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A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The first two stories of this issue were posted earlier today. The first has been revised slightly. This concludes ABP's coverage of the SBC. If you did not get any of our earlier releases, please contact the ABP office.

SBC installs new-style leader,  
severs funding tie to Fellowship

By Marv Knox

ORLANDO (ABP) -- For the first time since conservatives took control of the Southern Baptist Convention, SBC messengers elected a president not endorsed by its top tier of leaders. But the rightward juggernaut continues unabated, new President Jim Henry said, even as messengers jettisoned a relationship with the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The SBC annual meeting drew 20,364 messengers to Orlando June 14-16, on the 15th anniversary of conservatives' ascendancy to the denominational helm.

Backed by a new generation of conservatives, Henry got 1,853 more votes than Fred Wolfe, the pick of former presidents who have led the SBC's rightward resurgence.

Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, won 9,876 votes (55.18 percent) to 8,023 ballots (44.82 percent) for Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.

Henry's win marked a departure from recent precedent. During the past decade and a half, a close-knit cadre of convention leaders -- most of them former presidents -- chose the conservative party's candidate.

Henry, however, followed his own spiritual intuition, buoyed by encouragement from younger pastors who told him they wanted the convention to "move on" from the political skirmishes of the past.

Supporters of both candidates agreed five factors propelled Henry's win: He had the home-field advantage, with the meeting in his town. His support

reflected a generation gap within the conservative movement. Messengers rejected the perceived elitism of the past presidents' chain of succession. Voters were bothered by some results of the movement, especially the March firing of Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. And Henry's church has been a perennial leader of financial support for the SBC, while Wolfe's flock trails the national percentage average.

But Henry quickly pointed out his election does not signal a departure from the convention's rightward advance.

For example, he will continue the practice of restricting his presidential appointments to people who believe in biblical inerrancy and whose churches support the SBC's financial pipeline, the Cooperative Program unified budget.

"I'm strongly committed, as I have been, to the conservative position -- the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God," he told reporters. "This campaign hasn't changed that."

His election marks a "shift in emphasis, not a repudiation" of the conservative movement, he said. That means accepting recent SBC changes while focusing on building stronger churches and doing missions, not fighting denominational battles, he explained.

Still, the election marked a transition, something Henry's supporters compared to a reformation rather than a revolution.

"This might be a new day for us -- time to move on to Kingdom business," a supporter claimed after the election.

And messengers made a big move before the meeting was over -- instructing SBC agencies to quit accepting money from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

SBC moderates created the Fellowship in 1991 after determining they could not win a voice in convention affairs. Since then, the new organization has taken in about \$28 million and channeled more than \$9 million back to SBC agencies.

Despite that line of support, the Fellowship has been a source of irritation for SBC conservatives. They claimed the Fellowship used the SBC connection for public relations purposes while competing with their convention and siphoning funds away from SBC causes.

The day before the annual meeting, the SBC Executive Committee -- which had received less than \$25 of the \$9 million -- voted to encourage the other agencies not to accept Fellowship funds.

Convention messengers, however, upped the ante. Rather than follow protocol and "encourage" the agencies, they voted by a 60 percent majority to instruct the agencies not to take the money.

While messengers closed a door to the Fellowship, they opened another to Roman Catholics. A resolution affirmed the benefits of conversation between Baptists and Catholics and urged cooperative efforts in areas of social and moral concerns

The resolution came in response to the recent ecumenical document "Catholics and Evangelicals Together," signed by Catholic and Evangelical leaders. The document had been criticized by some Southern Baptists who felt it conceded too much ground, particularly on the doctrine of salvation and principles of evangelism.

The resolution affirmed that Catholics and Baptists "have found in recent years a common area of agreement in their concern" for conservative social issues and human rights. It also affirmed the importance of dialogue

between faith groups. But it held ground on the Baptist doctrine of justification "by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone without any addition of good works or human efforts." It also affirmed the SBC's "commitment to evangelism and missionary witness among populations and individuals not characterized by genuine faith in Christ alone" and rejected "any suggestion that such witness be characterized as 'sheep stealing.'"

Messengers also indicated they want to put a divisive issue -- the firing of Dilday at Southwestern Seminary -- behind them.

Prior to the annual meeting, Dilday's ouster stirred passions among moderates and conservatives alike. Cecil Sims, the retiring executive of the Northwest Baptist Convention, announced he would propose the seminary's trustee officers be removed from the board.

