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Fellowship's 'impact' on SBC  
is \$8.7 million, spokesman says

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- An Executive Committee study on "the impact" of funds coming to Southern Baptist Convention agencies through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is unneeded, a Fellowship spokesperson says.

"I think the 'impact' is rather evident," said David Wilkinson, communications coordinator for the Atlanta-based alternative missions organization for Baptists dissatisfied with the SBC's fundamental-conservative leadership. "Over the past three years, the Fellowship has forwarded more than \$8,773,000 to the work of the agencies and institutions of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The study was ordered at the Executive Committee's Feb. 21-22 meeting in Nashville, Tenn. It will include a recommendation regarding "the acceptance or rejection" of Fellowship funds by SBC entities and is to be reported to the Executive Committee's business and finance subcommittee at a June 13 meeting in Orlando, Fla., prior to the June 14-16 SBC annual meeting.

The motion was adopted without discussion during the Executive Committee's closing plenary session. It reportedly surfaced in a subcommittee meeting, where it also passed with little discussion.

Early in the meeting, officials making routine budget requests to the Executive Committee's program and budget subcommittee were quizzed about whether or not their respective agencies were recipients of any Fellowship funds. Several reporters tracking the development of the SBC's 1994-95 operating budget heard no further mention of the Fellowship.

Meanwhile, the issue emerged unnoticed by the press in the business and finance subcommittee during a review of denominational giving patterns.

Executive Committee members approached by Associated Baptist Press were vague about the motion's specific intent.

Scott Humphrey, an Alexandria, Va., layman who chairs the business and finance subcommittee, said the motion was not an agenda item, that it was made by a member of the subcommittee, seconded and passed unanimously. "I think the purpose was that people were asking questions about what was happening with the CBF money and nobody had the answer so somebody needed to study it," he said.

A member of the subcommittee, Douglas Dutton, a layman from Knoxville, Tenn., declined to discuss his intent in voting for the motion, saying he could not speak for the group. He made a motion in the discussion that was altered considerably before it was passed. "We discussed it quite a bit," he said, before arriving at what he called "a consensus motion." Asked to state the intent of his original motion, Dutton declined.

One Baptist state paper editor, Bob Terry of Missouri's Word & Way, wrote in his March 3 editorial that it was reported to him that part of the discussion involved "instructing" SBC agencies not to accept funds given through the Fellowship. "But because the Executive Committee does not have the authority to instruct, the decision was made to increase the political pressure by providing a recommendation from the Executive Committee officers," Terry wrote.

Wilkinson acknowledged that while it is the Executive Committee's "prerogative" to study funds earmarked for the SBC through the Fellowship, "I doubt that a study is necessary to conclude that the missionaries and the seminary professors and the others whose work is funded in part by these contributions would have a hard time distinguishing between dollars routed through Nashville and dollars routed through Atlanta."

One SBC executive is on record to that effect. Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis told Baptist state paper editors last month that refusing Fellowship money would be an "insult" to individual Baptists who choose to support SBC work in a non-traditional manner.

Lewis told editors he planned to meet with administrators of the SBC Foreign Mission Board and Executive Committee the following week in Nashville to discuss how to handle funds from the Fellowship. Asked there about the meeting, Lewis said "it was a good dialogue time" but that the leaders "didn't come to any specific conclusions."

Fellowship funding to SBC entities totaled more than \$2.7 million in 1993, according to information obtained from the organization's offices.

The biggest recipients of those dollars were the Foreign Mission Board, which received more than \$1.6 million, and the Home Mission Board, which received more than \$436,000.

About 25 percent of the \$11.2 million received by the Fellowship in 1993 went to support of the SBC. In 1992, it was 45 percent of \$7.3 million and in 1991 -- the Fellowship's first year -- 59 percent of \$4.5 million total receipts.

Meanwhile, the Southern Baptist Convention's unified giving plan, the Cooperative Program, has posted declines for three straight years. Receipts for 1992-93 were reported at \$136.5 million, \$4.1 million less than the 1989-90 fiscal year.

