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**Bush-Cheney accept nominations,
GOP touts inclusion, new agenda**

By Kenny Byrd

PHILADELPHIA (ABP) -- Showcasing speakers from minority communities and promising a return to integrity in the White House, the Republican National Convention ended with Texas Gov. George W. Bush accepting his party's nomination for president.

Bush told cheering delegates Aug. 3 that, as president, he would use the nation's "good times for great goals."

He said he believes in a God who calls for love and not judgment. "I believe in grace, because I have seen it," he continued, "in peace because I have felt it, in forgiveness, because I have needed it."

But he went on to criticize the administration of President Bill Clinton that had "so much promise, to no great purpose." He said, "Our generation has a chance to reclaim some essential values -- to show we have grown up before we grow old." But he continued, the Clinton administration did not "teach our children, it disillusioned them."

GOP vice presidential nominee Dick Cheney said a night earlier that on the "first hour of the first day [Bush] will restore decency and integrity to the Oval Office."

Bush told the delegates and the television audience that "big government is not the answer. But the alternative to bureaucracy is not indifference. It is to put conservative values and conservative ideas into the thick of the fight for justice and opportunity."

On policy, Bush promised to strengthen Social Security and vowed to reduce taxes "for everyone in every bracket."

He also highlighted controversial proposals to fund religious education and social services through education choice programs and "charitable choice." Schools should teach poor children, Bush said. And if they do not, "Parents should get the money to make a different choice."

Like his opponent, Vice President Al Gore, Bush supported funding faith-based groups, saying government "can feed the body but it cannot reach the soul."

Just days before the speech, the American Jewish Congress filed a lawsuit -- the first of its kind -- against Texas' implementation of "charitable choice" and charged that funds were used to convert people to Christianity.

Bush also pledged to value the life of the unborn. "Good people can disagree on this issue, but surely we can agree on ways to value life by promoting adoption and parental notification," he said, adding that he would sign a bill to outlaw "partial-birth abortions."

Despite opposition from pro-choice Republicans, Bush backed language in the GOP platform continuing to call for an abortion ban with no exceptions. He believes there should be exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the mother but, according to new reports, will accept the platform to "keep peace with the Republican right."

But while Bush tries to appease pro-life voters and continue his message of inclusiveness, observers say members of the Religious Right are being told to watch what Bush does, not what he says.

Christian Coalition President Pat Robertson told his members at a reception near the convention that the next president would appoint at least two or three Supreme Court justices. He said Bush is "a candidate who will appoint righteous judges."

Robertson said *Roe vs. Wade*, which allowed women to make abortion decisions, should be reversed. He criticized a Supreme Court decision that struck down school-sponsored prayer before football games and another decision that struck down a Nebraska law banning "partial-birth" abortions.

Another conservative Christian leader is backing the ticket even though many Religious Right leaders were not given much attention from GOP convention planners. Southern Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell called the Bush-Cheney ticket a "winning combination" and said, "There is more excitement today among religious conservatives than since Ronald Reagan days."

While the anti-abortion language remains strong, the platform seeks to offer a new Republican agenda. The call to end the Department of Education has been abandoned and the preamble urges the inclusion of minorities in the party.

"We offer not only a new agenda, but also a new approach -- a vision of a welcoming society in which all have a place," states the platform. "To all Americans, particularly immigrants and minorities, we send a clear message: this is the party of freedom and progress, and it is your home."

The GOP convention highlighted "profiles in compassion" throughout the four-day meeting. Several profiles involved the partnering of government and faith-based groups.

Pilar Gomez, a mother of four and a self-described Democrat, addressed the crowd and applauded Bush's support of school vouchers. Gomez is a participant in the Milwaukee school-choice program, which allows a small number of students to receive a voucher to use at private or parochial schools.

Gomez said on the issue "closest to my heart -- the education of my children and my right to choose their schools -- party lines fade."

And Bush received the endorsement of several people from minority communities, showing that the Bush-Cheney ticket will reach out to minority voters who typically vote Democratic.

Despite the GOP's attempt to reach out to minority voters, many felt the move was no more than a television stunt. Indeed, well over 90 percent of the delegates on the floor were white.

Jim Wallis, convener of Call to Renewal, told Associated Baptist Press that there are a lot of Republicans who care about racial justice. "Some Republicans care more about race than some Democrats." But, he added, "They're kind of running out of black people in the audience to take pictures of."

He said, "No party is on the side of the black poor" in this country.

Wallis was one of several organizers of Shadow Conventions 2000, a gathering of disenfranchised voters holding events in the same cities and the same times as the two major conventions. The Shadow organizers are addressing three issues they say have been ignored by Republicans and Democrats -- overcoming poverty, drug treatment and campaign-finance reform.

Texas Baptist leaders considering changes to denominational funding

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptists last year gave three-and-a-half times more funds to the Southern Baptist Convention-owned Southern Baptist Theological Seminary than to their own George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University.

Southern Seminary, in Louisville, Ky., is located more than 600 miles from Texas, educates few Texans and teaches views at odds with many of the Baptist General Convention of Texas' moderate leaders. Those facts are prompting calls for the largest state affiliate of the 40,000-church SBC to change the way it allocates gifts to missions.

Rather than routinely channeling large amounts to SBC agencies that have taken a different theological and political turn than many Texas Baptists, some are now saying the money would be better spent on neglected ministries within the state.

