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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

- \* Graham to nominate Henry for Southern Baptist president
- \* Presidential election could set future direction for conservatives
- \* Messengers to Orlando SBC face variety of issues
- \* Motion to dismiss Southwestern officers to come before SBC (revised)

Graham to nominate Henry  
for Southern Baptist president

By Greg Warner

DALLAS (ABP) -- Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, said May 27 he will nominate Orlando pastor Jim Henry for president of the Southern Baptist Convention because "I believe he brings the leadership skills, the temperament, the winsomeness, and the substance that we need at this particular time in the denomination."

Graham, a leading conservative pastor, has been rumored as Henry's likely nominator since Henry, pastor of Orlando's First Baptist Church, announced March 27 that he would be a candidate in the June 14 election. The convention meets in Henry's hometown of Orlando.

Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., also will be nominated and will carry the endorsement of most of the recent fundamental-conservative SBC presidents. Wolfe has not announced who will nominate him.

Although both Henry and Graham have been leaders in the SBC's 15-year fundamental-conservative movement, they are breaking protocol by making a nomination without the endorsement of the past presidents. The nomination of two conservative candidates has led some to suggest there is a growing rift in the fundamental-conservative movement.

Graham himself earlier called for a "fresh agenda" for SBC conservatives and a broader approach to selecting leaders. He said May 27 he is anxious for "constructive conservatives" to rise to SBC leadership. But he debunked the notion of a rift among conservatives.

"There is none," Graham said. "There may be disagreement as to who the next president should be. ... But if I felt this would be divisive to the conservative movement, I wouldn't be a part of it."

"In this case, I think there were more people talking, and perhaps not talking, together about this particular election," he continued. "The only thing this signals is that there is a widespread conservative movement that includes many, many people.

"I admire and respect the past presidents," Graham said. "In no way is this a rebuttal of their leadership. Rather it is just my strong persuasion that Jim Henry should be the next president of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Henry said he has not asked anyone but Graham to endorse his nomination because he wants to avoid any appearance of politicking.

"Probably some others may come out, but I haven't asked them," Henry said. "I've had a strong conviction not to ask anyone to write or ask anyone to speak out for me. But I would appreciate anyone who would like to speak out for me," he said with a laugh.

In recommending Henry, Graham emphasized the Orlando pastor's conservative theology and record of financial support for the SBC.

First Baptist of Orlando, with 10,000 members, has led all Southern Baptist churches in dollars given to the Cooperative Program for the last three years. Last year the church sent 14 percent of its undesignated receipts (\$850,805) to the Cooperative Program, the SBC's central budget.

"The Cooperative Program record is an issue simply because we are dealing with some who would dismantle the Cooperative Program," Graham said, in a reference to the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which offers missions alternatives that bypass the SBC budget.

"In a time like this, we need someone whose Cooperative Program record is consistent and faithful," Graham said.

Cottage Hill Baptist, where Wolfe is pastor, currently gives approximately 5 percent to the Cooperative Program, about 2 percent below the national average. In 1993 Cottage Hill gave \$199,681 of its undesignated gifts of \$4.2 million, or 4.7 percent. Wolfe has pledged to raise CP giving half a percent each year.

Graham said Henry's theological commitment is consistent with the conservative direction of the SBC. He dismissed speculation that Henry would appoint denominational leaders who are not committed to the conservative reforms.

"He has said his appointments would be consistent with the high view of Scripture established in the Peace Committee report and 'The Baptist Faith and Message' statement. He's clear on that. I have no concern about that."

Graham said Henry would "continue the process" of conservative reform "and at the same time be inclusive of all people in the convention who share our biblical and spiritual mandate."

Graham acknowledged some conservatives are trying to paint Henry as sympathetic to Baptist moderates and a hindrance to the conservative movement. Such charges won't stick, Graham said.

"Certainly Jim Henry is not attached, in any sense of the word, to the moderate faction of our denomination," Graham said. "He is not being used by moderates or anyone else to damage the conservative movement."

Graham also broke ranks with fundamental-conservatives in March when he denounced the firing of seminary president Russell Dilday, a personal friend, by conservative trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in nearby Fort Worth.