In 1992 the Executive Committee declined to pursue a study of the "agenda, purpose and character" of the Fellowship recommended unanimously by its administrative subcommittee. During discussion, Executive Committee members said the study would be a pointless distraction that would only lend credibility to the Fellowship.

Virginia Fellowship  
meets for first time

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia Baptists uncomfortable with the more conservative direction taken by the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979 can find a new home in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, speakers said at the first meeting of the CBF's state organization.

"In the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship we have a fellowship of missions-minded people who are seeking the will of God for our lives," said layman Jan Levy of Radford. His comments were echoed by other program headliners during the Feb. 25-26 meeting at Second Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

The two-day meeting was the first formal gathering of the Virginia Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the state affiliate of the three-year-old national organization of moderates. Earlier meetings have been informal and unstructured.

During a brief business session a constitution and bylaws were adopted and budget needs presented. But the focus of the more than 400 participants was on the mission work of the Fellowship and its distinction from trends in the SBC.

"The message that needs to go out to Baptist churches is: to what degree can we be faithful to Christ and yet compromise convictions? To what degree can we corrupt the gospel to which we've committed ourselves?" said Keith Parks, missions coordinator of the national Fellowship.

Being a "free and faithful" Baptist does not mean freedom to disregard absolutes, said Parks. "It really means you have so mastered the absolutes that you are free in the way you express them."

"This freedom frees us from human institutions that would define how we worship God and how we relate to God," he said.

Carolyn Crumpler, a Cincinnati laywoman who serves as CBF's moderator-elect, told her audience they must be "responsible for creating an awareness in the hearts and minds of Southern Baptists of what the reality of the situation (in the denomination) is."

She also urged the crowd to focus on God and missions, not on maintaining the denominational status quo.

Several "testimonies" -- including Jan Levy's, a member of First Baptist Church of Radford, Va. -- touted the CBF's approach to Baptist life.

The Fellowship is "another alternative which gives our people hope," said Thomas McCann, pastor of First Baptist Church of Martinsville, Va., noting that moderate Southern Baptists are "ugly stepchildren in a family that is no longer ours."

"The Southern Baptist Convention as I have known and loved it is dead -- it is gone -- it has passed from our time and will not return," said James Baucom Jr., pastor of Warsaw (Va.) Baptist Church.

"But I'm not willing to wander aimlessly anymore. ... I long for a land where Baptists are free and faithful," he said.

The CBF is "more interested in freedom than in theological precision," said Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Waynesboro, Va. "The

folks in charge (of the Southern Baptist Convention) don't like freedom and faithfulness — it's too messy."

In one of a series of small group "breakout sessions," Crumpler noted some 216 Virginia churches are contributing to the CBF, second in number only to North Carolina's 221 churches.

However, Baptist General Association of Virginia treasurer Nat Kellum, who was observing the meeting, noted that number doesn't include those churches which give through the World Mission 3 portion of the state convention budget.

About 80 churches contribute funds through that channel, which funnels money directly to the CBF.

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Americans misunderstand  
church terms, poll finds

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- The Christian church is preaching its message in terms most people don't understand, according to results of a new poll by the Barna Research Group.

A nationwide survey of American adults in January 1994 found few could explain the meaning of religious terms such as "the Great Commission," "John 3:16," "evangelical" and "the gospel."

Even many adults described as "born-again" Christians had trouble explaining the four terms.

Only 9 percent of all the adults surveyed could correctly identify the Great Commission as Jesus' command to go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them.

The vast majority (86 percent) were not even willing to hazard a guess at what the term meant. Only 5 percent offered incorrect descriptions.

Three out of four "born-again" Christians said they didn't know what "Great Commission" meant.

For the purpose of the poll, "born-again" referred to a person who claims to have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today and who believes he or she will go to heaven as a result of confessing sin and accepting Jesus Christ as Savior.

Americans know little more about the term "evangelical."