The 2.7 million-member BGCT gave just over \$1 million to Southern Seminary in 1999 through the SBC's Cooperative Program unified budget. That is 14 times the amount going to Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology, a second Texas school opened as an alternative to fundamentalist SBC seminaries.

Logsdon, in Abilene, and Truett, in Waco, together enrolled 302 students from Texas last year. Southern Seminary, meanwhile, enrolled 34.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth received about \$1.5 million from the Texas convention in 1999. Seminary officials said about 40 percent of the school's 4,000-plus students are Texans.

Several SBC entities are funded at higher levels than some high-profile state ministries.

For example, the childcare ministry of Buckner Baptist Benevolences is perhaps Texas Baptists' best-known statewide ministry. Yet in 1999 the BGCT sent larger allocations to five SBC entities than it gave to Buckner childcare.

No Texas Baptist leader has been more outspoken on the practical side of this question than Ken Hall, a former pastor who now serves as president of Buckner Baptist Benevolences. The Buckner system provides child and family ministries to 25,000 clients each year, facilitates dozens of adoptions annually and serves 2,200 senior adults through its retirement homes, assisted-living homes, nursing facilities and eldercare programs.

Running this statewide agency's varied ministries takes \$50 million per year. Of that amount, Buckner in 1999 received \$894,000 from the BGCT for childcare ministries, \$55,000 for ministries to the aging and nothing for adoption services.

"Texas Baptists have woefully underfunded the services to our Texas Baptist ministries to the poor and hurting people of our state," Hall said. "When we give a comparable amount of money to Southern Baptist seminaries that we give to all of our human-service ministries, something is wrong."

Despite advocating a "pro-life" position in the abortion debates, Texas Baptists have done little to fund crisis-pregnancy centers and adoption ministries, he added.

"One of the reasons so few girls can even consider adoption or being able to parent the child themselves is because abortion is the cheapest way to go," Hall said. "It's an economic decision. If Texas Baptists really aggressively chose to promote crisis-pregnancy centers through churches, through our Baptist institutions, many of these children who are pregnant, we can care for them."

The needs for educating Texas ministers at Truett and Logsdon are equally great, according to the deans of those schools.

"We very much need additional dollar support," said Vernon Davis, dean at Logsdon. "When we started this program, Hardin-Simmons as a whole had a massive deficit, \$12 million or \$13 million in our operating fund. That meant the university as a whole was experiencing some drastic cutbacks. The way we started this program was really on a shoestring."

For example, until this year Davis served as dean, faculty member and the theology school's only recruiter of students. Now Logsdon shares one recruiter who is responsible for bringing in students for all graduate programs at Hardin-Simmons.

Other urgent needs include building an adequate theological library and providing proper student housing, he said.

Providing sufficient scholarship assistance for the education of one theology student for one year requires an endowment of \$100,000, noted Randall O'Brien, acting dean of Truett Seminary.

Endowment or some other form of funding for ministerial training is essential because "not many can come in and write a check or take out a loan for their ministerial education and then go pastor a small church," he said.

O'Brien also noted that without such assistance, it becomes much more economically appealing for students to attend the six SBC seminaries, where tuition is heavily subsidized by Cooperative Program money.

"We have more Texas students at Truett than Southern Seminary does," he explained. "Yet we're sending funds out of state to educate residents of other states while our own are neglected. There's an opportunity right here at home. The need is great."

Both O'Brien and Davis emphasized the uniqueness of the Texas Baptist seminaries as alternatives to the SBC seminaries, which today are run by the conservative movement that gained control of the SBC over the last 20 years and has been at odds with the BGCT.

"We believe theological education at Logsdon is clearly within the historic Baptist tradition that values things that seem to be at some risk in the (SBC's) current climate," Davis said. "The other thing is we believe we can train ministers close to home for the task that's right here."

Despite these appeals for rethinking funding, Texas Baptists have made a commitment to the SBC they ought to keep, insisted Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, Tenn.

"From its inception, the Cooperative Program has been a partnership between the state conventions and the SBC for eliciting support from their common constituents, the churches," he said. "Of course, the churches are always free to give as they wish. But the states and SBC have a covenant with each other in the Cooperative Program. The agreement is that the state convention will not only promote and receive contributions for its own ministries but also will promote and receive contributions for the SBC ministries."

Chapman warned that "anti-SBC" voices in Texas discouraging support of the national body are "unwarranted" and "threaten the long-standing partnership" between the two conventions.

Chapman acknowledged the argument that Texas has a growing population in need of ministry.

"But beyond the borders of Texas is a nation of more than 270 million and a world whose population is more than 6 billion souls," he said. "It is crucial that all Southern Baptists do all we can, together, to reach that world. I believe mission-minded Southern Baptists in Texas and all the states want to do that, together with their larger Southern Baptist family."

Despite possible appearances to the contrary, the call for budget changes in Texas is not an anti-missions or Texas-only perspective, countered Hall, president of Buckner.

"We've got great institutions we ought to be proud of," Hall said. "But the fact is we don't support them the way we should. ..."

"Do Texas Baptist people really believe the (SBC) Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission needs Texas money more to lobby in Washington than (we do) to meet the needs of broken lives and families in Texas? I really believe God has given us the responsibility of educating our preachers and church staff

members in Texas. How many of our students are going to go to Southeastern Seminary? They're not. They're going to go to Truett, to Logsdon, to Southwestern.

"The issue for me is not taking it away from Southern Baptists to give it to Texas Baptists. The issue for me is prioritizing our mission giving."

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