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**Texas committee will propose
changes in seminary funding**

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- A committee is recommending that the Baptist General Convention of Texas dramatically reduce funding for Southern Baptist Convention seminaries.

If enacted, the proposal would be "the most dramatic thing undertaken by any state Baptist convention," said Charles Wade, executive director of the 2.7 million-member state group, by far the largest SBC affiliate.

The proposed funding changes follow a six-month study by the 16-member committee. It included on-site visits to the six SBC seminaries and extensive dialogues with the president, administrators and some trustees of each school.

The last-minute campus visits became necessary, committee chairman Bob Campbell explained, because the six SBC seminary presidents declined to meet with the committee in Dallas.

On the heels of the whirlwind tour of SBC seminaries, Campbell presented a preliminary report to Texas Baptists' administrative committee Sept. 8 during budget deliberations for 2001.

Because of a heavy agenda and the fact that the theological-education study committee was not ready to make a final report, the administrative committee set a special meeting to make final decisions about a 2001 budget for Sept. 13.

Several proposals for reallocating BGCT's unified budget, the Cooperative Program, that traditionally has been divided between the state convention and SBC, were put on the agenda during the Sept. 8 meeting, but the administrative committee chose not to finalize any budget recommendation until it receives the final report of the theological-education study committee.

Some Texas moderates have called for the state convention to stop sending millions of dollars in undesignated gifts to the national body each year. Those calls are based on theological and political differences that have divided moderate and conservative Southern Baptists since 1979. Texas Baptists particularly have been critical of SBC seminaries, the Executive Committee and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

The theological-education study committee is scheduled to finalize its report during a Sept. 11 meeting. The full report will not become public, however, until presented to the BGCT executive board Sept. 26.

Campbell said, however, that the study committee would recommend that the \$5.3 million currently sent to SBC seminaries be reduced to a maximum of \$1 million next year. This funding would be based on the number of Texas Baptist students attending each seminary.

A "Texas student" would be defined as someone who has been a member for the previous two years of a church that financially supports the BGCT. Students attending a school outside Texas would be eligible based upon membership in a BGCT-supporting church prior to entering seminary.

The net effect of this change would be a virtual defunding of five of the six SBC schools, which currently receive between \$443,000 and \$1.5 million annually from the BGCT. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, based in Fort Worth, would get the largest share of the \$1 million pool, because it currently enrolls about 1,400 of the estimated 1,600 Texas students attending SBC seminaries.

Even so, Southwestern's funding would be reduced from \$1.5 million to an estimated \$875,000 in 2001.

The committee will further recommend that the remaining \$4.3 million -- which could be even less if some churches respond by changing their giving options -- be redistributed in student grants and special project funds to Truett Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene and Hispanic Baptist Theological School in San Antonio.

In a larger context, the administrative committee discussed a number of Texas missions priorities they also would like to fund from some source. These include Hispanic-church starts, church-health resources, child-care ministries and adoption services.

The administrative committee plans to decide during its Sept. 13 meeting how to respond to these needs and implement recommendations of the theological-education study committee.

A separate study committee is looking at mission-sending agencies, including the SBC's International Mission Board and North American Mission Board as well as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. That committee has met with IMB and CBF representatives but will not meet with NAMB officials until Sept. 12, Wade reported.

BGCT officials have considered keeping the \$1.8 million sent annually to NAMB that NAMB sends back to support Texas missions causes. Mississippi Baptists made a similar change several years ago. The administrative committee agreed to wait on a report from the mission-sending study committee before making a decision on this.

Campbell said the theological-education committee's report will highlight issues such as:

- Requiring faculty members to sign the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" statement.
- A high turnover rate in faculty in several of the seminaries.
- A high percentage of faculty from non-Southern Baptist backgrounds in some seminaries.
- The use of Cooperative Program funds to create undergraduate colleges at the seminaries.
- A lack of diversity on the seminary trustee boards.
- A pattern of trustees interfering with the routine work of faculty and staff.
- Trustees creating political litmus tests for faculty hiring and lack of diversity in chapel speakers.

