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May 14, 1992

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

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Southeastern alumni president  
resigns over Patterson election

By Dan Martin

GASTONIA, N.C. (ABP) -- Leon Smith of Gastonia, N.C., has resigned as president of the national alumni of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in protest of the election of Paige Patterson as the seminary's president.

Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gastonia, announced his resignation in a statement to Associated Baptist Press immediately after Patterson's election May 14.

By selecting Patterson, one of the chief architects of the "takeover" of the Southern Baptist Convention, Smith said trustees "have chosen to ignore the voice of the vast majority of more than 7,000 alumni" of the seminary.

Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas, was elected in a special called meeting of trustees on the seminary campus in Wake Forest, N.C.

In his statement, Smith said trustees voted to elect Patterson "despite a resolution which was presented by the national alumni board asking the trustees not to choose someone closely identified with the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention."

In an interview, Smith said the resolution was read to the presidential search committee after it was adopted by the alumni board with only one person abstaining.

Most of Southeastern's alumni graduated before fundamental-conservatives gained control of the seminary's trustee board in 1987, prompting the resignations of the president and top administrators.

While the alumni resolution did not name Patterson, it did ask that the search committee not select someone closely identified with the 13-year movement that now controls virtually all SBC agencies and institutions.

"When the resolution was read, Paige Patterson's name was mentioned as

someone whom the resolution referred to," Smith told ABP.

Smith also charged that the presidential search committee did not follow due process and "did not take seriously" the advisory task force, which functions to assist the search committee in its presentation of a candidate for president of the seminary.

The seminary's governing documents specify that an advisory task force will be created to aid the search committee "in order to safeguard the interests of alumni and students in the process."

He said the advisory task force met only once, a joint meeting with the presidential search committee. "We were not given time to organize and to do our work as specified in the seminary documents," Smith said.

Smith served on the advisory task force as president of the national alumni, along with one other alumni representative, members of the seminary council and others.

"I felt violated as president of the national alumni in this process. I feel they did not give us enough opportunity to do our work, they did not listen to us, they did not pay attention to the resolution the alumni board presented, nor did they listen to our concerns about electing a low-profile person rather than a high-profile player," he said.

Roger Ellsworth, a pastor from Benton, Ill., and chairman of the seminary trustees, said the search committee followed exactly the procedures laid out in the seminary documents concerning the election of a president.

He said the search committee met with the advisory task force once -- for about an hour or so -- and met the requirements of the documents concerning the election of a president.

Ellsworth said he remembered there was a resolution requesting Patterson not be considered, but he said he thought it had come "from a group of pastors" and was not aware it was from the national alumni board.

"We knew Dr. Patterson would be a controversial choice, but we thought the positives outweighed the negatives. We were aware of some political baggage, but we were also aware he has a lot of positive dimensions to bring to the task," Ellsworth said.

Russ Bush, academic vice president and dean at the seminary and chairman of the advisory task force, said the task force had a limited function because the 1988 search for outgoing President Lewis Drummond had been so recent.

"The function of the task force was to help develop a presidential profile," Bush said. "We didn't have to start from scratch; we just pulled up the documents from the previous search."

The task force met with the search committee and "everybody had a chance to have their say," he commented.

Bush maintained that everything in the search process went as was specified in the documents. "It (the search) went faster than normally, but nothing was omitted (from the process)," he said.

Bush said he thinks "the problem some of the alumni have is not with the process. There was nothing wrong with the process. They just don't like the person chosen."

SBC leaders trying to block  
Pressler's election to FMB

By Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The most powerful leaders in the Southern Baptist fundamental-conservative movement are joining forces to keep one of their most prominent colleagues -- Houston judge Paul Pressler -- from becoming a trustee of the denomination's Foreign Mission Board.

Pressler, one of two architects of the movement that has held sway in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979, was nominated to the missions agency by the SBC Committee on Nominations, which will bring its report to the annual SBC meeting June 9-11 for approval.

But some of the people Pressler has helped elect to leadership roles in the SBC during the past 13 years now say his election to the embattled Foreign Mission Board would be too controversial and reflect badly on the movement Pressler founded.

Pressler, 62, recently completed seven years' service on the powerful SBC Executive Committee. His co-strategist in the fundamental-conservative movement, Dallas educator Paige Patterson, already serves on the Foreign Mission Board.

Leaders of the movement say giving Pressler another position of power so soon runs counter to their professed intention to "broaden the tent" of leadership in the SBC and smacks of the cronyism they assign to moderate-conservatives who controlled the denomination prior to 1979.

In a conference telephone call that included former SBC presidents Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, Jimmy Draper, Morris Chapman and presidential hopeful Ed Young, Pressler was urged to decline the FMB nomination, according to Alabama pastor Fred Wolfe, who also participated.

"There were a number of men who are close friends with Judge Pressler and we told him whatever he decided we would support him in it, but our counsel was we didn't think it was wise," said Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., who served with Pressler on the Executive Committee.

