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SBC messengers cut BWA allocation by \$125,000

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PHOENIX-A proposal to reduce the Southern Baptist Convention's allocation to the Baptist World Alliance by more than 30 percent was approved June 17 with almost no discussion.

The funding cut, included in the SBC's 2003-2004 operating budget, initially was adopted without discussion or debate. Moments later, after the convention had moved on to other business, messenger Jim Stroud was recognized by SBC President Jack Graham.

Stroud, a messenger from Tennessee, asked about the possibility of reconsidering and amending the earlier action. When told that would be out of order, Stroud requested "an explanation from the committee as to their reason for decreasing the allocation to the Baptist World Alliance."

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee and a BWA vice president, said a study committee recommended decreasing the amount contributed to the BWA because "it appeared Southern Baptists were not being ... heard adequately" on issues of concern to SBC leaders.

Sherry Reynolds, a messenger from Georgia, asked what the specific issues

were that prompted the funding cut.

While press reports focused on SBC's disdain for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's pending application for BWA membership, Chapman said SBC leaders primarily were concerned about the membership application process.

The BWA membership committee “exceeded their authority by going to the full general council and relating to them the conditions on which the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship would be accepted” as a member later this year, Chapman charged. He said he and other SBC representatives “took strong issue with the process.”

As a result, the SBC's 2003-2004 operating budget of \$7.84 million includes a \$300,000 allocation for BWA, a cut of \$125,000 from the current \$425,000 line item. The remaining \$125,000 was earmarked for Kingdom Relationships, a proposal for the SBC to “look toward strengthening relationships with other like-minded Christian bodies” worldwide.

When the proposal initially was approved in February by the SBC Executive Committee, Chapman said the Kingdom Relationships emphasis “won't be a duplication of the BWA.” He said initiatives might include Bible conferences and church-growth seminars that would involve “primarily Southern Baptist entities” around the world.

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz said BWA leaders are “very sorry that the SBC has partially defunded the Baptist World Alliance.” He noted that the BWA “has been close to the heart of Southern Baptists in working together with Baptists around the world” since the organization's founding in 1905.

The SBC is a charter member of BWA, an umbrella organization of 200 Baptist unions and conventions worldwide that represents 43 million baptized believers in 193,000 churches.

In an interview after the June 17 vote, Lotz said, "We shall continue to work and pray for Southern Baptists and to express appreciation for their encouragement and support over the years."

Emphasizing that he and BWA President Billy Kim of Korea "want Southern Baptists to know that we shall continue to work with all Southern Baptists and their leadership," Lotz added: "We belong together because we belong to Jesus Christ. We want to work with all Baptists all over the world."

In other business, Executive Committee proposals adopted by SBC messengers include:

Approving a 2003-2004 SBC Cooperative Program allocation budget of \$182.3 million. Budget allocations include International Mission Board, 50 percent; North American Mission Board, 22.79 percent; SBC seminaries and historical library and archives, 21.64 percent; SBC operating budget and Annuity Board, 4.08 percent; and Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, 1.49 percent. The first \$250,000 of any budget overage will be allocated "to fund the enhancement of Cooperative Program education at the six seminaries."

- ◆ Revising the IMB's ministry statement. IMB President Jerry Rankin described the changes as "a restatement and updated wording that more accurately reflects the focus and work" of the IMB. The revised document focuses on "nurturing church planting movements" as a strategy to make the gospel accessible to all people. It also highlights "sending" rather than "appointing" missionaries, recognizing a growing emphasis on volunteer workers.

- ◆ Adopting a resolution of appreciation for the Southern Baptist Council on Family Life. The eight-member council, chaired by former SBC President Tom Elliff, helped plan and produce the SBC's June 16 Kingdom Family Rally. The resolution expressed appreciation for the council's "keen vision,

deep passion, unflagging energy and unyielding diligence and perseverance in pursuit of the goal of saving families."

- ◆ Selecting San Antonio, Texas, as the site for the 2007 SBC annual meeting to be held June 12-13.