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Terrorists, not Muslims, target of wrath, Bush says

By Bob Allen

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Engaging in tough talk to prepare America for a possible prolonged war, President George W. Bush took care to identify the nation's enemy as terrorism, and not Muslims.

Speaking Sept. 20 on national television before a joint session of Congress, the president said evidence gathered so far points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al-Qaida, led by exiled Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden, as being behind the assault.

"The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics -- a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam," Bush said. "The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children."

Some Islamic nations discussing cooperating with the United States in expected military strikes against bin Laden and Afghanistan's Taliban leaders for harboring the accused terrorist reportedly took pause when Bush earlier referred to his declared war on terrorism as a "crusade."

"This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while," Bush said Sunday, Sept. 16 on the South Lawn of the White House.

For many, the term recalls the Crusades, a series of campaigns by Christians in the Middle Ages to rid the Holy Land of "infidels," primarily Muslims.

An aide said Sept. 18 that Bush regrets using the word "crusade," and he meant only to say his is a "broad cause" against terrorism, according to the Associated Press.

In part of his Sept. 20 speech, Bush spoke directly to the world's Muslims. "We respect your faith," he said. "It is practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them."

As Taliban leaders threatened a "jihad," or Muslim holy war, in response to American aggression, however, Bush invoked other language of religious warfare, referring to the terrorist attackers as "evildoers" and pledging to "rid the world of evil." The name given by the administration to the nation's response, Operation Infinite Justice, drew criticism from some who said that aim can only be attained by God.

Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, issued a statement urging caution when "Caesar quotes Scripture."

"The Holy Writ is forever threatened with being co-opted; it is always in danger of being robed in the garments of empire, of being mobilized to endorse injustice, of being segregated from intended conclusion," Sehested wrote in a "reflection" days after the terrorist attacks.

The Taliban claims to represent Islam in its truest form, but others say it is an extremist sect that has little in common with more than 1 billion Muslims worldwide.

In a 1999 interview with Time magazine, bin Laden said: "Hostility towards America is a religious duty. We hope to be rewarded for it by God. To call us Enemy No 1 or 2 does not hurt us. Osama bin Laden is confident that the Islamic nation will carry out its duty. I am confident that Muslims will be able to end the legend of the so-called superpower that is America."

Despite those comments, bin Laden has issued two statements denying responsibility for Sept. 11 terrorist attacks killing an estimated 5,000 victims in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Taliban leaders asked bin Laden to leave Afghanistan but refused demands to turn him over without evidence.

Several potential U.S. allies, like Pakistan, condemned terrorism but were concerned about taking part in what could be perceived as a war against Islam, according to media reports.

In response, Bush held a first-of-its-kind meeting with Muslim leaders Sept. 17 at the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C.

At a news conference following the meeting, Bush said: "The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war."

In a separate statement, Bush said: "It is important to know that this is not a campaign against Islam; this is not a campaign against Arab people. This is a campaign against terrorists. This is a campaign against evil doers who hate freedom."

Bush also issued a joint statement with the president of Indonesia, the leader of the world's largest Muslim population and third-largest democracy.

The two presidents underlined the importance of differentiating between the religion of Islam and the acts of violent extremists. Noting that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States, Bush assured President Megawati Soekarnoputri that the American people respect Islam as one of the world's great religions and that the United States would join hands with freedom-loving people of all religions to combat transnational terror.

Asked about the joint statement at a press conference, Bush said later: "I appreciate that question. First of all, it is so important for my fellow Americans, as well as everybody in the world, to understand that America will hold those evildoers accountable. We don't view this as a war of religion, in any way, shape or form. As a matter of fact, Islam preaches peace. The Muslim faith is a peaceful faith. And there are millions of good Americans who practice the Muslim faith who love their country as much as I love the country, who salute the flag as strongly as I salute the flag.

