

# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner  
Associate Editor: Bob Allen  
Phone: (904) 262-6626  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

October 24, 1995

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

## In this issue:

- State conventions to focus on funding, elections, colleges
- Religious leaders say welfare cuts endanger food programs
- American Baptist historian Robert Torbet dies
- Senate panel hears debate on religious equality amendment

## State conventions to focus on funding, elections, colleges

By Bob Allen

(ABP) -- Three large states will consider altering Southern Baptist Convention funding, several are gearing up for partisan presidential races, while others plan to discuss their relationships with Baptist colleges and other internal concerns at Baptist state conventions gearing up in November.

State conventions in Texas, Mississippi and Oklahoma will each consider proposals to cut back on SBC support. Texas and Oklahoma are proposing cuts in the percentages of gifts they send to the SBC through the Cooperative Program unified budget while Mississippi is proposing a new way of relating to the SBC's Home Mission Board.

Battles between moderates and conservatives for state convention presidencies are expected in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and North Carolina. Other states will elect new presidents, but races are lower key.

Baptists in Alabama and Florida, meanwhile, will discuss changes in the way they have historically related to Baptist universities in their states. Alabama Baptists plan to continue to relate to Samford University now that the convention no longer elects the school's trustees. Florida Baptists, meanwhile, will likely end their relationship with Stetson University because of a new school policy allowing alcohol on campus.

Several moderate state conventions have adapted their funding of the SBC in recent years to respond to a decade-long controversy in the 1980s in which conservatives gained control of the national organization.

Adding to the state of flux this year is a massive reorganization of the Southern Baptist Convention approved in June that will reshape denominational agencies and redefine cooperation between national and state conventions in the 21st century.

Texas Baptists will consider cutting state funding to the SBC about \$1.5 million next year to pay for a five-year project to start 1,400 churches in the state.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas currently forwards to the SBC 35.5 cents out of every mission dollar received from churches through the SBC's unified budget, the Cooperative Program. A proposal at this year's meeting, scheduled Nov. 13-14 in San Antonio, calls for raising the share remaining in Texas by 2.5 percent, to 67 percent.

Texas Baptist leaders say new churches are needed to reach a growing unchurched population, particularly

among the state's 5 million Hispanic residents and the 3.8 million apartment dwellers. Texas Baptists have given sacrificially to SBC missions in the past and now need to turn more attention to their own mission field, said William Pinson, Texas Baptist executive director.

SBC leaders say the cut will hurt Baptist work worldwide. Southern Baptists "already spend far more on the 'home base' than on global missions," said Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin. "The current Texas proposal only makes the situation worse."

Larry Lewis, president of the SBC's Home Mission Board, said 20,000 churches are needed nationwide to reach "the estimated 183 million lost people in America."

Some observers suggest the cut is motivated in part by politics. Conservatives control the agencies of the 15 million-member SBC, including Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. The 2.5 million-member Texas convention, the largest contributor to the SBC, is controlled by moderates.

Both moderates and conservatives in Texas have fielded slates of candidates for state convention offices. Texas Baptists Committed, a moderate group, is backing Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church in Arlington, for president. A conservative group, Southern Baptists of Texas, is supporting Gary Miller, pastor of Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth, for the office.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention will consider a change in the way it funds home missions within the state. Under the proposal, the state will continue to send 37 percent of its unified budget to the Southern Baptist Convention but will deduct from that portion about \$250,000 to pay for home missions work in Mississippi.

That is about how much of \$8.6 million Mississippi Baptists send to national ministries that would normally come back to Mississippi from the SBC Home Mission Board for jointly funded projects. In the new arrangement, the HMB would no longer send money to Mississippi but also would lose any control over home missions work in the state.

The Atlanta-based HMB would receive the same amount from Mississippi in 1996 as in 1995 because of a budget surplus anticipated at the end of the year, said Bill Causey, Mississippi Baptist executive director.

