

Messengers debate action of Southwestern Seminary trustees

June 14, 2018

DALLAS (BP)—Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention debated—and defeated—a motion to dismiss Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s trustee executive committee.

Debate included comments from two current seminary trustees, a former convention president and a laywoman.

Tom Hatley of Immanuel Baptist Church in Rogers, Ark., a former International Mission Board trustee chairman, said his proposal was based on his perception the seminary trustee executive committee acted with “haste, lack of proper investigation,” apparent disregard of the seminary’s founding documents and failure to allow former seminary President Paige Patterson to respond to accusations against him.

On May 30, the executive committee terminated Patterson, president of Southwestern Seminary since 2003.

The previous week, the seminary’s trustees moved him to president emeritus status on the same day allegations surfaced that he mishandled a sexual assault report during his presidency of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Since late April, Patterson also has been under fire for statements he made in the past about domestic violence and women’s physical appearance.

Former SBC President Ronnie Floyd spoke against the motion, asking

messengers to look past whether these trustees made the right or wrong decision. He adopting a motion to remove trustees “would destroy our own system of government.”

Bart Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church in Farmersville, and a member of the trustee executive committee, spoke on a point of personal privilege.

Barber asserted Patterson, as Southwestern’s president, attempted to remove a trustee, disregarded a request from trustee chairman Kevin Ueckert and refused to attend trustee Executive Committee meetings when asked to do so.

Once Patterson was president emeritus, his attorney “sent an email questioning the legal validity” of the full board’s action.

“What is your seminary to do when a president emeritus is working to undermine the legitimacy and validity of the seminary’s board of trustees?” Barber said. “If you take away the spine of the trustees, you take away the messengers’ voice.”

The motion failed decisively on a show of ballots.

Motions referred to Executive Committee

Grant Ethridge, a messenger from Liberty Road Baptist Church in Hampton Roads, Va. and chairman of the SBC Order of Business Committee, moved on behalf of the committee that the following motions be referred to the SBC Executive Committee for consideration and report to the 2019 SBC annual meeting in Birmingham, Ala.:

- A motion by Sam Fordham of Oak Bowery Baptist Church in Ohatchee, Ala., that the Executive Committee consider a separate

entity for evangelism.

- A motion by Marshal Ausberry of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va., that the convention cease inviting elected officials to speak at the annual meeting.
- A motion by Jason Pamblanco of Thomasville Road Baptist Church in Tallahassee, Fla., to amend SBC Bylaw 21 to prohibit elected officials from addressing convention messengers.
- A motion by Tim Overton of Kingston Avenue Baptist Church in Anderson, Ind., that the SBC Executive Committee strengthen trustee training.
- A motion by Steve Bailey of Calvary Baptist Church in Osceola, Ark., that SBC Bylaw 10C be amended to include the Cooperative Program percentage giving of churches where candidates for office are members.
- A motion by Lewis Richardson of Woodlawn Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La. that the chairman of the Executive Committee develop and provide more comprehensive trustee training.
- A motion by Dale Jenkins of Airway Heights Baptist Church in Airway Heights, Wash., that the Executive Committee study the feasibility of remote site and digital participation in the annual meeting.
- A motion by Brent Lay of Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson, Tenn., that the Executive Committee recommend a program assignment for church revitalization.
- A motion by Zak McCullar of Carbon Hill Baptist Church in Carbon Hill, Ala., that a children's ministry Sunday be added to the SBC Calendar.
- A motion by A.J. Smith of Bay Springs Baptist Church in Shelby, Ala., that the SBC president appoint a committee to articulate the relationship between the Old Testament and the gospel.
- A motion by David Prince of Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., that the Executive Committee study the process of

the Committee on Nominations and its standards.

- A motion by Michael Turner of Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Walhalla, S.C., that the Executive Committee study the biblical authority for a woman serving as SBC president.

Motions referred to SBC entities

The following motions were automatically referred to the appropriate SBC entity under Bylaw 26B for consideration and report to the 2019 SBC annual meeting.

- A motion by Wade Burleson of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Okla., that the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission study expanded resources to help churches protect themselves from sexual predators.
- A motion by Phillip Bethancourt of Redemption City Church in Franklin, Tenn., requesting a task force for helping churches protect themselves from sexual predators.
- A motion by Samuel Ray Henry of Belvedere Baptist Church in West Palm Beach, Fla., that the Southwestern Seminary board of trustees reconsider its decision regarding Paige Patterson.

Out of order

The following motions were ruled out of order because they would direct the officers of the convention to act outside the scope of their duties as established by the convention's constitution and bylaws, were in the nature of a resolution, or were similar to other motions already referred:

- A motion by Ron Wilson of Lakewood Baptist Church in Phenix City, Ala., that the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Executive Committee resign from the board of trustees.

- A motion by David Lewis of Mount Lebanon Baptist Church in Sheraton that messengers be engaged in pro-life issues.
- A motion by Scott Gordon of Claycomo Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., that elected officials not be a part of the annual meeting program.
- A motion by Caleb Potter of Shady Oaks Baptist Church in Hurst requesting focus on the John 3:16 gospel.
- A motion by Caleb Peterson of Dayton Avenue Baptist Church in Xenia, Ohio, requesting Vice President Pence to format his address to the messengers in a particular manner.