Many SBC observers expect Henry's candidacy to benefit from widespread anger over the Southwestern firing. "I can't tell how the Dilday situation will affect the election," Graham said. However, it was not a factor in his decision to nominate Henry, Graham said, and it likely "will not be a primary issue" in the election.

Graham said his own standing among conservatives has not been hurt by his support for Dilday or his nomination of Henry. He said an April 21 meeting of past presidents and other top conservative leaders in Atlanta "cleared the air."

"My only desire is that conservatives move together with class and with continued conviction," he said.

Presidential election could set  
future direction for conservatives

By Greg Warner

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- The election of a Southern Baptist Convention president, which for the past 15 years has given the SBC's fundamental-conservative movement a mandate for reform, will this year serve as a referendum on the future tone and direction of that movement.

Two prominent and successful conservative pastors, both supporters of the SBC's rightward swing, will square off in the presidential election June 14 when the annual Southern Baptist Convention comes to Orlando, Fla.

At first blush, the contest between Jim Henry of First Baptist Church of Orlando and Fred Wolfe of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., seems unremarkable. Both are biblical inerrantists who say the 15-year struggle to steer the 15 million-member SBC onto a more conservative course was worth the cost.

But insiders say the election reveals a struggle for control of the fundamental-conservative movement.

Wolfe's supporters, who include most of the movement's past presidents, say Southern Baptists need to keep the reins of the convention in the hands of those who have championed the conservative reforms.

"I am thankful for the conservative resurgence," Wolfe told the SBC Pastors' Conference last year. "I make no apologies as one who is privileged to be on the inside with the leaders God has used to bring God back to this denomination."

Henry's supporters say his election would signal a departure from the tightly held control that has characterized the conservative leadership and left a bad taste in the mouths of many Southern Baptists.

"We've had tight control," Henry told Associated Baptist Press. "An honest observation would acknowledge that. And among conservatives, there is a feeling that there was a time for that, but the time has passed. ... Most Baptists I talk to feel like the battle for the Bible is over. We must always be vigilant. But the people are tired. ... My sense is we need to move ahead."

Those very different perspectives on SBC politics have brought Wolfe and Henry into the presidential contest through very different routes.

Wolfe followed the established protocol of recent fundamental-conservative presidents, waiting first for encouragement to run from one or more of the past presidents, asking other top leaders to pray about his decision, then receiving the unsolicited endorsements of past presidents like Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, Charles Stanley and Bailey Smith.

That process has produced a string of fundamental-conservative presidents and enabled Baptists committed to conservative reforms to be appointed to positions of denominational leadership. The process also left Wolfe on the sidelines in 1990, when fundamental-conservative leaders bypassed Wolfe to back Morris Chapman as their presidential choice.

Henry and three other centrist conservatives were enlisted to endorse Chapman, who was in a tight contest with moderate Daniel Vestal in 1990. Henry did, under the banner of "broadening the tent" of leadership among conservatives, and Chapman won.

But critics say the broadening never took place, that control of the SBC machinery has remained in the hands of a few. Meanwhile, Wolfe has emerged as the consensus choice of those leaders this year.

Henry says that process of presidential selection needs to be loosened. "I remember going to the convention (before 1979) when several candidates were nominated," he recalled. "... We

need to be opening more to what the Holy Spirit is telling people to do."

Henry is not the first conservative to break ranks over the presidency. In 1992 Atlanta pastor Nelson Price was nominated against the "party" candidate, Ed Young. Price likewise argued it was time to open up the election process to encourage multiple candidates, but Southern Baptists were unconvinced. Young won on an easy victory over Price and a third candidate, Jess Moody.

But this year's nomination of the popular Henry is viewed by some as the most serious evidence yet of a long-predicted split within conservative ranks.

"There are serious divisions in the camp over all this," said Bill Leonard, a church historian and religion professor at Samford University. "You have the old guard, who are nearing retirement age, and the new guard, who are younger and are part of the non-denominational megachurch movement."

Wolfe and others downplay talk of a conservative rift.

"I don't think there's any split," said Wolfe. Pointing to Price's 1992 bid, he added, "It's happened before."

Bailey Smith, president in 1981 and 1982, agreed. "I do not see a split in the conservative effort. I think there is more of a coming together than there was a month ago." Conservatives are coming together around Wolfe's candidacy, said Smith, an Atlanta evangelist. "I think Fred will win, but sure, he (Henry) has a chance."

