

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Former Baylor president Abner McCall dies**

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Abner McCall, who rose from a childhood in a Texas orphanage to lead the world's largest Baptist university through two decades of monumental growth, died June 11 at his home in Waco, Texas. He died at about 9 a.m., three days after his 80th birthday, reportedly from massive heart attack.

McCall was president emeritus of Baylor University. He led the institution from 1961 to 1981. During his tenure as president, the school's Waco campus grew from 40 acres to 400 acres and its enrollment nearly doubled to 10,000 students.

Today, with 10,421 students, Baylor is the largest Baptist school in the world.

McCall had a long career at Baylor, interrupted for seven months in 1956 when he accepted an interim appointment to the Texas Supreme Court. Afterward he was known affectionately as "the judge" by friends and admirers.

McCall studied and taught law at Baylor before leaving to earn a master's degree at University of Michigan and work three years as a special agent for the FBI. He returned to Baylor to teach in 1946 and two years later, at age 33, became the youngest dean in the law school's history.

A native of Perrin, Texas, he led the law school 13 years before becoming executive vice president and then, two years later, president. He was named chancellor in 1981 and president emeritus in 1985.

McCall's father died when he was three. Later, when his mother's health failed, he, his sister and two brothers were sent to the Fort Worth Masonic Home. He graduated from there in 1933 as class valedictorian.

He attended Baylor on a scholarship and worked his way through college holding several part-time jobs. He graduated from the Baylor School of Law in 1938 and scored higher on the state's bar exam than anyone previous.

A Dallas newspaper once described him as "about as close to the classic cliché of a self-made man as any man can be."

Robert Sloan, who assumed office as Baylor's president June 1, praised McCall as "one of the greatest individuals ever to walk across the pages of Texas history," leaving his mark on the university, Texas politics and Baptist life.

Russell Dilday, interim dean of Baylor's Truett Theological Seminary, said McCall "represented to me what

it meant to be a Christian statesman."

McCall was president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in 1964-65 and was named Texas Baptist Elder Statesman in 1985.

He was elected first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979. In 1981 he ran unsuccessfully for the presidency, backed by moderates in a challenge to a traditional second term for SBC President Bailey Smith.

He was involved in statewide campaigns against liquor and parimutuel gambling. He made national headlines in 1980 by barring from graduation exercises a student who violated his prohibition against Baylor students posing for Playboy magazine's "Women of the Southwest Conference" pictorial. The SBC that year adopted a resolution commending his stand.

"He was unafraid to take a strong moral stand, whether it was Playboy magazine or anything else ... without doing it in a prudish manner," Dilday told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

In 1979 McCall was named "Texan of the Year" by the Texas Legislative Conference. It was said of McCall that every Texas governor for three decades sought his counsel.

McCall was preceded in death by his first wife, Frances, in 1969. He is survived by a wife, Mary Russell McCall of Waco, and four children.

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-- By Bob Allen and Ken Camp

## **Hearings examine solutions to religious discrimination**

By Pam Parry

HARRISONBURG, Va. (ABP) -- In two hearings on a proposed religious-liberty amendment to the U.S. Constitution, both sides agreed that students' rights are sometimes violated in public schools. But witnesses -- including two Virginia Baptist pastors -- differed on how to remedy the problem.

Some argued an amendment is needed to restore free exercise of religion guaranteed in the First Amendment but trampled on by U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

Others countered that the problem is not what courts have ruled, but that school boards and administrators do not know that some forms of religious expression are permitted. They advocated education and contended that meddling with the Constitution could lead to state-establishment of religion, which the First Amendment forbids.

The House Subcommittee on the Constitution held its first hearings on the issue June 8 in Washington and June 10 in Harrisonburg, Va. The witness list included clergy, constitutional lawyers, students, a congressman, parents and other concerned citizens. The hearings are designed to precede congressional debates on the amendment.

