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Quayle recruits SBC
for moral campaign

By Marv Knox

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Vice President Dan Quayle recruited Southern Baptist Convention support for a moral campaign against the nation's "cultural elite" when he welcomed the SBC to his home state June 9.

Quayle spoke to more than 15,300 SBC messengers during the opening moments of the convention's annual meeting in Indianapolis.

Quayle's address, which included references to his much-maligned "Murphy Brown" speech, signaled to some observers the next episode in the Bush administration's fight for moral values -- an issue the Bush administration hopes will figure prominently in the upcoming presidential election.

In a news conference after his speech, Quayle was asked what he hoped to get from his appearance before the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

"Support," he responded.

Quayle said he was pleased with his reception from Southern Baptists, who gave the vice president 11 standing ovations.

"Thank you for your support," he said at the end of his address.

"Thank you for joining in the struggle for the restoration of values in this great country of ours."

Quayle was presented a resolution, adopted by the SBC Executive Committee, that praised the vice president for his "forthright" support of the sanctity of marriage and family values.

In his 30-minute address, Quayle said those values are basic to American society and essential to its survival.

He told convention messengers that recent changes "have created a cultural divide in our country. It is so great a divide that it sometimes seems we have two cultures -- the cultural elite and the rest of us."

Quayle alluded to his May speech criticizing the TV comedy "Murphy Brown," in which the lead character gave birth to a child out of wedlock.

"As I discovered recently, to appeal to our country's enduring, basic moral values is to invite the scorn and laughter of the elite culture," he said. "Talk about right and wrong, and they'll try to mock us in newsrooms, sitcom studios and faculty lounges across America."

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"But in the heart of America, in the homes and workplaces and churches, the message is heard. A sense of moral decency runs deep in the American people. We know that the simple things -- the simple gifts and the simple truths that Americans have always sought to live by -- are more relevant than ever in our complex times."

Despite the disdain of what he termed the cultural elite, "moral values are what the American people care most about," Quayle said. "And that's why I say this about the scorn of the media elite -- I wear their scorn as a badge of honor."

"The cultural elite in Hollywood and elsewhere may have a lot of money; they may have a lot of influence," Quayle said. "But we have the power of ideas, the power of our convictions and the power of our beliefs."

"We shall carry the day, because in their sense of morality, in their belief in personal responsibility, in their faithfulness, in their love of goodness and love of neighbor, the American people are far ahead of our country's self-appointed cultural elites."

Conservative Americans "who talk of values" often are accused of intolerance, but in reality they are compassionate and tolerant, Quayle insisted: "But we do not believe that being compassionate and tolerant means abandoning our standards of right and wrong, good and bad. We do not think tolerance requires abandoning our belief in the family."

The vice president praised the family as a "sacred institution" and called for his audience to "speak up for the family, family values and the values and principles that make America great."

He did not specifically define those principles. But in his speech he cited faith, family, fidelity, freedom, modesty, integrity, honor, duty, goodness and love.

The breakdown of the family unit in America has produced "an ever-increasing rate of illegitimacy, youthful promiscuity, 1.6 million abortions every year," Quayle said.

Linking family and moral values to the strength of the nation, Quayle insisted: "If America ceased to be good, it would cease to be free. We would become a soul-less and divided nation, a nation under siege instead of a nation under God."

He praised Southern Baptists for their attempts to shore up the underpinnings of morality. "There are people like yourselves who don't just talk about values but seek to live by them. You know what it's like to bear the brunt of ridicule, as does anyone who has ever tried to stand up for a good cause."

Quayle recalled a remark made by George Bush when, as vice president in 1982, Bush told the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference that changes in the SBC signaled that "renewal" had begun.

But Quayle added: "Renewal, ultimately, is not primarily the work of government. It's our work, the work of our churches, the work of each person, responding each day to the hard questions of life and faith."

"It's the work of choosing wisely. Choosing to live in falsehood or in fidelity. Choosing to follow man in his foolish ways, or the Son of Man who walked the way of love and mercy, full of grace and truth."

