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Appeal on chaplains policy tops SBC business

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PHOENIX-Should Southern Baptist military chaplains be ordained ministers?

Navy Capt. Al Hill thinks so. During the opening session of the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Phoenix June 17, Hill offered a motion requiring that ordination to pastoral ministry be required for all people endorsed for military chaplaincy by the convention's North American Mission Board.

Hill's motion was one of 12 presented during the two-day meeting. Nine, including Hill's, were referred to SBC entities, and three were ruled out of order. No miscellaneous business item, including Hill's, was debated by the 7,070 messengers gathered in the Phoenix Civic Center.

Hill, a messenger from First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Va., said he was satisfied with the decision to refer. "At least we have the issue back on the agenda," he said in an interview. "Prior to this meeting, it seemed the door was closed to further consideration."

Hill and other military chaplains contend the current NAMB policy of not

requiring ordination for military chaplaincy service reduces Southern Baptist chaplains to “religious social workers.”

“It is like sending our troops into battle with defective rounds,” said Army Chaplain Capt. Randy Moore, currently stationed at Fort Benning, Ga. “Southern Baptist chaplains need the best equipment possible. That means ordination to me.”

NAMB changed its policy on chaplains in order to avoid endorsing female chaplains who have been ordained. Although the U.S. military requires all chaplains to be ordained in their faith traditions, NAMB officials contend they will find a way for women to continue serving as chaplains without ordination.

SBC conservatives, including those among NAMB's trustees, believe the Bible forbids ordination of women, but they are open to women serving in chaplaincy roles.

A NAMB spokesman said he is confident the concern of military chaplains will be seriously considered by the agency, including additional conversation with senior military chaplains.

A motion instructing the SBC Executive Committee and other SBC entities to accept funds from Baptist individuals, churches, associations, conventions and organizations originally was ruled out of order because it called on messengers to “exercise authority given to the trustees of the various entities.”

However, the order of business committee offered to meet with Brian Kaylor of Union Mound Baptist Church in Elkland, Mo., to reword the motion in a way that would make it acceptable. After the motion was reworded, it was referred to all SBC entities impacted by the proposed action.

The motion appeared aimed at the decision by the SBC Executive Committee not to accept funds from a recently formed state convention in Missouri. The new convention was formed after changes in leadership of the traditional state convention, the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Five motions were referred to the SBC Executive Committee. Two messengers moved that the SBC annual meeting be held in their respective areas. Bob Mackey of Parma Baptist Church in Ohio asked that the annual meeting be held in Cleveland by 2010 or as soon as possible. Ben Brazal of King of Kings Christian Fellowship in Bronx, N.Y., moved that the convention meet in New York City.

Bobby Greene of Beulah Baptist Church in Kents Stone, Va., asked that the convention calendar include an annual emphasis on God's creation being done in six 24-hour days and on the worldwide flood.

The Executive Committee also will consider a motion requesting a special offering to be collected in July for the International Mission Board to help make up shortfalls in the mission agency's budget. The motion was offered by Greg Hyland of River Valley Community Church in Lebanon, N.H.

Messengers also voted to refer to the Executive Committee a request that proposed resolutions be distributed to the messengers at least one session prior to their consideration.

In addition to the motion by Chaplain Hill, NAMB received two motions dealing with efforts to reach internationals in the United States. Jamal Buhara of Phoenix asked for increased "attention and funding" for ministries to Middle Eastern immigrants. Lawson Lau of Illinois asked for cooperation between NAMB and the IMB to reach 2 million international students and scholars studying in the United States.

Two motions by Wiley Drake of First Southern Baptist Church of Buena Park, Calif., were ruled out of order. Drake's first motion sought to amend

the annual meeting's order of business to allow a five-minute report from Crusade Radio, a program which he directs, about its support for President Bush. Drake's second motion sought to suspend SBC Bylaw 20 to allow presentation of resolutions from the floor. Bylaw 20 requires advance submission of all proposed resolutions. Earlier, the resolutions committee declined to accept resolutions from Drake because they were not submitted prior to the meeting.

Also ruled out of order was a motion by Roy Davis of North Shreveport Baptist Church in Louisiana asking that the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention be declared host of the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix. In declaring the motion out of order, the order of business committee reminded messengers that state conventions are autonomous bodies and cannot be instructed by the SBC.

A motion to reconsider the reduced budget allocation to the Baptist World Alliance was offered by Jim Stroud of Third Creek Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn. After determining that Stroud had voted for the budget the previous day, the motion was introduced and soundly defeated.

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