Wolfe said seven men participated in the first of several conference calls with Pressler soon after the nomination was announced April 21. Wolfe declined to name the seventh participant.

Although Pressler did not indicate he would withdraw, Wolfe said, "He said he would pray about it."

If Pressler doesn't decline the nomination, a motion to replace him is expected on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention next month.

One person who may make the motion is the Foreign Mission Board's outgoing trustee chairman, Bill Hancock.

"I'm willing to do it," said Hancock, a pastor in Louisville, Ky.

Hancock said he was asked to nominate a layman from Texas for Pressler's position, one of nine spots reserved for Texans on the 89-member FMB. Hancock said the substitute nomination should properly be made by a Texan, but he added: "I haven't made up my mind not to do it."

Pressler could be replaced by a majority vote on the floor of next month's convention. But SBC messengers in past years have seldom approved challenges to the Committee on Nominations' report.

Bobby Boyles, chairman of the committee, defended the choice of Pressler. "Judge Pressler is a man who loves God with all his heart and has a tremendous heart for missions," Boyles, a pastor in Moore, Okla., told

Baptist Press.

Pressler's nomination was offered by committee member Stan Coffey, a fellow Texan who served with Pressler on the Executive Committee.

If elected, Pressler likely would serve two four-year terms on the Foreign Mission Board. Coupled with his seven years on the Executive Committee, which develops the denomination's annual \$140 million budget, the Houston judge could spend 15 years on Southern Baptists' two key boards.

That's too much, say some fundamental-conservatives.

Hancock, who recently completed two four-year terms on the FMB, said he has "the highest regard for Paul Pressler and for his commitment and his leadership" in turning the SBC in a conservative direction.

"But it concerns me that conservatives would project an image of control," Hancock said, "and that the same people are recycling from one board or agency to another without giving opportunities for other laymen and ministers, both men and women, to be involved in the process of leadership."

"For that reason, I think any of us who have served on boards and agencies need to remove ourselves from consideration from serving on other boards and agencies," added Hancock.

Pressler declined to discuss his nomination with Associated Baptist Press. But according to Wolfe, Pressler is "sincere" in his desire to serve on the Foreign Mission Board.

"He said he is retiring as a judge, he has a heart for missions, and this would be a wonderful opportunity for him to serve...and travel overseas," Wolfe recalled from the conference call. "We told him, 'You can do that without being a trustee of the Foreign Mission Board.... It just doesn't look good.'"

That concern for appearances has convinced most fundamental-conservative leaders to oppose Pressler's nomination, sources say. "I can't find one -- not one -- that's for it," said one prominent leader from Texas.

Despite the unprecedented behind-the-scenes campaign to derail Pressler's nomination, most fundamental-conservative leaders are reluctant to talk about it on the record.

"They're all afraid of him," said the Texan, who spoke on the condition his name not be used. "He's got a lot of friends out there."

Pressler amassed a loyal following during years of whistlestop meetings across the country that successfully rallied fundamental-conservative pastors to oppose "liberalism" in the SBC. He expanded that influence significantly while serving on the Executive Committee, where some colleagues say he used intimidation to advance the fundamental-conservative cause.

Now Baptists on both sides of the aisle are concerned Pressler's election to the Foreign Mission Board will further disrupt an agency already in turmoil over its role overseas. That turmoil has prompted the resignation or retirement of several top administrators, including FMB President Keith Parks.

Pressler's nomination already has prompted critical editorials in Baptist newspapers in Texas and Louisiana.

But Wolfe said he and fellow SBC leaders will rely on persuasion, and not a substitute motion, to displace Pressler. "If there was a move to do it from the floor (of the convention meeting), I would oppose it," Wolfe said. "None of the guys on the conference calls would approve it."

The former presidents who participated in the conference call have conferred on a number of key decisions in recent years, including the selection of fundamental-conservative candidates for SBC president.

They are credited with persuading trustees of Criswell College in Dallas last October not to fire college President Paige Patterson, who since has been elected president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

All four SBC presidents were elected with the endorsement of the movement Pressler founded, and two have gone on to head Southern Baptist agencies -- Jimmy Draper, a former Texas pastor, is now president of the Sunday School Board, and Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, and current SBC president, will soon become president-treasurer of the Executive Committee.

Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., is mentioned by some fundamental-conservatives as a candidate for FMB president. Jerry Vines is pastor of First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Fla. Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston, is expected to be the fundamental-conservative nominee for SBC president next month.

Pressler's nomination is not the only one likely to bring charges of cronyism and control. Some examples from this year's nominations:

-- Missouri pastor Gerald Davidson, who previously served two terms as a trustee of Golden Gate Theological Seminary, is nominated to a four-year term on the Home Mission Board.

-- Ralph Pulley, a member of First Baptist Church of Dallas and a 10-year trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (1977-1987), is nominated to return to Southwestern's trustees for another five-year term, replacing fellow church member Bill Grubbs.