Even the most inclusive of the possible accurate definitions -- such as "people who spread God's word" or "people who spread their religious beliefs" -- was offered by just 18 percent of those polled. Another 16 percent gave incorrect answers.

Most Americans (66 percent) said they simply didn't know what the term meant. The pattern was roughly the same among "born-again" Christians, with 57 percent offering no answer.

Awareness of the most famous of Bible verses, John 3:16, was somewhat higher. The verse says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Only 17 percent of those polled could accurately recite the verse, while 25 percent could at least give the general meaning of the verse. Overall, 65 percent of the general population and 50 percent of "born-again" Christians said they did not know what the term "John 3:16" meant.

Americans are likewise ignorant of the meaning of "the gospel," which literally means "good news" and refers to the message of Jesus that people's sins are forgiven by God through their trust in Jesus.

Overall, only 37 percent of those polled offered an answer that could be considered even remotely correct, researchers reported. The most prominent answer, given by 33 percent of respondents, was that the gospel is synonymous with the Bible.

Others offered a variety of incorrect answers, but 31 percent said they had no idea what the term meant. Among "born-again" Christians, 16 percent could not give a correct definition.

Results of the telephone poll of 1,210 Americans age 18 and older are considered accurate to within plus or minus three percentage points, based on a 95 percent confidence level.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

BJC, others ask Supreme Court  
to keep neutrality standard

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Religious and civil-liberties groups have joined in a church-state dispute over the creation of a special school district to accommodate the needs of disabled children in a religious community.

A diverse coalition of Baptist, Jewish, Seventh-day Adventist and civil-liberties organizations filed a friend-of-the-court brief Feb. 23 opposing the accommodation to the special needs of a community of Hasidic Jews, saying it violated the court's stance requiring governmental neutrality toward religion.

The brief urges the high court to reject appeals to abandon its long-held but often-criticized Lemon test for assuring church-state separation.

Lemon requires governmental actions to: 1) have a secular purpose, 2) neither advance nor inhibit religion and 3) avoid excessive entanglement between religion and government.

The brief was filed on behalf of the American Jewish Congress, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, People for the American Way, the Baptist Joint Committee, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. It was written by American Jewish Congress attorneys Norman Redlich and Marc Stern.

The brief was filed in a dispute over creation of a special school district for a New York Hasidic Jewish community.

The state legislature created the special district encompassing the all-Hasidic village of Kiryas Joel in Orange County to resolve a conflict over providing special education services to disabled students in the village.

Hasidic Jews, who practice an insular lifestyle, found the Monroe-Woodbury Central School District's policy of providing special education

services in public schools unsatisfactory.

New York's top court said that because the special services were available to disabled Hasidic students in the public schools, the primary effect of creating the special district "is not to provide those services, but to yield to the demands of the religious community."

That decision was appealed to the Supreme Court by the Monroe-Woodbury and Kiryas Joel school districts and New York Attorney General Robert Abrams. The two school districts sought not only reversal of the lower-court ruling, but also asked the high court to reconsider the Lemon test. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments in the case March 30.

The Feb. 23 brief argues that the special school district is "an actual union of church and state," a violation of the First Amendment's ban on governmental establishment of religion so clear that it is evident without applying Lemon.

The brief argues that an "intent to create a religious-political enclave" distinguishes the dispute from "the common happenstance in which some religious group predominates in a community."

The brief defends Lemon against criticism that it is unworkable. It says other criteria proposed to replace Lemon, such as the "coercion" test favored by Justices Anthony Kennedy and Antonin Scalia, would lead to no more predictable results.

In a 1992 Rhode Island commencement-prayer dispute, the brief notes, Kennedy was confident coercion existed while Scalia found that claim "incoherent."

The quarrel Lemon's opponents have "is not with the court's formulation of a test; it is that the court's decisions take the establishment clause seriously," the brief asserts.

The brief also disputes the school districts' contention that the special district is a permissible accommodation, pointing out the accommodation argument is nothing new.