Asked later in his news conference if he wanted to continue the debate over his "Murphy Brown" speech, Quayle said: "I want to continue the discussion of moral values.... I want to coordinate a consensus. The majority of people support what I said. The American people don't joke about values."

Quayle also told reporters his speech was a "values speech," not a "partisan speech." But veteran political reporters who cover the vice president said the speech fit neatly into the administration's efforts to shape the national debate over moral values and to get the Bush-Quayle team

re-elected this year.

"He has found (moral values) the phalanx of the campaign," said conservative columnist Cal Thomas. "He has taken this issue."

Thomas said Quayle's criticism of the cultural elite is part of the Bush administration's "divide and conquer" political strategy aimed at exploiting the political weaknesses of "two socially liberal candidates," Bill Clinton and Ross Perot.

Morality and family values "are hot-button issues" for Quayle, and ones that set well with Southern Baptists, Thomas observed.

The resolution presented to Quayle affirmed "marriage as the only proper framework for the conception of children," decried hostility in the media and society toward that standard, and noted Quayle "suffered enormous and outrageous abuse for speaking the truth on this matter."

The resolution was passed by the Executive Committee June 8, instead of the SBC Resolutions Committee which met later, so that it could be presented to Quayle at the opening of the convention.

The vice president was given a framed copy of a resolution and a Bible published by the SBC Sunday School Board.

SBC president Morris Chapman thanked Quayle for his faith, his opposition to abortion, his devotion to marriage and family, and for "raising the consciousness of this nation to the undeniable sanctity of the family."

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Gay restriction added
to SBC constitution

By Greg Warner

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Southern Baptists voted overwhelmingly June 9 to exclude any church that affirms homosexuality from participating in the Southern Baptist Convention, marking the first time that a moral issue has been used to limit membership in the 147-year-old denomination.

By rewriting their constitution, messengers to the annual Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis made their rejection of homosexuality explicit and permanent. The constitution previously only looked at financial contributions to the SBC in determining church participation.

In the future, and if the constitutional amendment is ratified for a second time next year, no local church will be considered in "friendly cooperation" with the convention -- and therefore able to participate in SBC affairs -- if it acts "to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

The change was approved despite warnings it departs from the traditional relationship between the convention and its churches and that it opens the door for excluding congregations over a variety of moral issues.

The SBC action was directed at two North Carolina churches -- Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, which earlier this year blessed a marriage-like union between two homosexuals, and Olin T. Binkley Memorial Church in Chapel Hill, which licensed a homosexual divinity student to the gospel ministry.

Those actions "are contrary to the teachings of the Bible on human sexuality and the sanctity of the family and are offensive to Southern Baptists," the messengers said in a second motion directed at the two churches.

With that motion, which also passed with only a smattering of negative votes, the Southern Baptist Convention "withdraws fellowship" from the two churches -- Baptist terminology for ouster.

But messengers pledged to pray that the churches will rescind their actions. They also promised to pray for the salvation and healing of homosexuals and to "minister redemptively" to them.

The convention is expected to return approximately \$2,200 in contributions from the two churches.

Neither church applied to have messengers at the three-day Indianapolis meeting, a fact SBC president Morris Chapman told messengers he was "glad to report" during the opening session June 9.

Although the SBC had the power to oust the two churches even without the constitutional amendment, members of the SBC Executive Committee, which drafted the action, said the change was necessary in order to make "the strongest statement possible" against homosexuality. "We need to draw boundaries," committee member Guy Sanders of Lake Wales, Fla., said during the committee's debate June 8.

Committee member Walt Tomme of Washington, D.C., argued the SBC would be tempted to exclude churches over "other practices we find objectionable."

"We know of no other issues contrary to the Bible (that have surfaced in churches)," said C. Ray Fuller, chairman of the committee that brought the proposal. When those issues surface, Fuller said, "we will come back and address those issues as well."

