

Associated Baptist Press

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Mississippi Baptist budget proposes reallocation of funds

By Bob Allen and Tim Nicholas

JACKSON, Miss. (ABP) -- The Mississippi Baptist Convention will reallocate about \$250,000 in funding for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for in-state use if a 1996 budget proposed by the state convention's board is approved.

That is about how much of the proposed \$23.2 million Cooperative Program budget that would normally filter back to Mississippi through joint projects with the Home Mission Board. Those projects are funded 60 percent by the state convention and 40 percent by the HMB.

Next year, Mississippi Baptists will assume full responsibility for missions in their state, said Mississippi Baptist Executive Director Bill Causey.

Causey told the state board that the change will show a truer accounting of money contributed and used within the state.

Missions money is currently sent from Mississippi to the Southern Baptist Executive Committee in Nashville, Tenn., where it is disbursed to agencies including the Atlanta-based Home Mission Board, which in turn sends a small percentage back to Mississippi.

Robert Upchurch, chairman of the budget committee, noted that the Southern Baptist Convention has asked old line states to fund more of their own ministries in order to allow the national convention to focus missions efforts in areas where Baptists are few.

The reallocation "does not mean any pulling away or any expression of being uncooperative," Upchurch said.

The proposed budget calls for 37 percent of Cooperative Program receipts -- \$8.6 million -- to be sent to the SBC. Of that, the Home Mission Board would receive about \$1.7 million for church-starting and missions efforts in the United States.

The Mississippi convention will retain \$249,530 of the SBC's portion for missions work in the state, Causey said, the approximate amount the HMB presently returns for joint-funding of projects in Mississippi.

"Mississippi is going to take care of Mississippi and will contribute to the HMB for other areas," Causey told the Mississippi board.

The executive board adopted the 1996 budget unanimously Aug. 29. It will be considered again at the Mississippi Baptist Convention meeting in November.

Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis said that based on a conversation with Causey he understood that Mississippi Baptists would take over funding of projects now jointly funded with the HMB, but would not reduce the percentage or amount of funds going to the SBC or Home Mission Board.

"I see no problem with it," Lewis said.

However, when read a paragraph from the Mississippi Baptist Record news story describing the reallocation of the \$250,000, Lewis said he "would see a problem" with any "negative designation approach whereby they would retain an amount equivalent to what we are spending in Mississippi."

"I feel like the challenge of the world and the challenge of our nation and Canada is such that this is certainly no time for the larger and stronger states to be cutting back on their Cooperative Program allocation," Lewis said. "We welcome their assuming more responsibility out of their own resources."

Causey said the state convention plans to send the same dollar amounts to SBC agencies in 1996 as in 1995. The \$250,000 reduction in HMB funding will be offset by an anticipated budget surplus at the end of the current year, he said.

"In succeeding years, we have not decided how we are going to represent this when we present the budget to our people," Causey said. "For this particular year, it's going to work out that we're going to retain it out of the 37 percent and then pay it back out of the challenge part of our budget."

Mississippi is not the only state convention revisiting its funding of the SBC this fall. Texas Baptists will consider reducing their anticipated funding of the SBC by about \$1.4 million in order to start new churches in the state. Oklahoma Baptists' executive board is also proposing a cut in the portion of Cooperative Program gifts forwarded to the SBC, citing a string of deficit budgets in the state.

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Children's Defense Fund criticizes welfare bill

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An advocate for children's rights harshly criticized the Welfare Reform Act approved Sept. 19 by the U.S. Senate, saying the measure will deprive millions of food and shelter.

"What in the world are we doing at a time when a child is dying from poverty or being killed from violence?" Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman said during a conference call promoting the CDF's fourth annual National Observance of Children's Sabbath. "What are the values of this nation?"

"We're hitting the same children and the same families in multiple ways at the same time as we're proposing a \$250 billion tax break for the non-needy and wealthy," Edelman said.

The Senate approved the bill on an 87-12 vote.

Edelman, who is a Baptist, called on the religious community to take a stand to protect poverty-stricken children. "If this does not come from the religious community, where will it come from?"

Edelman said she wished for voices as ardent for the children on earth as those for the unborn. "Where is your voice?" she asked moderate churches.