-- David Allen, pastor of Audelia Road Baptist Church in Garland, Texas, is being nominated to Southwestern's board, despite the fact a layman from his church, William Cutrer, was elected as a trustee last year.

-- Paige Patterson's father-in-law, retired layman Charles Kelley of Beaumont, Texas, is being nominated as a trustee of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

-- Fred Powell, associate pastor at the Oklahoma church where nominations chairman Bobby Boyles is pastor and former associate to SBC past president Charles Stanley, is nominated as a member and chairman of the Committee on Order of Business, which controls the program for the annual SBC meeting.

-- Missouri pastor William Bowyer, who served on the 1989 Committee on Committees, is nominated as a trustee of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

-- Missouri pastor Robert Curtis, currently a trustee of the Home Mission Board, was appointed by SBC president Chapman to serve on the 1992 Committee on Committees, which nominates the committee that nominates future trustees.

-- This story includes information from Robert Dilday of the Religious Herald of Virginia.

Fellowship asks WMU to promote  
its missions program, offering

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will ask Woman's Missionary Union to promote the Fellowship's new missions program and annual missions offering.

Woman's Missionary Union, a self-governing women's auxiliary that promotes missions in Southern Baptist churches, has agreed to discuss those ideas with Fellowship leaders as part of WMU's current long-range study. The first meeting with Fellowship leaders is scheduled for May 18 at WMU headquarters in Birmingham, Ala.

But the prospect of an ongoing relationship between WMU and the Fellowship is likely to put further strain on the 104-year relationship between the WMU and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Fellowship, an organization of Southern Baptists displeased with the current leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention, appointed its first four "missioners" in May. As many as 16 more will be in place by next year.

The new organization would like WMU to raise money for Fellowship missions and feature Fellowship missioners in its promotional and educational materials.

Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of WMU, said she expects those topics to come up during the dialogue with Fellowship leaders. "I would think that would be something they would want to talk about," she said, "and we are in a listening posture."

O'Brien said WMU commissioned a special study committee earlier this year to look at all aspects of the organization's future. One of the committee's duties, she said, will be to meet with Fellowship leaders to discuss possible ways the two organizations can relate.

O'Brien noted WMU has issued a similar invitation to meet with SBC leaders. A preliminary report from the committee is due in June.

In 1990 Woman's Missionary Union raised \$115 million through the two annual mission offerings it sponsors. All of that money went to support Southern Baptist missions through the Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board.

Many churches participating in the Fellowship do not support the new leadership in charge at Southern Baptists' two mission boards, however, and are expected to put their money behind the Fellowship's missions effort.

O'Brien said the "bottom line" for WMU is its desire "to serve all churches."

"We used to serve all churches in the same way," she explained, "but now we may not be able to do that."

Missions alternatives such as the Fellowship, as well as a growing reluctance of many churches to identify with denominational institutions, will make it hard to serve all Southern Baptist churches in the traditional ways, O'Brien said. "It does put us in a dilemma."

Most of the Fellowship's missioners will, like the first four, be former missionaries of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board -- the same missionaries WMU has been promoting and supporting for years, said Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman.

"We don't want these very same missionaries to be disinherited," Sherman said. "We want to keep them before Baptists in prayer and support."

So we are going to ask WMU to assist us."

Sherman noted several of the Fellowship's missionaries will work at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, which was defunded by the Foreign Mission Board last year in a dispute over the school's theological direction.

"Nobody had any trouble promoting Ruschlikon Seminary two years ago," Sherman said. "There's not a reason in the world not to now."

Sherman said WMU should promote the Fellowship's offering alongside the SBC offerings as "another mission opportunity for churches."

"Let Baptists decide what they will do with it," he said. "If nobody wants to support our missionaries, then eventually they won't be missionaries. But I believe very deeply they will."

The WMU's dialogue with the Fellowship is likely to anger Southern Baptist leaders, who already are suspicious of WMU's intentions.

Unlike the 21 agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention, WMU is an auxiliary, which means its directors are not appointed or controlled by the SBC. An executive board elected by WMU members governs the organization, which does not receive funding from the SBC's budget.

In February a motion to "invite" WMU to become an SBC agency was referred by the SBC Executive Committee to its administrative committee.

At the same meeting, Executive Committee members approved a change in WMU's program statement, but only after WMU leaders agreed to add language -- deleted from the original -- that linked the auxiliary's work with "churches of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"Our bylaws certainly do tie us to the Southern Baptist Convention, and we like it that way," O'Brien told Associated Baptist Press.

So far the churches participating in the Fellowship have retained their identification as Southern Baptist congregations, which presumably would allow WMU to continue to work with them. But SBC leaders are not likely to approve if WMU begins promoting Fellowship missions.

"I hope we can continue to serve all churches," O'Brien said.

O'Brien noted the SBC Sunday School Board offers several types of Bible study literature to appeal to different types of churches. "So it may be possible for us to have generic material.... Maybe we have to look into a lot of options to serve all churches," she said.

"There are just so many more questions than answers," she concluded. "We're just trying to sift through all the information."

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