Oklahoma Baptists will also consider cutting back on their gifts to the SBC. A proposed budget calls for reducing by 2 percent the SBC's share of the Cooperative Program, to 40 percent. If the budget is adopted, Oklahoma would give about \$140,000 less to the SBC.

Oklahoma leaders said they still support the SBC, but the state convention needs more money, citing a series of deficit budgets.

"Missions do not just occur 'over there.' They occur in Oklahoma," said Allen McHam, chairman of the subcommittee that drafted the budget.

In addition to Texas, contested presidential races are expected in:

-- Louisiana, where Slidell pastor Michael Claunch is being backed for president by Louisiana Baptists Speaking the Truth in Love, a group that formed recently to promote a "conservative resurgence" in the state. He will oppose Eddie Simmons, pastor of Sales Street Baptist Church in Lake Charles.

-- Arkansas, where Baptists will elect a new president after being led two years by an avowed conservative, Ronnie Rogers, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church in Hot Springs. Observers expect both moderates and conservatives to put up a candidate, but neither side has announced who their nominee will be at the Oct. 31-Nov. 1 meeting in Little Rock.

-- North Carolina, which will elect a president to succeed moderate Alfred Ayscue, who completes a second term at the Nov. 13-15 convention in Winston-Salem. Conservatives are expected to back Greg Mathis, pastor of Mud Creek Baptist Church in Hendersonville, who says he is unaligned. Moderates are backing elder statesman Dewey Hobbs, a retired pastor and convention leader now living in Winston-Salem.

In other states, presidential races are lower-key.

In Kentucky, a three-person race is shaping up. All three candidates disavow any political alignment.

A new president will also be elected in Tennessee, following an unusually volatile contest in September for the presidency of the state convention's executive board. Herbert Higdon, pastor of Cross Roads Baptist Church in Bells, narrowly defeated David George, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Nashville for the post. Some board

members opposed George because he is involved in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group that critics charge is anti-Southern Baptist.

Conservatives in Virginia plan to sit this one out, according to Howard Baldwin, interim executive director of Southern Baptist Conservatives in Virginia. The group, which opposes moderate leadership in the state, is not fielding any candidates for the Nov. 9-10 meeting in Virginia Beach and is encouraging its members not to attend the meeting at all, Baldwin told the Religious Herald. Moderates have announced a slate of nominees, headed by Clint Hopkins, pastor of Churchland Baptist Church in Chesapeake.

South Carolina elects a new president each year. Conservatives have held the post several years running and are likely to win again at this year's meeting, scheduled Nov. 14-15 in North Charleston.

Baptists in Alabama and Florida will consider issues related to Baptist colleges.

Alabama Baptists, meeting Nov. 14-15 in Montgomery, will focus on relationships with two schools.

A committee studying Alabama Baptists' affiliation with Samford University is recommending a "new paradigm" for the way the state convention relates to institutions. Samford trustees voted last year to make their board self-perpetuating rather than chosen by the state convention. Under the new pattern, the Birmingham school could offer its slate of board members for the state convention to affirm but not amend.

Another Alabama Baptist committee is working to resolve an impasse that could lead to defunding of another school, the University of Mobile. A state convention audit committee cited "continuing deficiencies" in the university's financial dealings and claimed university administrators were reluctant to turn over records. University officials said the state board of missions was meddling in the business of the school's board of trustees.

The Florida Baptist Convention is expected to sever its 112-year-old relationship with Stetson University over the school's new policy allowing students to use alcohol on campus.

Florida Baptists, meeting Nov. 13-15 in Tampa, will consider a recommendation to cut off \$20,000 in scholarships, to no longer accept designated gifts for the school in DeLand and to ask Stetson to return a \$568,000 endowment established to fund ministerial scholarships.

Though the state convention never formally controlled Stetson, it at one time gave the school \$1.3 million a year.