Two other motions -- one calling for a study of the firing and another affirming the trustees -- also were introduced. The SBC's order of business committee took the middle ground, asking messengers to vote on the study proposal.

Messengers turned it down, picking up votes from Dilday supporters who favored Sims' motion, trustee supporters who wanted the officers exonerated and some messengers who said they just wanted to "move on."

While the presidential election, Fellowship vote and Dilday affair reminded Southern Baptists of some of the painful aspects of their journey, messengers in Orlando also saw evidences of some of their successes:

-- The weekend before the meeting started, hundreds of Southern Baptists ignored the lure of Disney World to participate in Cross Over Orlando, a citywide evangelism campaign.

At least 641 people made professions of faith in Christ during the two-day effort. The plan of Christian salvation was presented 5,172 times, and at least 4,366 Bibles were distributed.

-- On the morning the meeting opened, the lawn of the Orange County Convention Center was decorated with 102,695 pledge cards from Southern Baptist young people who had pledged to remain sexually pure until marriage.

They were the lead participants in True Love Waits, a sexual abstinence program sponsored by the SBC Sunday School Board. True Love Waits will peak July 29, when pledge cards from Southern Baptists and members of 25 other denominations and Christian organizations will be displayed on the Washington Mall in front of the nation's Capitol.

-- The election of SBC officers reflected the ethnic diversity of the nation's largest non-Catholic religious body. In addition to Henry, who is white, messengers elected Simon Tsoi, pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church in Phoenix, as first vice president, and Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church in Youngstown, Ohio, an African American, as second vice president.

-- A series of testimonies from Southern Baptists whose lives have been dramatically changed and shaped by Christ interpreted the annual meeting's theme, "I Know He Is Able."

-- The massive convention's political clout attracted the attention of two potential Republican candidates for the U.S. presidential election in 1996. Jack Kemp, former secretary of Housing and Urban Development, spoke to the SBC Pastors' Conference immediately prior to the annual meeting. Former Vice President Dan Quayle signed autographs and spoke briefly in the Baptist Book Store set up in the exhibit hall.

-- Just prior to the meeting, Southern Baptists celebrated their

missions advance by appointing 55 overseas missionaries in a first-ever joint service held by the Foreign Mission Board, Woman's Missionary Union and Pastors' Conference.

The annual meeting, a three-day affair that combines elements of an inspirational rally and trade show, also produced several decisions, including:

-- The convention approved a 1994-95 Cooperative Program operating budget of \$136.5 million, a 1.2 percent decrease from the current budget goal.

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SBC tells agencies to reject  
funding from Fellowship

By Greg Warner

ORLANDO (ABP) -- Contributions to Southern Baptist causes that are delivered through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are not wanted, messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention said June 15.

Messengers voted by a margin of almost three-to-two to instruct their 20-plus agencies and institutions not to accept funds channeled through the Fellowship, an organization of moderate Southern Baptists displeased with the SBC's current conservative leaders.

With the vote, messengers went beyond the action of their Executive Committee, which two days earlier merely "encouraged" the agencies to refuse the Fellowship funds.

Some observers said the vote will speed a split between Fellowship-supporting churches and the SBC, which many conservatives and moderates view as inevitable and even welcome. But others say the action changes little, and that moderate churches that still want to support SBC causes will find other ways to deliver the money.

Since its formation three years ago, the Fellowship has channeled about \$9 million in contributions from Baptist churches and individuals to the SBC agencies, bypassing the traditional avenue of support, the SBC Cooperative Program budget. In 1993 SBC-bound gifts accounted for a fourth of Fellowship income.

But SBC leaders, as well as messengers who spoke from the floor, said those contributions undermine the unity and integrity of the Southern Baptist system of cooperation. Many Baptists consider the Fellowship to be competing with the SBC for church funds, since the Fellowship also supports its own missions program and other ministries.