"And for those who try to pit religion against religion, our great nation will stand up and reject that kind of thought. We won't allow that to creep into the consciousness of the world. We're going to lead the world to fight for freedom, and we'll have Muslim and Jew and Christian side-by-side with us."

Several religious leaders have cautioned against lumping all Muslims together in ascribing blame for terrorism. "Pray that no Christians will blame all Muslims for terrorist acts perpetrated by radical religionists," said Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"As tensions and emotions run high, it is important for all of us to remember that there is no respected religion that advocates the killing of innocents or mass destruction," Wade said. "This act was about abuse of power, not faith."

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-- Ken Camp contributed to this article.

Child offers insightful prayer

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- "Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark," says Psalm 8:2. Isaiah 11:6 adds "a little child shall lead them."

So in a time of crisis, it should come as no surprise to hear prophetic words from a child.

Emily Woodell, a 10-year-old member of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., offered the following prayer on the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol during a prayer vigil:

"Dear God, I come to you on behalf of children like me. We don't understand everything that has happened in the past few days, but we do know that you are with us and care for us. Some children have been affected more than others by this tragedy. Some don't have moms, dads, or other family members anymore. Some are scared that it will happen where they live. Still others are concerned for friends and families they have not heard from yet. So God, come and be with us in a special way.

"Help us to know you are there and care for us. Let us also remember that while there are people in the world who do bad things, you have asked us to do the right thing. Let us show your love to others who are different from us, because they may be scared too. Thank you for loving and caring for us. We need your love more now than ever.

"In your name I pray, amen."

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-- By ABP staff

--CORRECTION: The following story corrects and replaces a version sent yesterday, which contained an error in the fourth paragraph.

Baptist senator offers advice for grief-stricken (corrected)

By Bob Allen

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- "Get up and do what is there and presents itself to you immediately. The thing that God has given for you to do that day, do that."

That's advice for thousands of grieving Americans who lost loved ones in Sept. 11 terrorist attacks from U.S. Sen. Jean Carnahan, who endured her own public tragedy nearly a year ago.

Carnahan's husband, Missouri Gov. Mel Carnahan, perished Oct. 16 last year in a plane crash while running for Senate. Their son, who piloted the private plane en route to a campaign appearance, was also killed.

After her husband won the election posthumously, the governor appointed Jean Carnahan to serve in his place.

She offered insight from her own grieving process Sept. 20 in an interview on ABC's "Good Morning America" television show.

Carnahan, a Southern Baptist, said it's natural to wonder why when tragedy strikes. "Why me? Why now? What have I done? I don't deserve this," she said. "You think all those questions you think later you wish you hadn't asked."

However, she added, "You look back in the Bible, you see even Job asked the question, 'Why me?'"

She said "connection" with others is a part of the healing process. "That is why it's so important for us to come together in candlelight services, in church services," she said.

Dealing with a personal tragedy in the public eye brings added pressure, Carnahan said. "There's such a focus of attention on you, and you wonder, 'What's expected of me?'" While feeling pressure to handle grief appropriately, Carnahan advised it's likely "not going to happen that way" for many people.

Asked if she can now think about her husband and son without sadness, Carnahan said: "I think about them every day, of course. I certainly think my husband would be proud of what I'm doing."

Asked by interviewer Claire Shipman, senior national correspondent, what advice she would offer those just beginning their grieving process, Carnahan said: "They'll not feel a year from now as they feel today. Time will heal. . There will be blessings in their life they cannot foresee at this moment."

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Illinois Baptist executive resigns

By Michael Leathers

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (ABP) -- In a surprising turn of events, Bob Wiley resigned as executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association Sept. 11, over differences with elected leaders termed "unresolvable."

When he steps down Oct. 31, Wiley will have been the head of the state association for five years and one month. Previously he worked 16 years with the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board -- now known as the North American Mission Board -- the last 10 years as director of the agency's associational missions division.

Tim Lewis, who is concluding his second term as IBSA president, said no questions about Wiley's ethics or character have ever been raised.