The Children's Sabbath weekend, Oct. 20-22, concludes with a discussion held at Washington National Cathedral by clergy and lay experts to find what churches can do for children who face adult-like problems on a daily basis.

The CDF sent 60,000 resource kits to congregations of all faiths hoping to increase involvement over last year's 5,000 participating churches.

"I hope the religious community will help us transform the values of this society and culture," Edelman added.

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-- Kenny Byrd is an intern at the Baptist Joint Committee.

Christian leaders deplore attacks on public schools

DALLAS (ABP) -- Christian educators and ethicists from across the nation deplored "slanderous attacks" against public schools at a recent gathering in Dallas.

"The frenzied bashing of public schools has obscured the fact that American public education is more successful than it has ever been," noted a document drafted at September's Maston Colloquium on "The Crisis in Public Education."

Last year's dropout rate in public schools was 11 percent, the lowest in history and the 11th straight year that the dropout rate declined, the group noted. Test scores have risen in public education three straight years even though the U.S. ranks near the bottom in per-student spending among industrialized nations. Graduation rates at U.S. public schools are the highest in the world, as are percentages of graduates that go on to and eventually graduate from college, they said.

The success of public schools, said the group, "is a tribute to the dedication of our public school teachers and other educators who far too often are the targets of unjustified political bashing."

Even though much of the hostility against public schools comes from religious leaders, Christians were largely responsible for the creation and support of public education in America and "are still intimately involved in it every day," the statement said.

The bashers of public education are "a diverse lot with one thing in common -- a clear vested interest," said Foy Valentine, president of the Center for Christian Ethics, which sponsored the conference.

Some want government money for parochial or private schools, some want to boost ratings for talk radio and others want to roll back school taxes as a first step to abolishing tax-supported education altogether, Valentine said.

Valentine acknowledged there are problems with public schools, but said Americans should concentrate on fixing, not weakening public education.

"As concerned Christians, we commend the churches, businesses, unions, civic clubs, volunteers, and most importantly the parents who are involved in positive support of the public schools," the group's statement said.

The statement commended churches for providing after-school activities for latch-key kids and other programs that encourage parents to be involved in the education of their children.

Participants included Valentine, retired executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission; Herbert Reynolds, chancellor at Baylor University; Tyrone Pitts, general secretary of the

Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.; Sarah Frances Anders, a retired professor at Louisiana College; and James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The group said it believes in "public money for public schools and private money for private schools."

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-- By Orville Scott and Bob Allen

Russian women persevere to build their church

By Melanie Childers

KLINTSY, Russia (ABP) -- Hang up your hard hats and put away your steel-toed shoes. Construction workers at First Baptist Church in Klintsey, Russia, wear scarves, dresses and overcoats.

Since more than 90 percent of the church's 150 members are women --including many who are aging -- the church could post a construction sign at its partially completed facility that says "women at work."

These women give as much as 50 percent of their scant monthly pensions to purchase construction materials, explained the congregation's young, energetic pastor, Eugeny Voronin. But there are no funds to hire workers.

So the women do the work themselves.

Some spend more than 300 days a year on the church site -- even some Sundays -- feverishly hauling bricks and raising the structure as quickly as possible.

"It's very difficult to build a church with women, but we're building," Voronin said. "We try to do the work ourselves. We don't hire help."

Voronin noted the church's immediate need for \$4,500 to purchase materials required to finish the roof. With the roof in place before the first snow, work could continue through the Russian winter; otherwise, all construction will come to a complete halt.

Located 550 kilometers southeast of Moscow, Klintsey is home to 100,000 residents -- a mere town by Russian standards.

Church members expect the completed facility to impact the 40,000 people in surrounding apartments for Christ.

"Many have had a negative attitude toward Baptists," Voronin explained. "They thought Baptists were cruel. So people are afraid to come to worship in small houses. But when they see this big church, they won't be afraid of coming. That's why we're praying for God to help us."

Despite the congregation's determined efforts and unflinching enthusiasm, inflation and poor economic conditions threaten to block further progress. In 1993, for example, \$1 would purchase 10 bricks; today \$1 will buy only three.

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