"... Practically every practice that has been condemned by this court as establishment has been defended as an accommodation," the brief says.

The special district "is an accommodation far more intrusive on establishment clause values than need be to ensure services to the disabled children of Kiryas Joel," the brief states. The Monroe-Woodbury school district could provide the services at a neutral site within the village, it notes.

The general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, Brent Walker, said the Washington-based agency "is profoundly concerned that government accommodate the free exercise rights of its citizens."

"But accommodation must not be done in a way that violates the establishment clause, as it did here," he said. "Providing remedial services at a 'neutral site' is a permissible accommodation. Creating and turning over a political entity to a religious sect is a blatant establishment."

The friend-of-the-court brief by the BJC and others is added to a list of positions staked out by various religious and civil-liberties groups. Other positions include:

-- A brief filed by University of Texas law professor Douglas Laycock on behalf of the National Council of Churches and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It adopts the BJC brief's arguments that the Kiryas Joel district is unconstitutional.

Laycock, however, calls for some fine-tuning of Lemon to assure that its second prong is understood to mean that "government was not to depart from neutrality in either direction; it was neither to advance nor inhibit religion."

-- A brief filed in support of the Kiryas Joel district by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. Written by CLC attorney Michael Whitehead, the brief argues that the Lemon test fosters hostility, not neutrality, toward religion.

The CLC proposes that Lemon be replaced with a test based on principles detailed by University of Chicago law professor Michael McConnell in a 1985 article.

The four-part test proposed by the CLC would ask: 1) Does the state action allow or accommodate independent religious choice? 2) Does the state action interfere with the religious liberty of non-adherents by inducing or coercing them to alter their religious practice? 3) Does the state action go beyond accommodation and show favoritism toward one religious choice which would not be shown to other religious or non-religious choices? and 4) Does the state action use the taxing and spending power of government to provide some financial incentive, benefit or penalty to a particular religious activity which is not given to other religious or non-religious alternatives?

-- A brief by McConnell on behalf of the Christian Legal Society, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Center for Law & Ethics and the Family Research Council in support of the school districts.

Rather than calling for the abandonment of Lemon, McConnell says its second prong should be clarified to mean that a government action would not be construed as having the primary effect of advancing religion unless "it accords religious institutions or activities preferential treatment over non-religious institutions or activities in a way that induces religious exercise, rather than removing a barrier to independent religious decisions of individuals or groups."

-- A brief filed by Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice calling for the replacement of Lemon with a test that would require governmental coercion to violate the establishment clause.

-- A brief on behalf of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Unitarian Universalist Association siding with opponents of the special school district.

While four members of the court -- Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Scalia, Kennedy and Clarence Thomas -- have sharply criticized Lemon, it is uncertain whether five justices will vote to abandon it.

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House addresses controversy  
over home-school licensing

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The federal government will not license parents who teach their children at home. That message resounded loudly from Capitol Hill as lawmakers scrambled to quell a controversy that generated a

public outcry.

The U.S. House of Representatives Feb. 24 attempted to end the controversy by twice amending an education-spending bill. Both provisions were adopted overwhelmingly.

The furor began when the House Education and Labor Committee approved a bill with language indicating teachers must be certified in the subjects they teach. Some home-schooling proponents interpreted the language as requiring parents to be licensed to teach their children at home.

That interpretation led several Religious Right groups such as Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition to campaign against the bill. The bill quickly became a hot topic on Christian radio stations nationwide.

"I do not know of any issue in recent time that has generated so much constituent awareness, concern and phone traffic as this one," said Rep. Gerald Solomon, R-N.Y. "The American people, by the tens of thousands, have flooded both our district and Washington offices with phone calls and faxes."

In fact, the outcry was so strong that it prompted lawmakers to adopt what Rep. William Ford, D-Mich., described as "an unnecessary solution to a non-existing problem."

Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, agreed with Ford. "The chances that the certification requirement could ever be interpreted to apply to home schooling were virtually nil. They (groups campaigning against the bill) really made a mountain out of a mole hill and then came off looking like heros."