Where Henry made his mistake, Smith said, was in not seeking the counsel of fundamental-conservative leaders. "The only thing that has made a lot of us question is that he's not talked to any of us."

"I think there's a sadness (among conservatives) that a man as good and sweet as Jim is embroiled in this, because if he had talked to any of us maybe something could have been worked out."

"There is this perception that he's running (for the office)," Smith said. "I would never, never have put my name up as a volunteer. I think that's the issue. But Jim Henry has called none of us."

"Why should he have to?" countered J. C. Mitchell, a friend and supporter of Henry's. There has been too much emphasis on seeking the approval of the past presidents, said Mitchell, a former Orlando pastor and member of the powerful SBC Executive Committee, which Wolfe chairs.

"Many people I know have been disenchanted with the strong-armed group who seem to be in control and continually think they've got to call all the shots," Mitchell continued. "For them to question Jim Henry's right to run for president without checking with them is ridiculous and -- I know it's a harsh word -- arrogant."

Henry said he deliberately did not seek the endorsement or approval of the past presidents or anyone else before deciding to be nominated "because I did not want to be beholden to any group. ... I wanted to be where I could not be maneuvered by anyone and could not manipulate anyone else."

"The presidents, I love them, they are all friends of mine. I've been with them through the battles. But I didn't go to them, because I wanted to get a sense of the Lord leading me."

Henry acknowledged some conservative leaders -- whom he did not name -- urged him to back out of the presidential contest. The pressure was "not very much," he said. "They were very gracious and gentle and (there was) no threat at all."

Both Wolfe and Henry have impressive records of SBC service to commend them for the office.

Wolfe, as chairman of the Executive Committee, presides over the body that sets the budget for Southern Baptist causes, through the Cooperative Program, and sets the agenda for much else that happens in the convention. He also has been president of the Pastors' Conference.

His church in Mobile has grown dramatically since he came as pastor in 1972, now boasting a membership of 9,000, an average worship attendance of 2,600 and a budget of \$4.3 million.

Henry was a trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board and Sunday School Board. He was counted among the conservative majority serving on the SBC Peace Committee, which tried to bring an end to the denominational turmoil. And, like Wolfe, he served as president of the SBC Pastors' Conference.

He has been pastor of the 10,000-member Orlando church since 1977. In the past five years, the church has averaged 333 baptisms a year and 3,800 in weekly Sunday school attendance. The church has an annual budget of \$6.9 million. In 1985, the church moved from downtown Orlando to its present location, which is valued at \$42.9 million and is debt-free. The church recently completed a \$5.7 million fellowship hall, which was built without debt.

But while both Wolfe and Henry have modeled church growth, their records of financial support for the SBC are vastly different.

Henry's church has led the SBC in dollars given to the Cooperative Program for three years. The church sent 14 percent of its undesignated receipts to the SBC Cooperative Program last year (\$850,805). Another \$190,000 went to SBC mission offerings from a total missions budget of \$1.4 million.

Wolfe's church currently gives approximately 5 percent to the Cooperative Program, about 2 percent below the national average. In 1993 Cottage Hill gave \$199,681 of its undesignated gifts of \$4.2 million, or 4.7 percent, up from 4.5 percent the previous year and 4.2 percent the year before that.

"I made a commitment to increase our giving by one-half percent per year," Wolfe explained.

"And I would say this by way of explanation and not as an excuse: We went into a new worship center in 1989 and paid \$9 million cash for it," Wolfe added. "For the next three years, we held our budget the same, but we have doubled our Cooperative Program gifts in the last three years."

With Cooperative Program giving nationwide down for three years in a row, some conservatives fear Wolfe's record will hurt him in the election. But supporters say his church is typical of other conservative congregations which are raising their Cooperative Program gifts in response to the conservative shift in the SBC.

But Mitchell is unimpressed with such reasoning. "I'm a bit weary with these guys saying 'I'm going to do it.' I'd rather go with someone with the track record," the former Orlando pastor said.

If Wolfe suffers because of weak missions support, Henry is being tagged by some as soft on liberalism. The reason: he said he wants to expand "the window of opportunity for (denominational) service and input." He would leave the denominational door open even to moderates who have supported the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, under certain circumstances.