In other business at fall meetings of state conventions:

-- California Southern Baptists, meeting Nov. 14-15 in Modesto, are expected to consider a proposal to amend the state convention's constitution to exclude churches that depart from traditional Baptist practices. The amendment is aimed at a church in San Francisco with a woman pastor. Messengers from the church have been challenged at the last two state conventions. The amendment is not expected to pass.

-- Virginia Baptists will also consider a strategic plan, drafted by a special committee during a two-year study. A denominational relations committee, asked two years ago to "initiate a dialogue" with other Baptist bodies that minister in Virginia, is bringing no "concrete" report this year, the Religious Herald reported.

-- Arkansas Baptists also plan to honor Don Moore, who is retiring as the state convention's executive director.

-- The Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship met Oct. 20-21 in Winterset and voted to form a new Baptist state convention. The Baptist Convention of Iowa boasts 12,000 members in 103 churches and missions.

-30-

## **Religious leaders say welfare cuts endanger food programs**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Religious leaders said Oct. 19 that welfare cuts proposed in Congress would undermine programs to feed the poor and essentially offer "stones instead of bread" to hungry Americans.

Anti-hunger lobby Bread for the World, joined by religious leaders from Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist and Lutheran organizations, delivered plates with stones to members of Congress.

"We are struck by the relevance of Jesus' question, 'Is there anyone among you who if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?'" said David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World.

Christine Vladimiroff, president of Second Harvest, said proposed budget cuts would undermine her agency's efforts. Second Harvest feeds 26 million hungry Americans, including 10 million children, she said, with funding from corporations, individuals and the federal government.

The House version of the welfare reform bill, approved March 24, would give states broad control over school meals, nutritional aid and other food programs. It would cut food stamps and deny federally funded welfare checks for children born to unwed teenage mothers and children born to welfare recipients.

The Senate version, approved Sept. 19, would shift less control to the states. It would preserve school meals and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food supplemental program. The bill would transfer cash welfare and child care programs to the state.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the House bill would save \$62.1 billion over five years and the Senate bill would save \$38.6 billion.

But religious leaders argued the budget should not be balanced by eliminating programs for needy people.

"It is the height of irony for religio-political extremists to claim a Christian agenda, a pro-family program and vote against demonstratedly successful provisions for poor children," said James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

Dunn, among several speakers at the press conference on the lawn of the Capitol, said biblical mandates to feed the hungry are not optional for people of faith. "The hard questions are: What would Jesus say about school lunches? What would Jesus say about WIC? What would Jesus do to threaten the least of these?"

Beckmann, with plates of stones and baby toys on high chairs beside him, said he was reminded of David's miraculous effort to slay Goliath with small stones.

Bread for the World released its report on world hunger Oct. 13. According to "Countries in Crisis: Hunger 1996," 100 million people worldwide are caught in cycles of hunger and violence.

At the same time, Beckmann said Congress is cutting the "best of its foreign aid programs."

"We shouldn't wait until we see bodies floating down the river on CNN to respond to crises," he said. "By spending a fraction of what it costs to send troops into Somalia and Rwanda, we could help prevent hunger and conflict on the entire continent of Africa."

Bread for the World reported that 800 million people in the world are hungry and the United States ranks last of 21 industrialized nations in percentage of GNP going to foreign aid.

The organization noted that the money used to buy a B-2 bomber could immunize 147 million children.

Former President Jimmy Carter applauded the report in a letter. "Today, hunger results more from human choices than from natural disasters. The most deadly choice is the decision to procrastinate while prevention of conflicts is still possible."

A spokesman for Rep. Randy (Duke) Cunningham, R-Calif., one of the authors of the House bill, defended the legislation. Spokesman Patrick McSwain said the bill would better feed children than the present system.

"The cruelest thing is to allow poor and lower income families to be trapped in the current welfare state," McSwain said.

He said the House bill would increase money for school lunches by 4.5 percent over five years. The bill transfers power to the states, which saves money by limiting the number of times the money changes hands, he said.