Ford offered the first amendment that struck out the original language and added a phrase that said nothing in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (H.R. 6) applies to home schools. Ford said the amendment was designed to end a false perception, because the original language "had nothing at all to do with home schooling." In adopting his amendment, lawmakers were going the extra mile to ease people's unfounded fears, he said.

"Congress has nothing to do with the question of home schooling," said Ford, chairman of the Education and Labor Committee.

"There was unfortunate language adopted in the committee that was ambiguous enough so that it could be, as it has been, misconstrued to apply to 'home schools.'"

Solomon disagreed with Ford, noting that the amendment was necessary.

"Anyone who has ever had any experience with the federal bureaucrats who write the regulations to implement our laws knows just how legitimate some of the fears expressed over this legislation are," Solomon said.

Rep. Dick Armey, R-Texas, offered another amendment that was broader in scope. Armey's amendment said that nothing in the bill would "require the certification or regulation of teachers in any private, religious, or home school."

"I am confident that this language solves everybody's problem and gives them a reassurance that their freedoms are protected," Armey said.

The two amendments were approved 424 to 1 and 374 to 53, respectively.

The House is scheduled to continue consideration of other possible amendments March 1.

Death penalty unconstitutional,  
Supreme Court justice asserts

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The senior justice of the U.S. Supreme Court has announced he will no longer support the death penalty, contending the judicial system is unable to apply it both consistently and fairly.

Justice Harry Blackmun wrote in a Feb. 22 opinion that the death penalty as administered is unconstitutional. His reversal on the issue is not expected to alter the direction of the nine-member court, which is still dominated by death penalty proponents.

Blackmun outlined his new position in a dissenting opinion in which he objected to the court's decision not to hear the appeal of a Texas death row inmate.

"I shall no longer tinker with the machinery of death," Blackmun wrote.

The 85-year-old justice said he and his colleagues have struggled for more than 20 years to ensure fairness and consistency in capital punishment but have failed to do so.

"Rather than continue to coddle the Court's delusion" that fairness has been achieved, Blackmun said he is "morally and intellectually obligated to simply concede that the death penalty experiment has failed."

The problem, Blackmun said, is that two constitutional requirements in death sentencing -- fairness and consistency -- have proven to be irreconcilable.

Requirements that the death penalty be "inflicted evenhandedly" and with "objective standards" contradict the concept of individualized sentencing which fundamental fairness demands, Blackmun said.

"A step toward consistency is a step away from fairness," he said.

Death sentences become arbitrary and discriminatory when courts and juries weigh individual factors in sentencing capital offenders, Blackmun said. Blacks, he noted, are more likely than whites to be sentenced to death.

Blackmun's change of view once again gives the court a staunch opponent of the death penalty. Two former colleagues -- Justices Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan Jr., who resigned in 1991 and 1990, respectively, consistently opposed the death penalty as cruel and unusual punishment.

Blackmun's announcement drew a strongly worded rebuttal from Justice Antonin Scalia.

Scalia said Blackmun's conclusions were based on "intellectual, moral and personal" perceptions rather than the "text and tradition of the Constitution."

Scalia agreed that the requirements for both consistency and fairness are contradictory, but said they are inventions of the court and not the Constitution.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story updates one issued under the same headline Feb. 24. Paragraphs 9, 10 and 11 replace paragraphs 9 and 10 in the earlier version. And the next-to-last paragraph has been added.

Executive Committee members  
part of state strategy group

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Some members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, which directs much of the work of the national denomination, are also heavily involved in the political battle for control of the 36 Baptist state conventions.

State-level strategists held another closed-door meeting Feb. 23, but this time the group included at least nine members of the Executive Committee and its chairman, Fred Wolfe, who is also a candidate for SBC president.

The state strategists have met at least four times during the last 18 months in their continuing effort to extend fundamental-conservative control to the states.

