teach part time at the two-year-old Baptist Theological Seminary in Tartu.

At the seminary, Lethsaar will join one full-time faculty member and several part-time faculty members who are Baptist pastors.

Most of the faculty has been educated in Germany, Switzerland or Finland. Estonian pastors were not allowed to travel abroad for theological training until the late 1970s.

"I believe God allowed them to study (abroad) so that they would be prepared to teach at the seminary," said Lethsaar, noting Estonian Baptists are in need of trained leadership. "Our greatest need is to build up the seminary... Our future is our seminary."

The future of Estonia and the rest of the Soviet Union appeared shaky at best immediately prior to Lethsaar's planned departure for America Aug. 23. Just five days before, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was overthrown in a coup.

Lethsaar and his wife, Tahti, had just completed an all-night bus ride to St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) to secure the family's visas when a taxi driver informed them Gorbachev had been ousted a few hours earlier.

Though unsure about the government's future, the Lethsaars remained confident they would be leaving for the United States.

"We had prayed for this so long," he said. "We had a real peace about it."

The Lethsaars returned to Estonia with their visas. Sensing there might be uncertainty in the States about their travel plans, they immediately informed Southern Seminary through a fax message that they had received their visas.

Despite the threat of closed borders, the Lethsaars and their two sons, Henri, 6, and Lauri, 4, began preparing to leave. Their church prayed fervently for the nation and the family's journey.

By the time of the Lethsaars' departure, Gorbachev had returned to power and the Soviet tanks began pulling out of Estonian streets.

During the tense days of the coup, Lethsaar said Estonian Christians clung to their faith.

"Difficult times do not disturb our faith," he said. "The believers pray and we have good fellowship. The difficult times are good for our faith. It gets stronger in those times."

Lethsaar is grateful to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the seminary for making his study opportunity available.

"I feel like I have a great privilege and a great responsibility to use my learning in Louisville to teach in Estonia," he said. "All of my previous education has been secular. Having professors who pray before class and who talk about the Bible is new for me."

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Will new oppression result
from Yeltsin-Orthodox ties?

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Even if Boris Yeltsin is not a particularly religious man, religion may play a key role in his tenure as Russian president, as the murky future of the crumbling Soviet empire unfolds.

In a Sept. 6 interview program on ABC television with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Yeltsin acknowledged he goes to church "quite often."

But Gorbachev -- who has done much to foster religious freedom and has been the subject of speculation about his religious beliefs -- identified himself to the American TV audience as an atheist.

Yeltsin went on to note that he doesn't observe the "ritual aspects" of the church services, but he said: "During the service, there's a kind of internal feeling of moral cleansing."

"I'm also superstitious, by the way," he added.

No matter how fuzzy Yeltsin's religious outlook, a theologically proud Russian Orthodox Church stands ready to capitalize on his political needs, says Mark Elliott, director of the Institute for East-West Christian Studies at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill.

"Yeltsin wants to hold the Russian people together, and the church is something most Russians have had in common," Elliott said. It would not surprise Elliott, the scholar noted, if Yeltsin values Russian Orthodox assistance.

"The church would be more than happy to lend support because there seems to be strong sentiment in the church to move back in the direction of a state-sanctioned church," he said.

Concessions to communism over the years have weakened Russian Orthodoxy, but it retains strength among workers and peasants "who are faithful (and) more willing to overlook the compromise in the hierarchy," Elliott said.

More educated members remain suspicious of the church for its centuries of "siding with authority and power and privilege and possessions," he said, but they respect priests who held to their faith under communist repression.

If Yeltsin and Orthodoxy warm up to each other, that spells trouble for Baptists and other evangelicals in the splintering Soviet Union. "By far the biggest single concern evangelicals face in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe is the re-emergence or attempted re-emergence of state churches," Elliott noted.

Strife between majority and minority churches, he continued, will be the "saddest theme stories will be written about in the next decade in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These tensions were frozen under communism and now they're thawing out in a rather violent fashion."

In the Soviet republic of Georgia, "Orthodox groups have literally barred the doors to some Baptist churches within the last year," Elliott recounted. In some cases, Orthodox priests led the assault against Baptist congregations.

If governments in the Soviet Union or elsewhere in Eastern Europe

"formally or informally re-establish close ties with the majority church," Elliott said, "the smaller churches and the small remnant of atheists are likely to suffer.

"Oddly enough, it appears that evangelicals and atheists may be in the same boat."

Russian Orthodoxy targets evangelicals and Catholics because of a belief that Orthodoxy is the true church descended from the apostles, Elliott said. The Orthodox regard Catholics and Protestants as the products of misguided theology and as people who have no business wooing others away from the historic faith. "'Orthodoxy,'" Elliott added, "literally means 'correct praise' or 'right worship.'"

However, a former writer for the Soviet news agency TASS paints a strikingly different picture.

Russian Orthodoxy is too weak from years of communist control to be a significant political force, said Maxim Kniazkov, who now lives in Chevy Chase, Md., and reports international affairs.

Nor will the church have much clout with Yeltsin, said Kniazkov, who is Russian Orthodox. "Yeltsin is not a religious person" and will have little fear of church pressure, said Kniazkov, who formerly worked for TASS in Washington, D.C., France and Mozambique.

Baptists and other evangelicals should not fear Orthodoxy, Kniazkov said. Minority religious movements "cannot pose any threat to the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church," he said. Evangelicals may face localized opposition here and there, he said, but otherwise they "will be allowed to operate freely, and I'm sure about that."

Under Yeltsin, however, the general climate of freedom -- and its potential impact on religious freedom -- remains in question, Kniazkov said.