While many Fellowship supporters likely never will return to the SBC fold, Henry said, some might -- and should be welcomed. "If they're committed to what mainstream Southern Baptists are, who agree in their heart and mind and soul with our scriptural view, with our mission, evangelistic view, and that this is where they want to go, we shouldn't say 'You can't come back.'"

Such talk has some conservatives worried Henry would be too lax in his presidential appointments, compromising the gains made by the fundamental-conservative movement.

"Some people have been concerned about his appointments, not out of being liberal but being naive," said Bailey Smith. "They are afraid they would not be as good as they could be."

Walter Carpenter, a Houston lawyer and conservative writer, warned that Henry, if elected, would be used by Baptist moderates to weaken the conservative movement. He asked Henry to

withdraw from the contest.

"Can it be that Henry's 'healing and forward focus' includes a rapprochement with those who have no problem with theological liberalism being taught in our institutions of learning?" Carpenter wrote in the Texas Baptist.

Wolfe says the conservative gains of the past 15 years should be preserved.

"The conservative leadership now feels that what we have prayed and hoped for is now a reality," Wolfe said. "Southeastern Seminary, for example, has turned to conservative leadership. Southern Seminary, under Al Mohler, will certainly take a conservative direction. The Christian Life Commission, as another example, has taken conservative political positions, especially on the abortion issue. We have upheld and confirmed the high view of Scripture."

The few convention observers who venture an opinion say Wolfe will win because of the past success of fundamental-conservatives to get out the vote.

Henry is likely to draw heavily from Florida, his home state and host state for the June 14-16 convention. But officials estimate only about 2,000 messengers will attend from Florida, which among the 23,000 to 25,000 anticipated attendance are not likely to swing the vote.

Two-term president Ed Young, whom one of the candidates will succeed, has been reluctant to endorse either Wolfe or Henry. "I would have hoped that only one would run and not both of them," he said, "but maybe it's time (for more than one nominee). But I hope we haven't repoliticized it (the presidential election) again."

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-- Contributing to this story were Mark Baggett of the Alabama Baptist, Jack Brymer of the Florida Baptist Witness and Toby Druin of the Baptist Standard of Texas.

Messengers to Orlando SBC  
face variety of issues

By Bob Allen

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- A contested presidential race, reaction to the March 9 firing of a seminary president and a likely recommendation that mission gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship be refused by agencies are among the issues that await messengers at the 137th Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Fla.

The convention, in the Orange County Convention/Civic Center, is the ninth to be held in Florida in the 15 million-member convention's 148-year history and the first in Orlando, the tourist mecca best known for attractions including Sea World and the Walt Disney World Resort.

But at least for three days, June 14-17, business -- and not necessarily pleasure -- will be the main focus for the convention crowd, which is predicted by one veteran observer to exceed 23,000.

Among issues expected to gain attention of messengers are:

-- Electing a successor to SBC President Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston.

Two candidates, both claiming allegiance to the fundamental-conservative movement which dominates SBC politics, have announced their intention to run.

Still, observers expect the vote for Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, to serve as a referendum for messengers who are embarrassed by the poor track record of many SBC leaders in support for the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budgeting plan. Others see a vote for Henry as a protest against the much-maligned firing of Southwestern Seminary President Russell Dilday by trustees elected during the so-called "conservative resurgence" since 1979. Still others are expected to vote for Henry who believe the time has come for leadership positions to be opened to a broader circle than the coalition of theological conservatives which won control of the convention.

The other candidate, Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., and current chairman of the SBC Executive Committee, is being backed by past presidents of the convention who, by exercising their appointive powers, helped nudge the nation's largest non-Catholic religious body to a more conservative stance.

-- The firing of Russell Dilday as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The March 9 firing, orchestrated by fundamental-conservative trustees, unleashed a firestorm of criticism from faculty, students, alumni and even from within the board of trustees. The convention, however, will offer the first opportunity for opponents to register their dissatisfaction in tangible ways.

Cecil Sims, the executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention, has announced he will bring a motion to the SBC that the officers of Southwestern's board of trustees be asked to resign over their handling of the controversial dismissal.

-- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The three-year-old organization of moderates displaced from SBC leadership in the last decade and a half is increasingly perceived as a threat by current leaders for its potential of siphoning off money that otherwise would flow into convention ventures.

In February, virtually unnoticed by the press, the SBC Executive Committee ordered its officers and staff to conduct a study of "the impact" of Fellowship funds on SBC agencies. The findings are to be reported to the Executive Committee's business and finance subcommittee meeting scheduled in conjunction with the SBC.

The officers are expected to recommend to SBC agencies that they refuse gifts from local churches routed through the Fellowship. It is likely the Executive Committee will act on the subcommittee's proposal and pass on a recommendation to the convention.

-- A statement on racism. Founded in 1845 because its predecessor, the old Triennial Convention refused to appoint slaveholders as missionaries, the SBC has never publicly repented of its checkered past on racism. An organization of Southern Baptist directors of associational missions, who meet in conjunction with the SBC, have announced they plan to consider a long-overdue repentance of racism, which, if adopted, will be introduced to the full convention.

Messengers will also vote on a Cooperative Program budget of \$136,539,730. The budget, which is based on actual receipts in the 1992-93 fiscal year, is 1.23 percent lower than the 1993-94 budget.

The theme for the meeting, "For I know -- He is able," will be interpreted through testimonies by several individuals. Bobby Boyles, pastor of Eagle Heights Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., will preach the convention sermon, scheduled at 11:40 a.m., Wednesday.

Pre-convention meetings include:

-- The SBC Pastors Conference, including addresses by former SBC presidents Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn.; Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.; and Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta.

Other scheduled speakers include Jerry Falwell, an independent Baptist who is founding pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., chancellor of Liberty University and founder of the Moral Majority. Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Jack Kemp, who is expected to run for the U.S. presidency in 1996, is also scheduled to speak.

The pastors conference will feature a first-time commissioning service for new missionaries, planned in conjunction with the SBC Foreign Mission Board, and a tribute to W. A. Criswell, retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, recognizing 50 years in the ministry.

-- The three-day meeting of the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association, which features addresses by noted speaker Tony Campolo, a professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in St. David's, Pa., and Kenneth Cooper, founder of the international aerobics movement and the Cooper Clinic in Dallas. The author of several books, Cooper coincidentally is a strong supporter of ousted seminary president Russell Dilday. He resigned as chairman of the Southwestern Council, a fund-raising group, when Dilday was fired.

SBC Registration Secretary Lee Porter, who brings a record of uncanny accuracy in his predictions of convention crowds over the years, expects between 23,000 and 25,000 messengers to this year's meeting. That is the same projection he offered for last year's meeting in Houston, at which his estimate uncharacteristically missed the 17,768 who actually registered by more than 5,000.

If Porter's projection is more accurate this year, convention planners fear logistical problems, particularly traffic gridlock on International Drive, the main access route to the convention center. There are 5,400 spaces in four main parking lots, said Jack Wilkerson, convention manager. The SBC creates special traffic problems because, unlike the typical large trade show at which participants come and go, virtually all SBC messengers converge on the meeting hall at once.

Construction for an expansion of the convention center complicates the traffic problem by closing a main parking entrance on International Drive. Wilkerson said limited shuttle service will be available. He recommended that messengers who drive use the parking lots on Republic Street and "try to keep as much traffic off International Drive as we can."

Convention planners also "will need people's cooperation to come early" to convention sessions, Wilkerson said. He said discounted food prices have been negotiated with vendors to make it possible for messengers to get meals without leaving the convention center.

The meeting hall proper should be adequate, Wilkerson said. The main assembly hall will seat 11,500 and an adjacent annex will accommodate another 9,500 who will be able to view proceedings only on image-magnification screens. If needed, he said, two overflow rooms can be opened, providing another 3,500 seats.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story contains new quotes from Cecil Sims. It updates

and replaces yesterday's story, which ran under the same headline. New information is in paragraphs 5, 6, 18 and 19.

Motion to dismiss Southwestern officers  
to come before SBC, state exec says

By Bob Allen

PORTLAND, Ore. (ABP) -- A motion to request that three officers of Southwestern Seminary's board of trustees resign their positions will be made at this year's Southern Baptist Convention, a Baptist state convention executive has announced.