Members of the powerful Executive Committee have participated in all four meetings, but this time the gathering was held in the shadow of the Executive Committee building one day after the committee's winter meeting. The invitation-only crowd included all three of the elected officers of the committee.

Executive Committee chairman Fred Wolfe, who announced Feb. 8 he will be a candidate for SBC president this summer, attended. So did vice chairman Eldridge Miller, a pastor from Sallisaw, Okla.

T. C. Pinckney, the committee's secretary, organized the meeting and the three earlier ones, although he said he did not issue the invitations this time.

Pinckney, a retired Air Force general from Alexandria, Va., said the meeting was a loosely structured, informal gathering of Baptists who are active in their state conventions. In the past he said the group is not seeking to draft a national strategy for gaining control of the state conventions but merely to "exchange experiences."

Organizers refused to open the meeting to reporters. Napkins were taped over the windows of the room at the Clubhouse Inn, a Nashville hotel adjacent to the Executive Committee building.

The Nashville group was the same gathering of Baptist leaders that asked Wolfe last year to seek the presidency.

Wolfe told Associated Baptist Press he spoke to the group Feb. 23 about his "pilgrimage" and his decision to be nominated for president. "I came at their request," he said. "I've really not been involved with them on state stuff."

Members of the Executive Committee also took note of Wolfe's candidacy during their two-day meeting, which preceded the meeting of state strategists.

Morris Chapman, committee president and former SBC president, asked the group to pray for Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala. Noting his request was not "political," he urged members of the committee to "commit ourselves in prayer to Brother Fred" and others

who might be nominated.

Conservatives, who usually have united behind a consensus candidate for president, are divided this year over who will carry their banner for the post, which has been key to the conservative rise to power in the SBC.

Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla. -- the city that will host the June SBC meeting -- said Feb. 7 he too is considering the position.

That prompted Executive Committee member J. C. Mitchell, also from the Orlando area, to ask for equal time the next day.

"I just feel in the spirit of fairness, and aware of what Morris Chapman said last night, we should pray for Jim Henry," Mitchell told the committee as it wrapped up its meeting with prayer. "This is not an endorsement. But Jim Henry is in the throes of a decision."

Wolfe, presiding at the committee meeting, said he already is praying for Henry. "I am not praying that he will not run. I am praying God will lead him."

Both Wolfe and Henry have been leaders of the SBC fundamental-conservative movement. Wolfe has taken a high-profile role in the politicking and has collected endorsements from several recent SBC presidents. Henry, meanwhile, has kept some distance from the political fray and is expected to attract support from Baptists disenchanted with denominational politics.

Moderate Baptists are not expected to field a candidate this year.

The Feb. 23 meeting was the second the state strategists have held in Nashville. The other was last February at Two Rivers Baptist Church, again on the heels of the winter Executive Committee meeting.

The group's first was held at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., in August 1992. The other was in Louisville, Ky., last October, immediately after the inauguration of Albert Mohler as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Mohler's election was viewed as a victory for fundamental-conservatives.

Executive Committee members attending the most recent meeting include: John Click of Wichita, Kan.; Reuel May of Jackson, Miss.; Gibbie McMillan of Baton Rouge, La.; Miller; William Parker of Lake Mary, Fla.; Pinckney; Guy Sanders of Lake Wales, Fla.; Jim Wells of Lee's Summit, Mo.; and Wolfe.

Others attending included Ken Barnett, a former Executive Committee member from Lakewood, Colo.; LaVerne Butler, president of Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College in Mayfield, Ky.; and Jim Richards, a pastor from Baton Rouge and trustee of the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Richards, who was chairman of the SBC Committee on Nominations in 1991, issued the invitations to the meeting. Concerning Wolfe's candidacy, he said, "I feel virtually all those present would support Wolfe."

Several of the 40 state Baptist conventions already are under control of fundamental-conservatives but others have rejected their political overtures. Fundamental-conservatives have held sway at the Executive Committee for a decade and have controlled the SBC presidential election since 1979.

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-- Bob Terry of Missouri's Word & Way contributed to this story.