The Republican proposal "supplements a person that wants to go back to work rather than supplement the person who wants to stay at home," McSwain said.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has not taken a position on the bills. A CLC spokesman said the Southern Baptist Convention had not approved resolutions or provided other guidance on the matter.

## **American Baptist historian Robert Torbet dies**

LANSDALE, Pa. (ABP) -- American Baptist historian Robert Torbet died Oct. 19 at his home in Lansdale, Pa.

During his career, Torbet taught at two American Baptist schools: Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in St. Davids, Pa., and Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan. He wrote several books, including, "A History of Baptists and The Baptist Ministry -- Then and Now."

He also was the lead ecumenical officer for the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Daniel Weiss, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches, called Torbet "one of the giants" in the denomination's history.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **Senate panel hears debate on religious equality amendment**

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Baptist church-state expert told senators Oct. 20 that a proposed "religious equality" amendment to the constitution would hurt, rather than help religious freedom.

"Before we adopt a new constitutional amendment on religion, let's try using the one we already have," Baptist witness Oliver Thomas urged the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Thomas, special counsel for religious liberty for the National Council of Churches of Christ, told senators the proposed amendment represents "a serious assault" on the First Amendment clause that bans government from establishing religion.

For too long, debate on church-state issues has been dominated by two extremes. One extreme used public schools to advance Protestant religion. The other, an overreaction to the first, turned schools into "religion-free zones," he said.

"Both are wrong; both have failed," he said.

However, Thomas urged senators to reject the call to correct those problems with a constitutional amendment. He noted the success of "common ground" initiatives in more than 300 school districts nationwide, where people on both sides have worked to agree on what forms of religious expression are permissible in public schools.

The common ground approach offers a "faster fix" than the proposed amendment, which would open a Pandora's box of legal interpretations, Thomas said.

"We don't need more law," Thomas said. "The framers did a good job; they gave us only 16 words, and it's taken us 200 years to figure out what (the First Amendment) means.

"I appeal to your conservative nature," he said to senators. "The most liberal, radical thing we could do today is amend the First Amendment. Don't do it."

Other witnesses, meanwhile, argued that education alone will not correct misinterpretation of the First Amendment by courts.

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said

a "virus of religious discrimination" exists in America's schools. He said his organization concluded a constitutional amendment is needed after "exhausting the alternatives."

Michael McConnell, professor of law at the University of Chicago, said religious liberty in America is "in excellent shape" but falls short of being "all it should be or all that our Constitution promises."

The proposed language of the amendment, nearly four times the length of the First Amendment religion clauses, says that no federal or state government "shall deny benefits to or otherwise discriminate against any persons, acting in a private capacity, on account of their religious expression, belief, or identity."

Forest Montgomery of the National Association of Evangelicals said the proposal "does not change the Establishment Clause" but merely clarifies it.

Thomas called that interpretation of the proposed amendment "just wrong," adding that some confusion on the issue stems from the misguided notion that church-state separation is somehow bad for religion.

The concept of church-state separation came from "a Puritan's Puritan," Thomas said speaking of Roger Williams, a Baptist who founded the colony of Rhode Island on the principle.

Thomas said that the "benefit" language of the proposal could force states to fund parochial schools.

But Douglas Laycock, professor of law at The University of Texas at Austin, disagreed. He said that the proposal would permit but not compel any state to adopt a voucher system.

"With respect to religious speech, there is no need for an amendment," Laycock said. "Religious speech is fully protected by current law, and no amendment could do anything but mischief."

But with respect to benefits, Laycock said, current laws leave room for improvement.

Sen. Russell Feingold, D-Wis., said a new amendment also will be misconstrued. His point seemed to be unwittingly underscored when Montgomery said during a vigorous exchange that the proposal was barely 15 minutes old and already it was being misrepresented.

Committee chairman Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said he "would like to see less polarization and more consistent Supreme Court decisions" in this area of the law.

-30-

---

END