

Leatherwood resigns as president of the ERLC

July 31, 2025

Brent Leatherwood, who spent nearly four years dealing with critics from the most conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention, resigned as head of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

The commission's board announced Leatherwood's resignation July 31. Miles Mullin, vice president and chief of staff, will serve as acting president.

Leatherwood—a former executive director of the Tennessee Republican Party—played a key role in advocating for the federal defunding of Planned Parenthood.

The ERLC under his direction also placed 40 ultrasound machines in pregnancy resource centers around the country through its Psalm 139 Project.

However, Leatherwood resisted the efforts of some abortion abolitionists to seek criminal penalties for women who pursue abortions. That position proved unpopular with a vocal segment of Southern Baptists.

Other Southern Baptists criticized the ERLC under Leatherwood's direction for participating in the Evangelical Immigration Roundtable.

Agency survived vote at SBC in Dallas

At the SBC annual meeting in Dallas in June, Southern Baptists voted to reject a motion to do away with the ERLC.

However, the motion to abolish the agency received support from about 43 percent of the voting messengers at the annual meeting. It marked the fourth attempt in recent years to disband or defund the ERLC.

Seven weeks after the ERLC survived the floor vote at the SBC, its board issued a statement from Leatherwood announcing his departure from the moral concerns and public policy agency.

“After nearly four years leading this institution, it is time to close this chapter of my life,” he stated. “It has been an honor to guide this Baptist organization in a way that has honored the Lord, served the churches of our convention, and made this fallen world a little better.”

He applauded the ERLC and its staff, saying the commission “never wavered in serving as a light on Capitol Hill, before the courts, and in the culture.”

‘A balance between conviction and kindness’

“In all of our advocacy work, we have sought to strike a balance of conviction and kindness, one that is rooted in Scripture and reflective of our Baptist beliefs,” Leatherwood stated. “That has meant standing for truth, without equivocation, yet never failing to honor the God-given dignity of each person we engage.”

The ERLC “has helped the world clearly understand that Jesus Christ reveals a better way to live rather than the angry, self-absorbed, and cruel model that is so often served up by our modern culture, and, more importantly, he freely offers the gift of eternal salvation—selflessly purchased with his own blood,” Leatherwood continued.

“That hope has powered our work these last several years, and has shaped

my own conscience. It will continue to do so as I move forward to render service where the Lord is calling me next.”

Led in the face of ‘polarizing culture’

Scott Foshie, chair of the ERLC board of trustees, expressed gratitude to Leatherwood for his leadership and service.

“Brent has led the commission well and demonstrated loving courage in the face of a divisive and increasingly polarizing culture in America,” Foshie said. “While biblical values have been under attack, Brent has been a consistent and faithful missionary to the public square. We are thankful for his commitment to the Lord and to this commission.”

That “polarizing culture in America” plagued Leatherwood for much of his tenure since the time he was elected president in 2022, after serving one year as acting president. Previously, he served the ERLC as chief of staff and director of strategic partnerships.

Leatherwood, the father of three children who survived the shooting at Covenant School in Nashville, angered some in the SBC when he supported a proposal by Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee to allow authorities temporarily to keep guns out of the hands of people at risk of hurting themselves or others.

He also alienated some supporters of President Donald Trump when he praised President Joe Biden’s decision to withdraw from the 2024 presidential race, calling it a “selfless act.”

Kevin Smith, who was chair of the ERLC board at that time, initially announced Leatherwood was fired as ERLC president. Less than 12 hours later, the ERLC executive committee issued a statement saying Leatherwood was not fired, Smith acted without board approval, and

Leatherwood had the board's support "moving forward."