Cecil Sims, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention in Portland, Ore., wrote a letter May 25 to editors of Baptist state papers announcing his intent to ask the convention to request that the seminary board's chairman, vice chairman and secretary resign.

The officers, respectively, are Ralph Pulley, a Dallas attorney; Lee Weaver, a Fort Worth petroleum engineer; and T. Bob Davis, a dentist from Dallas. They have borne the brunt of criticism for the March 9 firing of Russell Dilday, the seminary's president, and operated as spokesmen for the board in a series of statements defending the controversial action.

In his letter, Sims acknowledged his motion "will not change any balance of power" but will afford "an appropriate forum for the voice of dissent" at the SBC, scheduled June 14-16 in Orlando, Fla. "I genuinely believe the decisions and judgments of these officers have not been in the best interest of the convention or seminary," Sims wrote.

Sims told Associated Baptist Press the motion is not personal. Of the three officers, he said he knows only Pulley, who was his classmate and friend at Baylor University more than 40 years ago. "I don't suppose we've had any contact since," Sims said.

"To me it's a philosophical issue," he added. "The convention has a right to express itself about matters that it feels strongly about and I'm asking for that privilege, that's all. By virtue of the fact that these fellows have led in this effort (to dismiss Dilday), I think we ought to tell them what we think about it."

Sims said he has researched the SBC's constitution and bylaws and believes the motion is in order and can be adopted by a simple majority. He said he has asked SBC President Ed Young of Houston and Executive Committee President Morris Chapman of Nashville, Tenn., for guidance about how to introduce the motion "with dignity and order."

Chapman was out of town and unavailable for comment May 26. Mark Coppenger, the Executive Committee's vice president for public relations, said it will be Young's prerogative to rule on whether the motion is in order. Those who would advise the president, including legal counsel and parliamentarian, are in conversation, studying "everything from Robert's Rules of Order to Texas law," Coppenger said.

Young did not return ABP's phone call.

SBC legal counsel Jamie Jordan said recent precedents are being considered. Two incidents, in 1989 and 1990, indicate the SBC has been reluctant to air grievances with individual trustees on the convention floor.

In 1989, a motion to remove Mississippi physician Curtis Caine from the Southern Baptist

Christian Life Commission over allegedly racist statements was ruled out of order. That convention did, however, adopt a motion by the Committee on Order of Business that an investigation, including the legal ramifications of the motion, be conducted and a recommendation be brought to the 1990 convention.

After study, the SBC Executive Committee declared the issue "moot" since Caine completed a first term on the CLC at the 1990 meeting. His renomination to the committee was a decision between the commissioner and the SBC's Committee on Nominations, they reported. Caine was included in a slate of nominees to leadership posts and elected by messengers to a second term, which expired in 1994.

In 1990 President Jerry Vines ruled out of order a motion calling for Colorado pastor Jerry Johnson's removal from the board of trustees at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for writing a widely circulated article alleging a "cover-up" of liberalism by the seminary's president, Roy Honeycutt.

At Honeycutt's suggestion, the convention voted to refer the matter to Southern Seminary's board of trustees. Johnson subsequently apologized to Honeycutt and the board and received a public exoneration by the trustees.

"Those are the only two precedents of which I'm aware," Jordan said. He said in his opinion how the motion is worded when brought to the floor will have a lot to do with if the motion is in order, but "it really wouldn't be appropriate for me to second guess the chair" about how Young ought to rule.

Chairman Pulley said he is surprised by the motion. Sims is "free to bring any kind of motion he wants to," Pulley said, but the officers "feel the convention will affirm the trustee process that's been in motion all these years."

Pulley said both the SBC constitution and the seminary's bylaws and charter make it clear that the trustees are charged with operation of the seminary on the convention's behalf and that the trustees "have acted in a decisive manner in the best interest of Southwestern Seminary."

Sims acknowledged that as a group, the state convention executive directors have a reputation of maintaining neutrality on controversial issues, but that is not his philosophy. "My whole approach to things is to lay them on top of the table, deal with them openly and get on with our business," he said.

Sims said he wrote the editors because "I wanted the press to know what I was doing."

"I have not conducted a campaign to try to cause anything," he said. "I have been open and above board."