Rather, the resignation was triggered by the realization that "unresolvable leadership issues" existed between Wiley and the state group's board of directors, said Kevin Kerr, who chairs the board's administrative committee. The board and Wiley have been involved in an ongoing remediation process to resolve those differences.

"There is no animosity, there is no arrogance, there is no pride in what has taken place," Kerr, pastor of First Baptist Church of Waterloo, Ill., said. "There was not a campaign (to remove Wiley). There was nothing personal. No one's happy that it happened."

Lewis, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Troy, Ill., scheduled a special meeting of the board of directors at 10 a.m. Oct. 18 to select a committee from the board to begin the search for a new executive director, a process that could take a year or longer. The special meeting will occur less than three weeks before the IBSA's annual meeting, scheduled Nov. 7-8 in Peoria.

Wiley submitted his resignation on Sept. 11, the morning of the second day of the twice-annual meeting of the board of directors. His decision followed the administrative committee's meeting held the night before, which concluded with a four-hour closed session that wrapped up around 2 a.m.

Wiley's annual performance review was one of the items listed for that session. The administrative committee reconvened the next morning about 7 a.m. and continued to meet until 40 minutes into the full board meeting.

After the full board concluded its public business, it went into a more than two-hour closed session, where members were advised of the resignation. They accepted it and approved an undisclosed severance package for Wiley.

Lewis told IBSA staff members later that afternoon that the decision to accept the resignation was not unanimous. The differences between Wiley and the board of directors were not "political or personal" but centered on "irreconcilable leadership differences," he said.

The 60-year-old Wiley declined to comment but was willing to say that he did not want the board's concern over his leadership to be a distraction from the goal of Southern Baptists to communicate the gospel throughout the state. "I am more concerned about seeing this state won for Christ."

Bob Reccord, president of the North American Mission Board, said he was saddened to learn about Wiley's resignation. The two grew up in Indiana, where Reccord said he has known Wiley since the IBSA executive director was pastor of Bethany Baptist of Evansville, Ind., from 1970 to 1973.

Describing Wiley as a good and strong partner with the North American Mission Board, Reccord told the Illinois Baptist that he was "thankful that under (Wiley's) leadership . the Cooperative Program grew, that baptisms grew and that there was a record number of new church starts."

During Wiley's leadership, statewide baptisms had increased by more than 13 percent to 7,740 last year from 6,829 in 1996. Contributions to the Cooperative Program, the voluntary partnership in which local Southern Baptist churches support their state conventions and the national denomination, jumped by nearly 23 percent to more than \$6.3 million last year from almost \$5.2 million in 1996.

Wiley's pastor, Bob Fulkerson of First Baptist of Rochester, called Wiley an innovator who has used his God-given skills to make a difference in God's kingdom. "I've seen his passion and his desire to share Christ and to do it as effectively as it can be done."

Two days after Wiley's resignation, the Capital City Baptist Association met for the first day of its annual meeting. Members approved a unanimous resolution supporting Wiley and his wife, Barbara, and affirming his ministry and leadership of the IBSA. "Bob Wiley is a man of honesty and Christ-like character," the resolution said. "In each area of ministry he has been called, he has served as a faithful minister of the gospel."

The resolution further stated "our lives have been blessed by Bob and Barbara Wiley as they have faithfully and effectively served with us in our association."

IBSA staff members, already in a heightened emotional state after learning of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that morning, first heard about Wiley's resignation in a meeting he called at 10 a.m. Sept. 11 while board members discussed his resignation in closed session.

Employees began to cry as he explained his decision and encouraged them to continue to be faithful to their areas of ministry.

After one staff member asked if they could pray for Wiley, the staff encircled him, with those closest placing their hands on him, as several people voiced spontaneous prayers.

Many staff members were surprised by the resignation because they thought the remediation process had been making progress. Wiley had been upbeat about it after the March board meeting.