After approval by messengers June 9, SBC attorney James Guenther told ABP the action represents a "historic" change in ecclesiology for the Southern Baptist Convention.

"It is hard to overestimate the significance of this change," said Guenther of Nashville, Tenn.

"The convention has always had the power to determine which churches will be in friendly cooperation," he said, "but for one reason or another...the convention has never thought an issue was so important as to look to the faith and order of a church (to determine participation)."

Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, disagreed, saying the change does not involve an "ecclesiological question." "If you had the power to do it, how does it change anything when you do it?" he asked.

The action was justified, Land said, because "there have never been two Southern Baptist churches who have so directly challenged basic Southern Baptist belief."

He said it is "highly unlikely" the SBC will soon add other moral restrictions to the constitution.

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SBC cuts ties to Joint Committee,
but disputed fund may bring suit

By Robert Dilday

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Southern Baptists ended their 50-year-old relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs June 9 in a vote that drew no discussion and little opposition.

Messengers attending the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention also overwhelmingly rejected a request from the Washington-based

religious-liberty agency for binding arbitration to settle a dispute over who owns a 28-year-old capital-needs fund that bears the name of the BJC.

Instead, they approved a recommendation from the denomination's Executive Committee to give the committee authority to distribute the \$300,000 in question.

That decision raised the specter that directors of the multidenominational BJC will file a lawsuit to recover the funds.

"I would be negligent as an attorney if didn't tell my board of directors to sue," BJC attorney Oliver Thomas told ABP. Thomas added, however, he will not be "pushing" the BJC to file a suit and could not predict the decision of BJC directors, who are expected to consider legal action during their meeting in October.

The virtually unchallenged vote to sever ties with the SBC's former religious-liberty voice was in marked contrast to the tempestuous debates over the past 10 years between the agency's staff and Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives, who objected to BJC positions on such issues as government-sponsored prayer in public schools and tuition tax credits.

Growing opposition from the increasingly conservative convention led last year to elimination of all SBC financial support for the BJC but left unresolved continued affiliation with the agency, supported by nine other Baptist denominations in the United States and Canada.

Also undecided was the fate of the \$300,000 allocated by the SBC in 1964 to its Public Affairs Committee, the members of which then served as Southern Baptist representatives on the BJC.

The Public Affairs Committee merged last year with the SBC Christian Life Commission and both the CLC and BJC now claim the funds.

Earlier this year the BJC offered to submit the dispute to binding arbitration mediated by a prominent evangelical attorney. Thomas, general counsel for the BJC, reiterated the offer to Executive Committee members the day before the convention vote.

Christian arbitration "is simple, it is inexpensive and it is scriptural," said Thomas, adding the BJC would "stand by the (resulting) decision and waive any right we might have to sue the SBC or its foundation." The funds are on deposit at the Southern Baptist Foundation, which refused to release them without Executive Committee approval.

But several Executive Committee members denied the funds were a gift to the BJC and noted they have relinquished claims to the more than \$600,000 in accumulated interest received by the BJC since 1964. The committee rejected the overture June 8 by an estimated two-to-one margin.

However, when the recommendation to distribute the funds to other causes was presented the next day, Executive Committee member J.C. Mitchell of Winter Park, Fla., raised the arbitration issue once more.

"In the spirit of Matthew 18 -- the spirit of conciliation -- it would be well for this convention to accept" the arbitration offer," he said. "Even if we lose, it says a good deal about our image."

But another Executive Committee member, Rex Terry of Fort Smith, Ark., said the committee had no authority to enter negotiations with the BJC. "Arbitration is not appropriate because the money belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

Thomas, who described the \$300,000 fund as the BJC's "only significant asset," said some BJC directors would oppose a lawsuit "even if their personal property was taken," he said, while others think a "stand should be made."

The board's October meeting will be the earliest opportunity for it to respond to the SBC's action. Thomas said he did not anticipate a called meeting prior to that time.