The amendment, proposed by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., is one of the 10 items in the Christian Coalition's "Contract with the American Family" and is supported by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

The issue of public school prayer has polarized the nation, a fact illustrated poignantly when two Southern Baptist pastors took opposite sides before the June 10 panel meeting at Harrisonburg High School.

Charles Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church in Roanoke, spoke on behalf of the amendment, and William Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Waynesboro, urged the panel to reject it.

Fuller said he opposes both sponsorship and suppression of religion by government.

"I do not believe it is the government's responsibility to help me evangelize America or to help someone else to propagate whatever his faith may be, but it is the responsibility of government to keep the ground level on religious terrain," Fuller said.

Current interpretations of the First Amendment do not provide such equality, Fuller maintained. He also called allegations that the proposed amendment's hidden agenda is to reinstate government-prescribed prayer and Bible reading "a misrepresentation of my intent and the intent of others."

"Though I would be the first to say I believe the very survival of our nation is dependent upon nothing short of a moral and a spiritual awakening, it is not the duty of government to engineer or accomplish that awakening," Fuller said.

On the other hand, Fuller argued, the government also "does not have the right to instigate or to encourage the suppression of the religious expressions of its citizens."

The government is inconsistent in protecting free speech, Fuller observed.

"We are told that some are offended by having to hear prayers offered at school functions, assemblies and commencements. What about the profanity and vulgarity heard in school hallways, locker rooms and along the sidelines?" he said as the crowd roared in approval.

Wilson, a board member of the Baptist Joint Committee -- a Washington-based religious-liberty watchdog group -- said he spoke not only as a Southern Baptist minister but also as the husband of a public school teacher and a father of public school children.

"I am deeply troubled by the decay and erosion of morality that seems to beset our nation at this time in our history," said Wilson, a self-described evangelical conservative. "Having said that, I want to urge you to resist those who advocate the government as the instigator, promoter and advocate of religious faith."

He told the panel that many Virginia pastors were jailed for preaching their brand of the gospel before the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791. Baptists, along with others, he said, rose up to help secure the First Amendment protections.

"So, when I hear the clamor for weaving together religious doctrine and legislation, I say: 'Been there, done that.' Please don't send us back," he pleaded.

"Instead of knee-jerk legislative or judicial reaction to our social and moral quagmire, why not let the religious community do what we are called to do ... promote God? What we need from you is neutrality," Wilson said.

The law currently permits equal access to school facilities for religious groups, for instructors to teach about religion, for private prayer like Jesus instructed in Matthew 6 and for baccalaureate services sponsored by the religious community, Wilson said.

Religious leaders "are blaming the government because that is easier than accepting responsibility for a history of self-serving religion" that has "helped create this crisis in our nation's soul," Wilson added.

"I know you want to provide some needed and necessary treatment and healing, but please, do not apply the Band-Aid of a constitutional religious amendment of some type to this critically ill patient," Wilson said.

Another Baptist, Robert Alley, also spoke against the amendment.

The "fact that many citizens have resorted to using prayer as a weapon designed to destroy public schools needs to be exposed and combatted by those who respect both prayer and education," said Alley, professor emeritus of humanities at the University of Richmond.

"I do not believe that this Congress wants to go down in history as the legislative body that changed or altered the most precious single achievement of our American democratic republic," Alley said. "The beacon for millions, the inspiration for nations yearning to breathe free, the First Amendment is the crown jewel of our Constitution."

Those Baptists were among 11 witnesses testifying at the June 10 hearing. Most witnesses favored the amendment. The panel also relinquished the microphone to members of the audience who overwhelmingly spoke in favor of the amendment.

Another Baptist figured prominently in the June 8 hearing in Washington.

Derek Davis, director of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said a religious equality amendment would "represent radical surgery" from which the nation would never recover.

The proposal goes far beyond what some of its proponents are saying, to the point of providing a mechanism for government funding of religion, he said.

"It is incredible to me that in the United States of America, where religion is alive and robust, we may be on the verge of adopting funding practices that have for centuries characterized Europe, where religion is essentially moribund."

The subcommittee scheduled other field hearings across the nation.

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