

entities."

In response to the deletion, NAMB amended the statement about conformity by inserting in parentheses: "This includes NAMB's requirement for these personnel to conform to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000."

At its most recent meeting March 4, the BGCT executive board grudgingly accepted that insertion, but not before adding one of their own - over the authorizing signatures at the end of the document - that notes: "Approved with the understanding that this indicates neither affirmation nor endorsement of the Baptist Faith & Message 2000."

That may be the last straw for the North American Mission Board.

"I can't help but see this action by the BGCT as yet another step away from the Southern Baptist Convention and our historic partnership...", said NAMB chair Terry Fox in a statement March 7.

Right now the two sides can't even agree on whether the Texans adopted or rejected the cooperative agreement. While the amended document was approved by the executive board with little opposition March 4, NAMB president Bob Reccord said March 7 the last-minute amendment constitutes rejection.

"This second failure of the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas to affirm a proposed cooperative agreement between our two agencies is regretful and frustrating, and places at risk the possibility that we could once again work cooperatively to reach Texas and North America for Christ," Reccord said in a statement.

Ironically, both sides agree the BGCT's latest amendment doesn't change the meaning of the agreement. But that may not matter. NAMB leaders say privately that the agreement, after more than a year of tinkering by both sides, likely will be rejected by NAMB trustees when they meet in May 7.

The unexpected gloomy reactions from Fox and Reccord were prompted by more than the last-minute amendment, however. "Even more disturbing" than the amendment, Reccord said, was a quote attributed to the BGCT's E. B. Brooks, who negotiated the cooperative agreement.

In a news release from the BGCT, Brooks is quoted as saying some funds traditionally sent to NAMB will be used to fund mission workers in Texas who refuse to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.

Mission contributions from Texas and other states that are sent to the Atlanta-based mission board are distributed to NAMB-supported personnel around the country, including some in Texas. For two years, the BGCT has retained and administered \$1.1 million that supports home missionaries in the state, while passing on about \$2.8 million in Texas funds that supports NAMB work elsewhere.

According to the cooperative agreement, however, the funds retained by Texas can be used only to fund workers who meet NAMB's requirements, including endorsement of the doctrinal statement.

"Now, we learn the BGCT intends to use them for personnel who cannot affirm NAMB's doctrinal guidelines," Reccord said in his March 7 statement. "For an agreement that is supposed to be cooperative, it's strange that this is the first we've heard of this. Is that cooperation?"

Brooks, coordinator of the BGCT's church missions and evangelism section, immediately issued a clarification saying the news release was incorrect. "I did not say that the BGCT would use retained funds for such personnel," said Brooks after reviewing an audio tape of the executive board meeting. "I apologize to Dr. Reccord, Rev. Fox and

anyone else who, having read that misquote, assumed that there was anything but a desire to work together according to the cooperative agreement."

Brooks said other mission personnel working in Texas who do not wish to be appointed through NAMB or who will not sign the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message will be supported by the Texas convention without NAMB funds.

That clarification may not be enough to salvage the cooperative agreement, however. Leaders of NAMB declined further comment but raised the likelihood that the mission board trustees will decide in May to end their dealings with the BGCT.

At risk is about \$144,000 a year the mission board currently sends to the BGCT to support 17 jointly funded employees. Some Texas leaders say NAMB is looking for any reason to end the relationship with the state convention. The mission board already cooperates with a competing conservative convention in Texas, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Both sides said they are "saddened" by the deteriorated relationship. But Brooks, noting NAMB has not rejected the agreement outright, voiced optimism.

"Without any response from NAMB, I think there is a great opportunity for us to move forward to reach North America for Christ," he told Associate Baptist Press March 13. "I anticipate the North American Mission Board will see that and join with us to approve the cooperative agreement as sent to them."

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- This article includes information from the BGCT, NAMB and the Baptist Standard

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'Partial-birth' abortion ban passes Senate overwhelmingly

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- For the first time since it returned to Republican control earlier this year, the Senate passed legislation March 13 that would significantly restrict abortion rights.

The Senate passed a bill banning certain late-term abortion procedures labeled by critics as "partial-birth abortion." The vote was 64 to 33, with 16 Democrats joining the majority. Three Republicans and one independent voted against the legislation.

Hailed as a major victory by anti-abortion groups and President Bush, supporters expect the bill to sail through the House by the end of April and for Bush to sign it into law shortly thereafter. A similar bill passed the House but died in the Democratic-controlled Senate during the last session. Previous versions of the bill have passed but were vetoed by then-President Bill Clinton. Congress could not muster enough votes to override the veto in previous instances.

"Partial-birth abortion is an abhorrent procedure that offends human dignity, and I commend the Senate for passing legislation to ban it," Bush said in response to the news. Employing terminology popularized by Pope John Paul II in his essays opposing abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment, Bush called the action "an important step toward building a culture of life in America."

However, opponents said the bill is virtually identical to a law overturned by the Supreme Court three years ago. In that case, Stenberg vs. Carhart, the court invalidated a Nebraska "partial-birth" ban because it was overbroad and failed to include an exemption to the ban to preserve the health of the mother.

Supporters of the bill -- including chief sponsor Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) -- attempted to address that concern by including in the legislation a congressional "finding" that the procedure -- in which physicians partially deliver a fetus, pierce the base of its skull with a sharp instrument and suction out its brain matter -- "is never medically necessary and should be prohibited."