During the three-day SBC meeting in Orlando, three motions with almost identical wording were introduced to restrict CBF funds. In its final form, the motion calls for the SBC to "direct its agencies and institutions to maintain fidelity to the convention, to avoid compromising the integrity of the Cooperative Program, and to decline to receive funds through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

Craig Kendall of Aurora, Colo., who offered the motion, said the Fellowship and SBC have "mutually exclusive" positions on many issues. The Fellowship opposes the SBC stance against abortion and homosexuality and in

favor of biblical authority and the virgin birth of Jesus, he said.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship bases its appeal for gifts on the claim that it is a legitimate way to give to Southern Baptist causes," Kendall said. "... If we accept any receipts from them, we legitimize their claim and, in effect, their agenda."

Owen Bozeman, pastor of a church -- First Baptist in Milton, Fla. -- that supports the Cooperative Program and not the Fellowship, nonetheless argued against the motion, which he said might reflect an un-Christian spirit. "Cooperative Baptist Fellowship members are our brothers and sisters in Christ," he said. "Their gifts are Christian gifts."

With the CBF sending an ever-smaller portion of its funds to the SBC, Bozeman advised, "Let this funding die a natural death rather than arbitrarily cutting it off." An abrupt change would "severely disrupt" the budgets of SBC agencies, Bozeman said, and a decision about CBF funds should be left to agency trustees.

Some of those agencies said earlier they wanted to take the funds. Others have voted already to decline them. The SBC decision will spare most agency trustees a vote on the sensitive issue of the CBF.

But Fellowship leaders, and at least one SBC agency president, said the new policy will not necessarily reduce funding from Fellowship churches, who instead will find other means to support SBC causes.

Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin, who supports the new policy, said the Fellowship funds "are not from the CBF, they are from churches committed to foreign missions."

"I would assume anyone designating gifts to the Foreign Mission Board is doing so in obedience to God's leadership ... and I hope they will continue."

Churches can send funds directly to the agencies or in some cases through state convention offices and still avoid Cooperative Program channels. However, the Home Mission Board is beginning a study that could penalize state conventions that channel CBF funds.

"CBF exists as a funnel through which Baptist monies are poured," said Cindy Johnson of Gaithersburg, Md., a Fellowship officer. "If the SBC closes off the opening, individual Baptists will be ardent in finding another way through the bottleneck."

Johnson, who attended the SBC as a messenger, said Kendall's description of Fellowship views on abortion and other issues "was not reflective of who I am as a CBF member. And I do not think it is possible to make a blanket characterization of the Fellowship."

The SBC vote will not speed the departure of Fellowship churches from the SBC, said Johnson, recorder of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council. The CBF declined to defund SBC seminaries in May, she said, despite the firing of a popular seminary president, indicating "the CBF is not interested in divorcing the Southern Baptist Convention."

J. C. Mitchell, an Executive Committee member from the Orlando suburb of Winter Park, said the vote could lead to a split between CBF churches and the SBC. "It's a hard decision, but if we don't do it there will continue to be tension," he said.

Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman said the new policy is intended to hurt the Fellowship's fund-raising ability, but he predicted Fellowship faithful will remain firm. "It may be so many churches will be intimidated back into their fold, and it may be they will move the other way," he said. "Churches can say, 'We'll do what we please.'"

"I don't think this will intimidate churches that already have chosen to go with us. They've already paid the price."

Sherman described the new policy as "one more encroachment on the autonomy of the local churches." But supporters of the action -- including Kendall, Rankin and SBC chief executive Morris Chapman -- said it does not interfere with local-church freedom.

There are "adequate channels" for churches to send funds directly to the agencies, Chapman told messengers in his report. "If a church wishes to give to SBC causes, we simply ask them to give through our traditional channels."

Sherman said the action is disappointing. "The tragedy is this separates us from some people we care about deeply," he said. "There are some good people working for and in the Southern Baptist Convention -- as missionaries, as teachers."

"It's bizarre," he said. "They're ready to turn down good money."

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-- Bob Allen and Marv Knox contributed to this story.

Resolution affirms dialogue  
between Baptists, Catholics

By Bob Allen

ORLANDO (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention defended two of its agency heads against criticism for their endorsement of a historic accord pledging greater cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics.

Messengers meeting in Orlando, Fla., June 14-16, passed a resolution clarifying the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document released in March and signed by 40 evangelical and Catholic scholars, but messengers rejected an amendment to censure the two SBC leaders who helped develop and endorsed the document.

The document, signed by Larry Lewis, president of the SBC's Home Mission Board, and Christian Life Commission head Richard Land, noted that irreconcilable theological differences exist between Catholics and evangelicals, but urged the two groups to work together on common ground in moral and social concerns including abortion, pornography and family values.