The committee also reported "a great deal of mistreatment of people" by seminary administrators and trustees, added Michael Chancellor, vice chairman of the study committee.

"People in the church I serve hold certain expectations about Christian conduct," he said, that have not been exemplified at the SBC seminaries. "It's not about beliefs. It's about the way as Christians we treat other people."

Despite this, the in-person conversations between the BGCT representatives and SBC seminary officials were cordial and Christian, Campbell said. "We were received graciously by every school."

Contrary to some reports that have circulated, the Texas committee did not have its mind made up before visiting the SBC schools, Campbell said.

After doing its work, the committee struggled with a desire to treat some of the SBC seminaries

differently than others -- Southwestern, for example, because of its location and Texas heritage -- but concluded it could not do so. The six SBC seminary presidents specifically asked the committee to treat all the schools the same.

"The six seminaries chose to stand as one. That was their choice," Campbell said.

He told the administrative committee that leaders from more than one seminary begged the committee not to give their school more favorable treatment than other SBC schools. The result would be to hurt those schools rather than help them, he said.

The process was painful for committee members, particularly those who are graduates of Southwestern or value its historic ties to the BGCT, Campbell said.

In the end, however, "Southwestern should be treated equally, because the things we found are equally true," he said.

Southwestern is "a changed school," Campbell said. "The Southwestern I was trained in does not exist anymore.

"Are there still some good professors there? Absolutely. Are they as free as they used to be? No."

The hard truth, Campbell said, is that Southwestern's faculty members "can't criticize the 'Baptist Faith and Message.' If I can't criticize this man-made document, I've made this document inerrant. That's creedal. And that's a big thing for us."

Requiring faculty affirmation of the 1998 and 2000 revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message" presents serious problems for faculty at all six SBC seminaries, Campbell said.

He cited a comment by New Orleans Seminary President Chuck Kelley that no faculty member would be allowed to question the "Baptist Faith and Message" anywhere at anytime, not even in private conversation at an off-campus party.

Further, four of the SBC seminary presidents told the committee they believe the 1963 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" is a "neo-orthodox document," Campbell said. "We had never heard that before. This is an alarming description."

Neo-orthodoxy was a 20th century Protestant theology and a reaction to liberalism. While it re-emphasized the authority of Scripture, neo-orthodoxy is still too liberal for many SBC fundamentalists.

Campbell said the committee responded by asking: "Do you know who you're calling neo-orthodox? All the presidents of the state conventions."

The 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" committee was comprised of the presidents of the state Baptist conventions, with statesman Herschel Hobbs of Oklahoma as chairman.

Further, the seminary presidents told the Texas committee that Hobbs was "duped" by neo-orthodox individuals who heavily influenced the 1963 document, Campbell said.

The committee's findings provide clear evidence that the SBC seminaries have moved from the theology, polity and ethic embraced by Texas Baptists, Campbell said.

He noted that Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, had appealed to Texas Baptists to keep supporting SBC causes because Texans have been given so much. "To whom much is given, much is required," Chapman quoted from the Bible.

"That's right," Campbell said. "Texas Baptists have been given very much. And we've been willing to share it. The SBC should also realize the six seminaries have been given much by Texas Baptists and under God we believe much was required in return.

"But they abandoned the requirements, and our report reflects that."

State Department annual review lists same religious-liberty violators

By Jeff Huett and Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- For the second straight year, the U.S. State Department listed Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Serbia and the Taliban of Afghanistan as severe violators of religious freedom.

Robert Seiple, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom at the State Department, listed the "countries of particular concern" Sept. 7 just two days after the State Department released its second annual report on global religious freedom.

The International Religious Freedom Act requires the president to take some action against those seven countries within 90 days. There is broad authority, however, given to the president to waive imposing any sanctions at all, but he must tell Congress why. Theoretically the president could also delay action for another 90 days, pushing the date past his term in office.

The refusal this year to add any additional "countries of particular concern" drew sharp criticism from a 10-member independent commission also created under the two-year-old law. The commission's role is merely to advise and monitor the administration and Congress, giving it no power to directly sanction countries found to be harsh toward religious freedom.

Seiple and members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom testified before House and Senate foreign-relations committees Sept. 7.