During floor debate on the bill, Santorum said he has repeatedly asked one question to opponents of his bill: "Tell me why this is medically necessary. Tell me why, when even abortionists say it is not medically necessary, where no medical school in the country teaches this procedure, tell me why we have to keep this brutality of killing a child literally inches away from being born." Santorum cited a letter from an abortion provider who claimed that the procedure is not "the safest to use."

But Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) cited other medical professionals who pointed to cases in which the "dilation and extraction" abortion, as the procedure also is called, was the safest option for preserving the mother's health when ending troubled pregnancies.

Feinstein offered an amendment that would have added a health exception to the ban, but senators turned down the amendment, as well as others designed to lessen the bill's impact.

Opponents of the bill said it was just an attempt by abortion-rights opponents to get their foot in the door on restricting abortion and could actually be interpreted to ban much more than simply "partial-birth" procedures. "I want to expose this proposal for what it is -- it is deceptive, it is extreme, and it is unconstitutional," said Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash). "The other side wants you to think that this just affects one procedure performed in the third trimester, but that is not true."

Murray said the bill was "neither designed nor written to ban only one procedure" and that the ban "is just the first in a long march to dismantling a constitutionally protected freedom."

But longtime abortion-rights opponent Ken Connor of the Family Research Council said the bill was sufficiently narrow to pass Supreme Court scrutiny. "From a tightened definition of the partial-birth abortion procedure to evidence showing that it is never medically necessary, the bill specifically addresses the concerns needed to garner majority support in the court," Connor said. "It's time we put this barbaric procedure behind us."

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Nashville church faces ouster
after hiring lesbian minister

By ABP staff

NASHVILLE (ABP) -- A Nashville church faces possible ouster from its local association because members hired a lesbian minister.

A Jan. 26 article in The Tennessean, Nashville's daily newspaper, reported that Glendale Baptist Church in Green Hills called April Baker, a professed lesbian, as associate pastor for children and families last May.

According to the article, Glendale hired Baker out of a field of candidates of which all were women and two were lesbians. But the church denied Baker's hiring was an attempt to make a statement. According to Annette Sisson, who was on the search committee that presented Baker, members only wanted to find the best person for the job.

But members of Nashville Baptist Association took exception to the church's hiring of Baker. The association's executive board voted in Feb. 17 to recommend withdrawing fellowship from the congregation if Glendale fails to reverse its action by September.

Prior to the executive board meeting, three representatives of the Nashville association met with Glendale pastor Mark Caldwell and other leaders from the church to verify the accuracy of The Tennessean story. Association leaders asked if the church was approving a homosexual lifestyle by hiring Baker, according to Jim Freedman, the association's director of missions. Glendale leaders denied that hiring Baker constituted an endorsement of her lifestyle, Freedman said.

The association advised Glendale leaders of the its position on homosexuality and told them if the church did not make a change, "the executive board would recommend that the association withdraw fellowship from the church."

According to its constitution, the association can withdraw affiliation from any church which "persists in doctrinal practices out of harmony with the Baptist Faith and Message," the Southern Baptist Convention's doctrinal statement. Hiring a lesbian minister qualifies, Freedman said.

Glendale likely will be booted from the Southern Baptist Convention as well, said Bill Merrill, an SBC spokesman. The SBC was unaware of Baker's hiring until the article appeared in the Tennessean.

When contacted by Tennessee's Baptist state paper, Baptist and Reflector, Caldwell declined to comment, referring questions to Glendale's church council. Caldwell is slated to retire as pastor March 16.

Martha Jo Berry, chair of Glendale's church council, said the church understands "that many NBA members have strong opinions about decisions we have made as a community of faith."

"We appreciate the fact that representatives of the NBA, instead of acting on supposition and in reaction to news reports, came to visit with us directly about the situation," she said in a statement March 10.

While the congregation "wish[es] the NBA the best," Berry said, "Glendale will continue to follow the teachings of Christ as we understand them and to serve God, faithful to our Baptist heritage and traditions."

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Truett-McConnell College
sells satellite facility to state

By John Pierce

WATKINSVILLE, Ga. (ABP) -- Truett-McConnell College has sold its campus facilities in Watkinsville, Ga., to the state's university system for use by Gainesville College.

Truett-McConnell, a Georgia Baptist Convention-related college, has its main campus in Cleveland, Ga., but had expanded to provide classes near the University of Georgia in Athens. Gainesville College also began

offering classes in the area in May 2001, enrolling several hundred students.

According to The Athens Banner-Herald, 24 full-time faculty members in Watkinsville lost their jobs as a result of the sale. The paper reported that TMC president Jerry Pounds read a brief statement regarding the sale but would not take reporters' questions or address concerns by faculty members left without jobs.

Reports that some may find employment at the expanded Gainesville College facility when it opens this summer was met with skepticism. Gainesville College president Martha Nesbit was quoted as saying the school will not be hiring many new faculty members and "there will be some areas where we're not hiring at all."

Truett-McConnell has recently suffered financially from this and other failed extension programs. Pounds, a former development vice president at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was hired last year as president. The college has since announced its first four-year degree program to give TMC senior college status.

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