The document brought mixed reviews. Some observers hailed it as a breakthrough in evangelical-Catholic dialogue. Others dismissed it as a purely pragmatic coalition of right-wing politicians, thinly cloaked in pious language about Christian unity. Still others warned it compromised too much in its theological affirmations that Catholics and evangelicals are brothers and sisters in Christ and that evangelicals should refrain from "proselytization" or "sheep-stealing" among active Catholics -- a prohibition, those critics claimed, of legitimate evangelization efforts among Catholics who do not possess a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

That controversy found its way to the floor of the SBC in a resolution recommended by the convention's resolutions committee. The statement, adopted overwhelmingly, affirmed the benefits of conversation between Baptists and Catholics and urged cooperative efforts in areas of social and moral

concerns, while affirming Baptist doctrines such as justification by faith and the need to evangelize all people regardless of church affiliation.

Messengers defeated overwhelmingly an amendment offered by T.C. French, pastor of Jefferson Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La., stating the convention "cannot endorse" the Evangelical-Catholic document and "respectfully requesting" agency heads not to lend their support to "ecumenical statements or documents."

HMB President Lewis asked messengers not to censure the agency heads and to allow them "the freedom to give the prophetic leadership God would have us to give on all issues."

Lewis later told reporters the amendment's defeat "indicates to me the convention wants to give agency leaders the right and liberty to take a prophetic stance, even though it might be controversial."

At a press conference following the vote, Frank Ruff, liaison to the SBC for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, described the SBC resolution as "significant" for its endorsement of ongoing dialogue between Catholics and Baptists. While the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department has maintained discussions with the National Conference of Bishops since 1971, Ruff said he believes this is the first endorsement of that dialogue by the national convention in annual session.

The resolution also specifies "common, basic Christian beliefs that Catholics and Baptists share," Ruff said. "I don't think that's been done before."

Resolutions Committee member Timothy George defended the Evangelical-Catholic document, telling messengers it allows Southern Baptists to work with other Christians "in a land where there is a demonic onslaught against the forces of righteousness" while reaffirming "our basic historical Christian and Baptist doctrinal commitments."

It also affirms "without any equivocation" Baptists' right "to share the gospel with anyone, anywhere, regardless of their nominal religious affiliation," said George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala.

Tommy Lea, chairman of the SBC's Resolutions Committee, told reporters the committee's primary interest was not to affirm either the interfaith witness department or its Catholic counterpart "but clarifying for Baptists what could have been an ambiguous document."

The body of the SBC resolution "affirmed much of what the document itself affirmed," Lewis said, by acknowledging that the fact there are differences between Catholics and Baptist "does not prohibit us from combining our efforts to deal with important moral and social issues."

"I support the resolution totally, every syllable," Lewis said.

Ruff said the resolution is "a Baptist document" and does not use the same terminology related to evangelism that Catholics might use. However, he said, Catholics "certainly agree with the principle that it is the right and responsibility of Christians to share the message of Jesus with unchurched people.

"We want that to happen," Ruff said. "Someone who is not involved with a Christian community, his faith is not going to deepen."

George, a church historian, told reporters the resolution signals a significant shift for the SBC. "Southern Baptists historically have been very reluctant to enter into ecumenical unions" and "anything that would threaten our biblical commitment to congregational polity and our historical

theology," George said.

"Now what we say as clearly as we ever have is the basis of our ongoing conversation does not involve a compromise of our historic convictions," George said.

Baptists have been reluctant to join in ecumenical efforts in part because they fear such unions lead to compromise of biblical principles, George said. Now, however, "I feel much more in common with a born-again Roman Catholic ... than a liberal Baptist who is not sure Jesus was born of a virgin, rose again or is returning," he said.

George said the document's use of the terms "proselytization" and "sheep-stealing" describe "pejorative terms" that are distinguished from legitimate evangelism by "underhanded methodology." "That's what we want to repudiate," George said.

Still, George said, Baptists "would want to have the right to share with Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ ... a more fully biblical understanding of the church and would fully expect them to do the same with us."

"We do not believe Roman Catholics have a proper biblical understanding on a number of issues, and they would say the same about us. I don't think we want a pat-on-the-back ecumenism that papers over that," he said.

