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Baylor basketball scandal thickens as calls for Sloan's resignation increase

By Robert Marus

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DALLAS (ABP) – What began as a basketball scandal may be morphing into a full-blown crisis for the leadership of the world's largest Baptist university.

On Aug. 19, one of the country's largest newspapers called for Baylor University President Robert Sloan to resign as a result of recent revelations about alleged NCAA violations in the men's basketball program of the Waco, Texas-based school.

In an unsigned editorial, the Houston Chronicle said, "As university head, Sloan bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring Baylor runs an upright program. Having failed dramatically, it's time for him to step down.

"Failing that, the board of regents must make the decision for him," the paper added. Already, prominent Baylor alumni have called for Sloan's resignation.

The call follows a weekend of compounding allegations in the controversy, which began when Baylor basketball player Patrick Dennehy disappeared in late June. His body was found in July, and his death was ruled a murder. Dennehy's teammate and onetime roommate, Carlton Dotson, was arrested and charged with the murder.

On Aug. 8, head basketball coach Dave Bliss and athletic director Tom Stanton resigned after an internal investigation revealed that Bliss knew of "major infractions" in NCAA rules that included coaches providing money to basketball players for tuition and car payments. Bliss admitted he was the source of the tuition payments.

Then, over the weekend of Aug. 16-17, secretly-taped audio recordings of conversations Bliss had with his fellow coaches and the father of a basketball player revealed he tried to cover up the payments by encouraging rumors that Dennehy received the money from drug dealing.

In an Aug. 18 online discussion with members of the Baylor community, Sloan said he would not resign unless the school's Board of Regents asked him to. "I am totally committed to this university, to the 10-year vision of the university, and I intend, again at the will of the board, to continue to serve the university," Sloan said. He answered 16 questions during the session on the university's athletics website, www.baylorbears.com, which said that more than 550 questions had been received from Baylor alumni and boosters.

After the allegations about NCAA violations came to light, Sloan imposed a two-year probation on the team, which meant it could not participate in post-season play.

But some members of the Baylor community have called for Sloan to go farther by imposing a "death penalty" on the program – meaning no play for at least a year in order to allow the program to rebuild. Already, several of Baylor's scholarship players have indicated they will transfer to other schools or are considering doing so. The hemorrhaging of players may make it difficult for the school to field a fully-manned squad in the competitive Big 12 Conference in the 2002-2003 basketball season.

In addition to the other revelations, the Dallas Morning News published an Aug. 19 article based on an interview with Bliss' former administrative assistant. In it, Laura Collins-Hays said Bliss was "an angry man" who was abusive to his players. When she complained to administrators about his behavior and what she perceived as irregularities in the men's basketball program, she said she was ignored. As a result, she said, she resigned in March 2002. Collins-Hays is a Baylor alumna.

Reached by phone in his Waco office, Baylor spokesman Larry Brumley said Collins-Hays "has gone to the media and has said some things that don't square with what our human resources people say."

Brumley said that Jaffus Hardrick, the school's director of human resources, acknowledged a discussion with Collins-Hays in which she complained about work conditions, but that "the things she has complained about in the media – the abuse and things – are not the things that she went to our human resources director to complain about."

Brumley pointed to an Aug. 19 Waco Tribune-Herald story on Collins-Hays' allegations in which two of Bliss' other

administrative assistants said they never witnessed any such abusive behavior. "Coach Bliss and I never had a minute's problem," Debbie Williams, Collins-Hays replacement and Bliss' assistant until his resignation, told the paper.

The basketball scandal is the latest in a string of controversies marking Sloan's presidency at Baylor. In 2000, Sloan's support for the establishment of an institute at Baylor for the study of "intelligent design" – which critics claim is simply a dressing-up of discredited theories of "creation science" – led to heavy criticism of him from a majority of the school's faculty. He has faced strident critiques from many prominent Baylor alumni for aspects of his 10-year plan for improvements to the school's campus and its academic reputation.

Some alumni, faculty and regents have expressed discomfort with his emphasis on building a reputation for Baylor as an "evangelical" institution. And the most recent major public controversy came earlier this summer, when Sloan accused a regent, who is one of his most outspoken critics, of improprieties involving her son's fraternity and a campus drug-sting operation gone awry. A committee of her fellow regents later cleared Jaclanel McFarland – a former Baptist General Convention of Texas officer and Baylor alumna – of those charges.



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New AP poll suggests support for gay marriage politically risky

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – Another new poll suggests that support for same-sex marriage has slipped since a recent landmark Supreme Court decision – and that such support could be a political liability in the upcoming presidential election.

A new Associated Press poll released Aug. 18 shows that 54 percent of Americans support a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage while 42 percent oppose it. In addition 53 percent of respondents opposed legalizing same-sex "civil unions" – which offer most of the same legal benefits as marriage – while 41 percent support the idea. The percentage of those opposing civil unions is up from 46 percent who opposed the idea in a similar poll three years ago.

About half – 49 percent – of respondents said they would be less likely to support a presidential candidate who supports gay marriage, while about 10 percent said they would be more likely to support a candidate who was in favor of the practice.

The six top Democratic presidential contenders – former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, Missouri Rep. Dick Gephardt, North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman and Florida Sen. Bob Graham – have said they are not officially in favor of gay marriage, but also oppose attempts to ban it at the federal level.

The poll reflected recent Gallup and Washington Post polls that showed increases in opposition to gay rights – especially legalizing same-sex marriage – since the Supreme Court passed a major decision in June striking down state laws banning gay sex acts. Opponents of gay rights have labeled the trend a backlash against the specter of legalized gay marriage, while gay-rights supporters have said any such significant societal changes often cause fluctuations in poll numbers.

However, the most recent poll also reflected that support for full recognition of gay rights in America is much higher among younger age brackets.

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Baptist Men serve meals to shrimp boat crews in South Texas

By Ken Camp

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BROWNSVILLE, Texas (ABP) — Baptist disaster-relief volunteers served about 500 meals to Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishermen forced to dock as they waited out Tropical Storm Erika.

The storm, which fell short of hurricane intensity, made landfall before dawn on Aug. 16 in northern Mexico, 30 miles south of Brownsville near the Mexican city of Matamoros.

About 1,200 Rio Grande Valley residents crowded into shelters at local schools anticipating a deluge that never hit their area. However, strong winds did cause some scattered power outages.

The South Texas disaster-relief unit from the Corpus Christi and Beeville area was activated Aug. 15. Texas Baptist Men volunteers from the region set up a field kitchen in Brownsville to serve shrimp boat crews at the request of the local Salvation Army.

The Top of Texas unit from First Baptist Church in Plains was placed on alert, and volunteers from the Panhandle traveled to San Antonio to respond if needed. The Bluebonnet Association unit in New Braunfels and the Midland-Odessa Area unit also were placed on alert but not activated.



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