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Online poll about Patterson's election draws high interest

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Baptist Standard readers have weighed in with a record number of responses to an online poll about whether they favor or disfavor Paige Patterson's election as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Baptist Standard posted the online opinion poll June 27.

The poll asks the question, "Do you favor the election of Paige Patterson as president of Southwestern Seminary?"

Voting took off immediately, and after just one weekend of voting, more than 335 readers had taken a stance.

Readers also were given an opportunity to express their honest and anonymous opinions regarding Patterson's election. Despite the obvious division, there were only a few short-lived reversals in the polls, and after one week the results remained consistent-split about 50-50.

In the beginning, the poll's percentages were divided 60-40, with the majority of voters opposed to Patterson's election. The largest change in

voting happened when pro-Patterson voters submitted 120 votes in two hours on Tuesday, July 1. From that point on, the number in favor and against his election remained about equal.

The poll closed July 10 with 1,606 voters—863 against Patterson's election and 743 in favor.

Strong opinions surfaced in the anonymous commentary. Some of the comments expressed humor, while others revealed bitter and painful sentiments. Some of the online comments from each side were so hateful or crude that the Baptist Standard removed them from the site, said Managing Editor Mark Wingfield.

Those in favor consistently praised Patterson's commitment to conservative education, saying, "He brings experience and a clear vision to Southwestern," and "He increased enrollment and missions emphasis at Southeastern" making him a "good fit." Another person said, "This is about strengthening what is already in place and seeing (Southwestern) flourish—this is not a new day in Texas, just another great one in the Lord's kingdom."

Comments from those opposed to Patterson's election included, "I feel like we in Texas are seeing an institution that produced some of our best leaders becoming a completely foreign institution whose sole purpose will be to turn out graduates committed to the fundamentalist agenda of controlling the BGCT."

One former Southwestern student who now is a minister wrote that "Southwestern is not a place that I could in good conscious recommend my students to attend."

Current students at Southwestern also appear divided on the issue, based on the online discussion. One student said, "Brother Patterson will bring a new excitement and vision to this seminary." Another said, "I am not sure I

can continue to be a student at any Baptist seminary when I can't trust their authority and leadership, and that breaks my heart.”

A third opinion also was expressed from some who said the controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention has been futile.

“Baptists are spending far too much time fighting” said one respondent. “There are too many lost people and too many ministry opportunities that I don't see how you have the time to squabble.”

The online poll is not a scientific poll and includes no mechanism to prevent individuals from voting more than once.

A new poll question was to be posted on the Standard's website July 11. To register an opinion on that discussion, visit, baptiststandard.com.

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