Ruff told reporters the New Testament calls Christians to be united but does not require they be identical in the expression of their faith.

"Unity and union are not the same," said Ruff. "I think that no Christian has to apologize for wanting Christian unity."

Ruff told reporters he would like to "apologize" to Southern Baptists who could not support the resolution. Only moments before voting the resolution, the convention voted to include a quotation from Mother Theresa opposing abortion, cited earlier in the meeting, in the convention's minutes, Ruff pointed out.

"It's obvious that Jesus is in Mother Theresa," Ruff said. "The Catholic Church is not generally as good an image of the presence of Jesus as she is. If we were a better follower of Jesus, there wouldn't be the difficulty people have in accepting this."

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Southern Baptist resolutions  
address diverse social issues

By Trennis Henderson

ORLANDO (ABP) -- Social issues ranging from health-care reform and the RU-486 abortion pill to AIDS and outcome-based education were among topics tackled in a dozen resolutions overwhelmingly adopted by Southern Baptist Convention messengers.

Other resolutions called for increased awareness of world-hunger needs, commendation of World War II veterans and affirmation of teens participating in Southern Baptists' "True Love Waits" sexual-abstinence campaign.

Notably absent were resolutions broadly reprimanding the Clinton administration or specifically addressing homosexuality or abortion. The

resolutions committee opted to refer messengers to related resolutions from previous years rather than introduce new resolutions on those issues.

The health-care reform resolution voiced opposition to any legislation that includes "morally objectionable provisions" such as abortion on demand, distribution of contraceptives through school-based health clinics, rationing of health care on the basis of economic decisions or the violation of physician/patient relationships.

While emphasizing that "our Baptist heritage of insistence on limited government causes us to believe the need for reform does not mandate a government-controlled health-care system," the resolution added that messengers "nevertheless encourage the President and Congress in their attempt to reform America's health-care system."

Describing health-care reform as "an issue of justice," resolutions committee chairman Tommy Lee said committee members "stand in favor of some type of reform" despite reservations "about all that might be done in a government-controlled health-care system."

The resolution opposing the RU-486 French abortion pill was adopted without discussion. Condemning "the blatant advocacy of RU-486 by the Clinton administration," the resolution also voiced opposition to "the testing, approval, marketing and sale of the abortion pill in the United States."

The resolution also urged southern Baptists to support a proposed boycott against RU-486 manufacturer Roussel Uclaf, its parent company Hoechst A G and their American subsidiaries. The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission is among pro-life organizations calling for the boycott.

The AIDS resolution urged Christians "to follow Christ's example of compassion and reach out to those with AIDS and their families."

"It is not our intention as a committee in any way to castigate those who have AIDS," Lee explained. "Let us reach out with compassion to all those who have AIDS no matter how they may have received it."

The resolution, which encouraged Christians to become better informed about the disease and affirmed those already involved in AIDS ministry, was amended to "also urge those not involved to become involved."

A resolution addressing religious harassment guidelines under consideration by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission warned that the proposed guidelines "pose a grave risk to religious freedom in the workplace." It called for religion to be deleted from the guidelines and for religious harassment to be addressed in separate guidelines.

President Clinton responded to the resolution prior to its adoption in a June 15 letter to Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. Expressing his "strong commitment to protecting religious freedom," Clinton said religious freedom "is perhaps the most precious of all American liberties, and I intend to continue doing all I can to protect this liberty."

CLC staffer Jim Smith responded that the Clinton administration "is well known for its rhetoric and for not always following through on its rhetoric." Noting that "we are appreciative of his interest and concern," Smith added, "We also are interested in seeing action."

Lee described the EEOC resolution as "a very strong statement of this convention in opposition to these (proposed) guidelines."

A resolution concerning SBC trustees and administrators, an apparent response to the recent firing of Southwestern Seminary president Russell Dilday, urged trustees and administrators "to demonstrate the attitude of

love and service in the name of Jesus which Paul commends."

Lee said the resolution was written to "acknowledge the wisdom and usefulness of the trustee system" while also calling "on both trustees and administrators to follow biblical guidelines in their performance of duty."

Describing "the philosophical underpinnings and goals" of most outcome-based education as "promoting multiculturalism, 'politically correct' social values and New Age philosophy," the anti-OBE resolution declared opposition to "educational experiments including those labeled 'outcome-based education,' which risk the undermining of Judeo-Christian values, local control and traditional academic standards of excellence."