In the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Seiple said the act establishes a "very high standard" for CPC designation. A country must have engaged in or tolerated "systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom accompanied by flagrant denials of the right to life, liberty and security of persons, such as torture, enforced and arbitrary disappearances, or arbitrary prolonged detention."

Seiple said the same seven nations listed last year merit the status again, but added, "After carefully reviewing these records, I have concluded that no other countries reach that standard." Secretary of State Madeleine Albright approved Seiple's recommendations, he said.

However, Firuz Kazemzadeh, vice chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, said the commission was disappointed that the commission's advice to include four other countries was not heeded. The commission believes Laos, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan should have been added to the list.

Speaking for the commission, Kazemzadeh applauded the State Department's report and increased focus on religious freedom in foreign policy. The State Department has incorporated many of the commission's suggestions, he said.

But he criticized the State Department report for "labeling what are really positive developments ... as improvements," confusing "positive steps with real and fundamental progress in eliminating religious persecution."

In Laos, Kazemzadeh pointed out, the State Department report called the release of religious prisoners a "significant improvement. But the Laos section noted that 'the government's already poor record for religious freedom deteriorated in some respects.'"

Seiple spoke to Associated Baptist Press outside the Senate hearing room about the State Department's disagreement with the commission on listing the four additional countries. "In each case, we had diplomacy working," he said.

"We had some significant breakthroughs, for instance in Laos, with prisoners being released," Seiple continued. "And when we talked to some of our sources of information, we were told that if we were to make such designations, it would set back the spirit of the law. It would be more difficult for people to worship not less difficult."

He added, "That was information that we had that the commission did not have when it made its recommendations to us."

Also a hot issue at the hearings were whether China should be given permanent normal trade relations status with the United States. The administration supports the action and the House of Representatives already approved it.

The commission opposes normalizing trade with China because of religious freedom abuses. The Senate is set to vote on the issue in the next few weeks.

Brownback -- the only senator in attendance at the hearing -- told ABP he supports permanent normal trade relations with China, but said the testimony by Seiple and the commission does not make his vote easier. "The Chinese do everything they can to make it harder. ... The faith community is quite divided on PNTR. There are a number of people in favor of it, saying that we should be engaged."

The Sept. 5 State Department report said respect for religious freedom in China has "deteriorated" over the past year.

It also cited Afghanistan, Burma, Cuba, Laos, North Korea as having regimes in place with totalitarian or authoritarian attempts to control religious beliefs.

The report also found that countries such as Austria, Belgium, France and Germany "stigmatize" certain religions by "wrongfully associating them with dangerous cults or sects."

"Every country has its own unique political and legal system. In our report, we do our utmost to be fair and respectful to other cultures," Albright said at the report's release. "But no country's history or culture can exempt it from the need to respect principles of religious freedom enshrined in the Universal Declaration [of Human Rights]."

Countries listed in a section detailing state hostility toward minority or nonapproved religions were Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sudan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Also included in the report was a listing of countries whose nonaction for the cause of religious liberty induced concern. Egypt, India, Indonesia and Nigeria were found to have "state neglect of the problem of discrimination against, or persecution of, minority or nonapproved religions."

The separate bipartisan commission on international religious freedom praised the report, but said the Clinton Administration and Congress should do more to promote the cause by standing up to countries found to be violating the religious freedom of its citizens.

In a prepared statement, commission chairman Elliott Abrams said "the commission is disappointed in the administration's policy toward several countries of particular concern following their designation in 1999."

He pointed out China and Sudan, where the sanctions the administration identified "are grossly inadequate and ineffective."

"In Sudan, access to U.S. capital markets for companies involved in the Sudanese oil industry has not been closed, and the government of Sudan remains able to control most food aid supplied by the international community," Abrams said.

"The facts are in now," said Lawrence Goodrich, communications director for the commission. "The question is what the Administration and Congress will do. The first two years leave a lot to be desired."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story replaces an earlier version in the Sept. 5 issue. It corrects editing errors in the first and third paragraphs, and corrects a reporter's error and clarifies information in the sixth.

