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By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -As embattled Southern Baptist leader Bob Reccord met with prominent pastors April 13 seeking advice about his future, several of his own trustees at the North American Mission Board urged him to resign as the agency's president.

Reccord took the brunt of a scathing report issued by NAMB trustees March 23, which faulted the missions leader for poor management, autocratic decision-making, extravagant spending on failed ministry projects, apparent conflicts of interest in no-bid contracts for a friend, and creating a "culture of fear" that prevented staffers from questioning the abuses.

After meeting all day behind closed doors March 23 to weigh the results of the investigation, trustees stopped short of forcing Reccord to resign the post he has held eight years. Several told Associated Baptist Press the board offered not to release the critical 19-page report if Reccord resigned at the time.

Reccord didn't resign, and the trustees voted overwhelmingly to make the findings public — over Reccord's objections.

Several trustees told ABP they expected the disclosure of the report, which is still posted on the NAMB website, to persuade the former Virginia pastor to step down and spare the agency further turmoil and embarrassment. So far the "hint" hasn't worked, said one trustee leader.

"There is an outcome that we all believe is necessary," said the trustee, who spoke only on the condition of anonymity. "Everybody gets it except Bob Reccord."

According to NAMB employees, Reccord told his management staff in the last week he may resign. He said some trustees are telling him to step down and others are telling him to ride out the controversy.

But he may not have much longer to think about it. If he doesn't resign in the next few weeks, the trustees may force him out when they meet May 2, several told Associated Baptist Press.

"If he's still here at the May meeting, it's very possible that somebody may make that motion," said former trustee chairman Terry Fox, a pastor from Kansas, who was on the investigation committee. "I may have some of the trustees mad at me for saying that."

"I hope he does resign," said another trustee. "I'm ready to fire him. If I had [an investigation] report that my leadership wrote like that, I'd be looking for a place to go."

Among those who could help him find another job are the prominent Southern Baptist megachurch pastors who quietly met with Reccord near the Atlanta airport April 13, offering support and counsel. Reccord could not be reached for comment by ABP after that meeting.

"I hope they advise him it's time to step down for the good of Southern Baptists," said one trustee leader.

Several trustees said they do not want to have the issue hanging over the agency when Southern Baptists gather for their annual meeting in June. Some fear a motion opposing or favoring Reccord could disrupt the meeting and damage the agency, which directs and coordinates Southern Baptist mission work in the United States and Canada.

"I don't want to see it go to the SBC, because I don't want people to get discouraged about giving to missions," one trustee said.

Fox, the former chairman, agreed the issue would be disruptive if it were debated at the convention, which already is expected to air grievances with another SBC agency, the International Mission Board. "I'd like to have it taken care of by then," said Fox, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Wichita, Kan.

Two trustees said they have been disappointed in Reccord's response since taken to the woodshed by the board. "I don't see or hear of any improvements," one concluded. "He just hasn't done things to try to make amends and change things," the other said.

"I only know two trustees who don't want him to leave," said one trustee leader.

At the time of the March trustee meeting, the board reportedly was about evenly divided on whether Reccord should resign. With no clear consensus, it never came to a vote.

Now, some trustees say, resignation is the only solution. "For the love of God and your agency, and for the good of the Kingdom, this is the course of action," one leader told ABP.

Some trustees have stiffened their resolve in the weeks since their tumultuous meeting — but for different reasons. Some are most upset about the extravagant spending on failed projects. Others are worried about no-bid contracts to InovaOne, a communications firm owned by one of Reccord's friends. Others cite Reccord's blurring of the line between NAMB and personal interests.

"The trip to London ticked people off the most," said one trustee, referring to the \$3,800 NAMB paid for Reccord and his wife to attend the premiere of the Chronicles of Narnia movie. "But the real issue," he continued, "is InovaOne and the perceived conflict of interest. I think we'll take more action on that.

"The fact that disturbed me the most," said another, "was there were so many things that the trustees were not involved in. I don't think the trustees would have minded who NAMB did business with, if NAMB had bid it out."

If Reccord decides to stay, he will face unprecedented strictures designed to prevent further abuses, trustees said. They are drafting "executive-level controls" that will require trustee oversight for all major NAMB decisions.

Trustee investigators said Reccord "participated in or presided over some poor management decisions on a number of levels," emphasized events on the periphery of NAMB's mission, and was absent so much he couldn't provide consistent, day-to-day oversight "to properly manage the agency."

As a result, the trustee report said, a task force will make sure specific rules will now govern the president's travel, speaking engagements, and office time. A system of competitive bidding for outside contracts will be established. And new initiatives will require "appropriate oversight and approval by the board."

Moreover, permanent policy changes will ensure trustees are not caught off

guard again, regardless of who is president, trustees told ABP.

"If Bob could work under the intensity of more trustee involvement, he could stay," one trustee said. "But is Bob willing to do it?"

Most trustees and employees who talked to ABP predicted Reccord, a former megachurch pastor who is used to free rein as an administrator, will choose not to live under those constraints.

"I would not be surprised if Bob would make that decision," agreed one trustee. There's "no question" such close scrutiny runs counter to Reccord's personality, he said.

Reccord alienated many state-level denominational leaders with his go-it-alone decision-making style, according to the NAMB investigation. Reccord declined to discuss the trustee report with ABP.

Trustees told ABP Reccord gave too much attention to his own public profile, seeking media exposure and speaking engagements that would bring him — and the agency — into the spotlight.

"Bob wanted someone to get him on CNN," explained one trustee leader. Reccord hired two outside public-relations firms — contracts totaling \$12,000 a month; more than \$75,000 to date — to get him "secular media placements" like other SBC leaders Al Mohler and Richard Land.

Reccord and his administrators developed a pattern of launching expensive, often innovative, ministry projects without specific approval from trustees, who found out only after million-dollar losses resulted. Questionable contracts, like the ones with Reccord's friend and neighbor Steve Sanford of InovaOne that brought charges of conflict of interest, weren't disclosed until reported by the Christian Index newspaper.

However, Reccord's innovations also brought some successes, his

supporters say, pointing to high-profile urban-evangelism strategies as an example.

"He could have gotten approved, through the trustee board, anything he wanted in the way of ministry projects, but he tried to do it without approval," one trustee leader concluded.

While some trustees — particularly pastors following the same leadership model — could accept those lapses, others could not, the trustee said. In the end, the "megapastor" leadership style proved a poor fit for a denominational agency dependent on donations and collaboration from churches and conventions all across the spectrum, he concluded.

"We love the fact he's innovative. He's always flying at 40,000 feet," said one trustee who supported Reccord in the past. "The majority of trustees love Bob and would not disagree with his style. But his unwillingness to involve trustees more [was the biggest failure]. There was not a lot there that couldn't have been defended. The largest offense was we didn't know so much was going on."

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