Messengers approved an amendment by David Crosby of Temple, Texas, who encouraged Southern Baptists to address education issues "more as encouragers and as insiders than as adversaries."

Noting that Southern Baptists "historically have been involved in and supportive of public education," Crosby's amendment affirmed educators "who have maintained a faithful witness for biblical morality in our public schools."

Messengers also adopted a resolution concerning Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics as a response to the recent "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document signed by CLC executive director Richard Land, Home Mission Board president Larry Lewis and other Evangelical and Catholic leaders.

Resolutions committee member Timothy George said the resolution was an effort to affirm "the need to stand with good people of moral concern" on key social issues while also reaffirming "our basic historic Christian and Baptist doctrinal commitments."

Acknowledging "the benefit of conversation with any religious group," the resolution encouraged ongoing conversation with Roman Catholics through the HMB's interfaith witness department "while maintaining our Southern Baptist confession without compromise." The resolution also affirmed justification "by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone," the inerrancy of Scripture, and Southern Baptists' commitment to evangelism and global missions.

An attempt by T.C. French of Baton Rouge, La., to amend the resolution to "reject all ecumenical efforts" was soundly defeated. His amendment sought to withhold any endorsement of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and to request all SBC agency heads to refrain from future endorsement of ecumenical documents.

Among other resolutions adopted, convention messengers:

-- affirmed the presidential theological study committee report as "a resource for a new denominational consensus rooted in theological substance and doctrinal fidelity."

-- noted the 50th anniversary of D-Day by expressing gratitude to all World War II veterans, adding that it is God alone "who gives victory in battle."

-- applauded the more than 102,000 Southern Baptist youth who pledged sexual abstinence until marriage. It also called on adults "to be encouragers and role models as they live out their pledge."

-- urged Southern Baptists to redouble efforts to become aware of and involved in hunger and relief needs.

Among 32 proposed resolutions submitted by messengers for consideration,

the committee declined to take action on such proposals as honoring Russell and Betty Dilday, the role and ordination of women, and a call for a "casual dress code for warm convention cities."

Among resolutions referred to convention agencies was one on Russian language videotapes referred to the Radio and Television Commission; Freemasonry referred to the HMB; divorce and ministry referred to the CLC; Jewish evangelism referred to the HMB and FMB; gospel rock and rap music promoted in the convention bookstore referred to the Baptist Sunday School Board; and an invitation to President Clinton and Vice President Gore to speak at the 1995 SBC referred to the SBC committee on order of business.

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#### House appropriations panel declines EEOC amendment

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An attempt to bar the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission from implementing proposed religious harassment guidelines failed June 15 in the House Appropriations Committee.

But the issue is not dead, according to the congressman who proposed the amendment.

The proposed EEOC guidelines interpret Title VII of the Civil Rights Act by defining what constitutes religious harassment in the workplace. The EEOC published and distributed the proposed guidelines, inviting public comment before their implementation.

Religious and civil liberties groups have criticized the guidelines as vague and open to misinterpretation. Some groups have called for stripping religion from the guidelines, while others urge that the religion section be maintained, but clarified.

Rep. Charles Taylor, R-N.C., tacked an amendment opposing the guidelines to an appropriations bill for various government agencies, including the EEOC. The guidelines could "hamper religious expression," Taylor said, adding that concerns about the regulations have come from both left and right.

Rep. Sidney Yates, D-Ill., argued against the amendment, calling it "a very drastic remedy." He pointed to the diverse religious groups opposing the amendment, including the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious liberty watchdog group representing several Baptist groups.

The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, meanwhile, opposes the guidelines. The SBC adopted a resolution backing its moral concerns agency June 16, urging separate treatment for concerns about religious harassment.

The amendment failed 28 to 21.

Taylor told Associated Baptist Press he plans to bring the amendment to the floor of the House of Representatives and -- despite its defeat in the committee -- predicts it will succeed. The committee level is a more controlled environment, Taylor said, because some members feel obligated to go along with the chairman.

Taylor's amendment would prohibit using any funds in the appropriations bill to implement the regulations.