After his brave opposition to last month's abortive coup by Kremlin hard-liners, Yeltsin ordered eight or nine newspapers in the Moscow area closed, along with "scores" of other city and regional papers elsewhere in the Russian republic, Kniazkov recounted. Some were under hard-line control, some were independent yet still opposed to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms. But their sin was "they were still not under the control of Yeltsin," he said.

Yeltsin supporters orchestrated the firing of the top editors of two Moscow publications -- editors who had published articles reporting on the crimes of Stalinism and corruption among the communist elite several years before Yeltsin dared to challenge the party, Kniazkov recounts. The editors were accused of not being active enough in opposing the coup.

For about a week after the coup, a Yeltsin-controlled TV station in Moscow advertised a telephone number to report on people suspected of complicity with the hard-line plotters, Kniazkov continued.

And in banishing the Communist Party, Yeltsin has engineered "a left-wing counter-coup" and eliminated the only significant opposition to his reform movement, Kniazkov said.

"Although the Communist Party is bankrupt, there are still lots of people who sincerely believe in communist ideals -- perhaps 3 million or more -- good communists. They had nothing to do with crimes committed by top leaders of the party. It's unjust to ban their political activities (and) compel them to work underground.

"I'm not one of them," Kniazkov said, "but we have to respect them. This is what democracy is all about."

HMB transfers maternity home
to Louisiana Baptists

By Lacy Thompson

NEW ORLEANS, La. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has agreed to transfer operation of the denomination's only nationally funded maternity home to the state level.

Trustees of the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home in Monroe voted unanimously yesterday to assume operation of the Sellers Baptist Home and Adoption Center in New Orleans at the close of 1991.

The Sellers operation will be relocated at that time to an eight-bedroom facility in Tallulah, La., where it will continue to provide pregnancy and adoption services. The 13,000-square-foot Tallulah house was donated to the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home last year.

"We're excited about this," LBCH Executive Director John Williams said. "Our primary desire (in making such a move) is to have a ministry to hurting and needy women. We believe this will provide pastors in Louisiana with another solid counseling resource.

"We hope Louisiana Baptists share our excitement."

For years, the Sellers Home has served as Southern Baptists' only nationally funded maternity home. It was begun in the 1920s and came under the auspices of the Home Mission Board in 1933. Since then, it has placed some 2,500 children for adoption and ministered to about 3,800 maternity clients from throughout the United States and some foreign countries.

In recent years, however, numerous state Baptist conventions have responded to growing needs by beginning their own maternity homes. As a result, the ministry of the Sellers Home apparently became more and more localized. Currently, about 85 percent of the women at Sellers are from Louisiana, Williams said.

The HMB executive committee and trustees of the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home followed the trend toward state-level maternity care by agreeing to transfer control of the Sellers Home to the state agency.

Williams said LBCH trustees see the added task as an extension of the Children's Home's current ministry. He noted the Children's Home already is licensed to serve as an adoption agency.

Paul Adkins, HMB vice president for ministry, spoke favorably of the new arrangement. "I have known the staff of the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home for years, and I have the utmost confidence that they will continue the professional care provided at the Sellers Home," Adkins said in an HMB release.

The national and state agencies have spent months working out a transfer agreement. Children's Home trustees began to explore the possibility of such a ministry with the gift of the Tallulah home, Williams explained.

He noted that 19 state Baptist conventions have child-care ministries, with 15 or 16 of those involved in maternity homes as well. However, Louisiana never had entered into that field.

In exploring the possibility of such a ministry move, Children's Home leaders conducted a statewide survey among pastors last year. The survey indicated "overwhelming" support for a state-based maternity home, Williams said.

"Several pastors made the comment that it was time we quit giving 'lip service' to fighting abortion and start doing something," he said. "This move gives us the vehicle to do something."

Under the transfer agreement, the Sellers Home operation will move to Tallulah Jan. 1, 1992. For the ensuing three years, the Home Mission Board will provide a total of \$600,000 (in decreasing increments) for support of

the ministry. At the end of the three-year period, the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home will assume full responsibility for financial support of the ministry.

The agreement calls for the Children's Home to incorporate the "Sellers" name into the title of the new facility.

However, the agreement leaves responsibility for current Sellers Home staff with the Home Mission Board, Adkins told the Baptist Message. The board will negotiate equitable settlements with staff members, he said.

Only one staff member of the Sellers Home is an HMB missionary -- Director Mary Dan Kuhnle. Kuhnle will remain in New Orleans for awhile to oversee Sellers Home files for the board.

Meanwhile, the HMB has reached no decision on plans for the current Sellers Home building in New Orleans.

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Crouch to raise money
for Richmond seminary

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Henry Crouch, pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., will join the staff of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond as director of development Nov. 1.

Crouch will direct all external fund-raising efforts for the new seminary, which is seeking to build its endowment. Plans are for him to be based in Charlotte, with Richmond staff providing administrative support.

Tom Graves, BTSR president, said Crouch will be "an invaluable asset to this school at a crucial point in its young life." Graves also praised Providence Church, which is funding Crouch's position.

The church voted Aug. 18 to approve a retirement package for Crouch that will continue his salary and insurance through September 1993. Crouch, 63, has been pastor at Providence Church for 23 years.

Crouch previously was pastor of other churches in North Carolina, Mississippi and Kentucky. He is a graduate of Mars Hill College, Wake Forest University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Trustees of BTSR are expected to affirm Crouch's hiring at their Oct. 14-15 meeting in Richmond.

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-- By Beth McMahon

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CORRECTION: In the ABP story "CLC wants possession..." (Sept. 12), please replace the 24th paragraph with the following:

The confusion is likely to get worse since the Foundation, which has administered the fund for 27 years, says there was no original documentation to describe how the money was to be applied.

Also add as the last paragraph to the story:

-- Trustees voted to ask the Executive Committee to do "whatever is necessary" to sever all remaining ties between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee.

***** END *****