NAMB cuts back social ministries, while adding evangelism positions (revised)

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board has cut two social-ministry positions -- and a total of five jobs -- in a move officials said is designed to free up budget dollars for new evangelism projects.

John Yarbrough, vice president of evangelization at the national agency in Alpharetta, Ga., said the changes reflect a "commitment to keep our structure and resources in line with our strategies."

While eliminating three national missionaries and two staff positions, the change creates five similar positions but with new assignments.

Two new national missionary positions will focus on evangelism over the Internet and through welfare-to-work opportunities. A current staff position in women's evangelism is being elevated to national-missionary status. Two other staff additions are planned in prayer evangelism.

Martin King, director of convention relations for NAMB, quoted agency President Bob Reccord as saying: "We are not static and we are not done changing. We will continue to be more effective and more efficient."

The changes caught workers, including ministry-team heads, by surprise. Employees affected by the cutbacks were notified in person Aug. 17. State convention leaders learned of the changes, effective Aug. 31, in an Aug. 23 letter. Since the letter one exception was negotiated with NAMB leadership. Originally, national literacy missionary Kendale Moore's position was to be eliminated. But national literacy missionary Gayle Leininger announced her retirement effective Dec. 15, 2000, allowing Moore to stay on board.

Three of the other affected employees were offered a transfer to another position and one was dismissed and given a severance package, Yarbrough said.

The positions eliminated include:

- One national literacy missionary.
- One national interfaith missionary.
- Immigration ministries specialist.
- A position in special ministries.
- A position in multi-cultural evangelism.

Another office that handles domestic-hunger and migrant ministries also felt the impact, gaining additional assignments of immigration and refugee ministries.

Leaders at one Baptist state convention said the job cuts would have a negative impact in their state.

"I am very disappointed in the reduction of the emphasis in both literacy and immigration resettlement," said Richard Alford, associate in the associational/cooperative missions office at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Both of these are significant needs in the state and across the nation."

Alford, who also heads up literacy work among Alabama Baptists, said: "This reduces NAMB's ability to serve the churches, the associations and the state conventions. This will severely affect us."

With immigration on the rise nationwide and illiteracy not declining, Alford said "there is a great need" to reach out and minister. "But at the same time, we are saying nationally that we are reducing our forces," he added.

"This reduces the national agency's ability to serve its people," he said. "These are critical issues."

NAMB missionary Leininger agreed the changes are a "setback" for literacy missions. "Kendale Moore will obviously not be able to field service as many as if we had two," she explained. "His budget and time will only go so far. He will have to choose priorities."

Boyd Campbell, an immigration lawyer and Baptist lay leader in Montgomery, Ala., said he is

concerned about the effect on ministries to Spanish-language churches in the United States. Previously, NAMB officials have taken a lead in bringing in pastors from out of the country to lead Hispanic churches, he said. Now, he predicted, one person will be doing the work of two and will no longer be able to intervene before the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Justice Department.

Others questioned how the information about the changes was disseminated.

Alford said missions leaders from state conventions had a meeting with NAMB officials in July "and this information was not mentioned."

King said Yarbrough ultimately made the decision based on input from the various ministry teams that fall under his leadership.

"This is a change in strategy," King said. "It didn't have anything to do with budget, but everything to do with strategy ... the most effective way to do missions," he said. "We have to be effective first and what flows out of that is efficiency."

"It does signal a change in priorities," King confirmed. "Does it mean that with less attention they will have a lower priority? Probably true," he said. "But it does not mean that they are not important."

"We are not abandoning anything," King said. (Those ministries) just don't have the resources they once did."

Barry Holcomb, a NAMB trustee from Ashford, Ala., said he supports the move. "What NAMB is doing is to develop more efficient ways to reach people for the Lord," he said. "NAMB has not dropped the ministries but has merged positions."

Still, Holcomb said, as a trustee, he plans to be sensitive to concerns that are raised about the changes. "I will investigate these further and will talk about policy and procedures that went into these decisions," he said.

"If we find that needs aren't being met, then I will intervene," Holcomb said. "But I also want to be supportive of the board."

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-- Adapted from an Alabama Baptist story by Jennifer Davis Rash.

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