-- By Pam Parry

Senate subcommittee hears  
debate on teen pregnancy

By Elizabeth Rivers

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Contrary to public perception, teen pregnancy is not on the rise, but decreasing in the United States, according to a recent study.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute, a non-profit corporation for reproductive health research, issued a report June 7 indicating that many prevailing views about teen pregnancy are based on myths.

The report said although more teens are sexually active today, the pregnancy rate among sexually experienced teenagers fell 19 percent between 1972 and 1990, probably indicating that teens are using contraception more effectively.

"Adult women, not teenagers, account for large majorities of unintended pregnancies, abortions and out-of-wedlock births," the study said.

Statistics showed that teenagers account for a quarter of unplanned pregnancies each year.

The report concluded that "we must concentrate more on giving [teens] the information, guidance, skills and services they need" to make sure teen pregnancies continue to decline.

Such preventive measures were the topic of discussion at a June 8 hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services and Education.

Esther R. Sylvester, administrative judge of the Philadelphia Family Court, told the subcommittee that 82 percent of mothers under age 15 are themselves children of teen parents.

"Kids do not have a firm set of values to counter the culture that says it is OK to get pregnant as a teenager," Sylvester said.

Rosetta Stith, director of the Pacquin School for Pregnant Teens in Baltimore, Md., said that "kids must see to be." Recognizing that teens often acquire their values from entertainment media, Stith suggested a program that would provide caring and responsible role models.

Three teens who participate in pregnancy prevention programs also testified. Markita Morris, student advisory member of the Philadelphia Board of Education, stressed the importance of environment. Morris said that "a strong and supportive family" and "positive peer pressure" helped her to persevere toward her goals.

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., asked if welfare support encourages teen pregnancy. Shawn Braxton, a father of a child born to a teenage mother, favored giving aid to those who need help "as long as it leads to independence." In cases of subsequent births, special consideration should be made, Braxton said. Mary Morris, a teen mother, said she is reluctant to depend on welfare.

Though the extent of the problem is subject to debate, areas of

agreement emerged. All seemed to agree that family, friends and the media have a tremendous influence on today's young people. They agreed that education is important and intervention programs have proven to be successful in curbing the frequency of teen pregnancy.

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-- Elizabeth Rivers is an communication studies major at Virginia Tech University and intern at the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington.

Supreme court nixes  
residential sign ban

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Missouri city's near-total ban on residential signs went too far in restricting free speech, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court ruled June 13.

The high court upheld lower-court decisions striking down a sign ordinance enacted by an affluent St. Louis suburb seeking to preserve property values and avoid the visual blight caused by a proliferation of signs.

The Ladue City Council barred residential signs except those providing residence identification, "for sale" notices and safety hazard warnings. The ordinance also permitted businesses, churches and non-profit organizations to display signs not allowed at residences.

The ordinance was challenged by resident Margaret P. Gilleo, who sought to display a small sign stating "For Peace in the Gulf" from her second-story window.

The Supreme Court struck down Ladue's sign regulation for a different reason than the one cited by lower courts.

A federal appeals court had concluded that because the ordinance exempted certain signs and treated commercial signs more favorably than non-commercial signs, it regulated speech on the basis of content. Ladue's reasons for enacting the sign ban were substantial, the appeals court said, but not "compelling" enough to justify a content-based restriction.

In a decision written by Justice John Paul Stevens, the high court said the sign ban prohibited too much speech by closing a "venerable means of communication that is both unique and important.

"It has totally foreclosed that medium to political, religious, or personal messages," Stevens wrote.

Broad media bans may avoid content and viewpoint discrimination but still pose a danger to free speech, Stevens wrote. "By eliminating a common means of speaking, such measures can suppress too much speech," the court said.

The court's decision has important implications for religious speech, according to a Baptist church-state attorney.

"Although church signs were exempted, the ordinance banned an important medium for religious speech and religiously informed political speech by individuals," said Brent Walker, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee.

"The state's interest in eliminating visual clutter is simply

insufficient to justify cutting off the right to speak from one's own home," Walker said.

In another free-speech case acted on June 13, the high court agreed to decide the constitutionality of a 1935 federal law that prohibits malt liquor labels from stating how much alcohol the beverage contains.

The law was enacted to prevent "strength wars" among brewers and bars listing alcohol content unless state law requires it.

The high court agreed to review lower-court decisions siding with Adolph Coors Co.'s challenge of the statute.

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-- By Larry Chesser

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