Lewis and Kerr told staff members during an afternoon meeting on Sept. 11 that they had not expected the resignation. Kerr told staff members that the remediation process was challenging, and that "a lesser man" would have resigned sooner.

Kerr told the Illinois Baptist that there had always been the possibility that Wiley might have chosen to resign during the remediation process, but everything seemed to indicate that was not going to occur at this month's board meeting. "We thought that the issues had been resolved sufficiently so that it was not imminent." Because the matter was a personnel issue, Kerr said he could not discuss the specifics about the board's concerns over the "unresolvable leadership issues."

Kerr also said that the reorganization of the IBSA a few years ago was not an issue involved in the resignation. He said Wiley received an unfair level of criticism for the board-directed reorganization, which resulted in a number of staff members resigning to accept other jobs.

Lewis told IBSA staff members that the board was pleased with the direction of the state association and the work of its employees. He encouraged them to remain in their positions. Lewis acknowledged that perhaps two or three people on the board have personal issues with Wiley, but Kerr said that anyone "with strong, antagonistic feelings toward Bob did not have a part in this process."

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-- Michael Leathers is editor of the Illinois Baptist newspaper.

Illinois Baptists to hold forum on 'Baptist Faith and Message'

By Michael Leathers

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (ABP) -- Fulfilling a pledge he made at last year's annual meeting of the Illinois Baptist State Association, president Tim Lewis received funding to hold a forum next year to address both sides of the controversy over the revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message."

The IBSA's board of directors on Sept. 11 approved Lewis' request for \$7,500 for the forum, to be held sometime before the IBSA's annual meeting in November 2002. That's when Illinois Southern Baptists will convene to vote whether or not to include the 2000 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message," a statement of faith regarded as the core beliefs of many Southern Baptists, into the state association's constitution.

Lewis, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church of Troy, Ill. said he hopes the forum will give "good people on both sides" the opportunity to debate the pros and cons of the "Baptist Faith and Message," perhaps providing a relief valve that could prevent the November 2002 annual meeting from turning into a rancorous and divisive setting.

"Folks are gearing up for a fight on this," Lewis said, adding the forum could prevent a split in the state association resulting in churches breaking ties with the IBSA.

Lewis will name a six-person steering committee, with equal representation from both sides, to put together the IBSA-sponsored event. He wants it to be in a neutral location, possibly a hotel, and coordinated by a trusted moderator with national speakers representing both perspectives.

The forum could also provide time for small-group discussions to allow people to share their views with each other and close with a prayer session, Lewis told the board's administrative committee during its Sept. 10 meeting. With the "Baptist Faith and Message" receiving a thorough discussion, Illinois Baptists

could then go to the November 2002 meeting, cast their votes for or against the revised faith statement and agree to go forward together however the vote turns out, he said.

Pat Pajak, the IBSA's vice president and pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Decatur, Ill., described the forum as innovative. "I think it will be seen as a healthy debate."

Lewis is also one of four pastors promoted on a flier for a "Baptist Faith and Message" rally to be held in early October at Pajak's church. Pajak is also a speaker. The faxed flier has a headline that says, "If the truth is worth believing, then the truth is worth defending."

Acknowledging that his inclusion on the flier may send a mixed signal about his objectivity, Lewis said, "I think the 'Baptist Faith and Message' is a fine statement, and I support it." However, as IBSA president, he has a responsibility to be fair to all Baptists, which is why he is pushing for the neutral forum.

Two groups have formed in Illinois with opposite views on the "Baptist Faith and Message." One is a loose-knit group of pastors that supports inclusion of the faith statement into the IBSA's constitution. The other, Mainstream Illinois Baptists, opposes inclusion.

On the national front, the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" has increased tensions between moderates and conservatives. Many conservatives view the revisions as closing loopholes for liberal interpretations of Scripture and a better reflection of the conservative direction of the national denomination. Moderates contend some of the revisions are issues best left to local churches and that the faith statement has become increasingly "creedal."

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