

# Southern Baptists grapple with morality, white nationalism

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was edited after it originally was posted to reflect a late-breaking development. Read the follow-up story [here](#).*

PHOENIX (RNS)—Southern Baptists, grappling with the country's political realities, adopted a statement on the importance of public officials who display “consistent moral character.”

With minutes of that action at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting, they agreed with a committee's decision not to bring forth a proposed resolution condemning the “alt-right movement,” whose members include proponents that call themselves white nationalists.



Barrett Duke, president of the 2017 Resolutions Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, discussed the statements considered by his committee and by Southern Baptists at their annual meeting. (RNS photo by Adelle M. Banks) “Our decision not to report that resolution out is not an endorsement of the alt-right,” said Barrett Duke, chairman of the SBC Resolutions Committee, in an interview after

the committee's report. "There are aspects of people who identify as the alt-right, certainly, a lot of their views and their intentions, we would adamantly, aggressively oppose."

However, the resolutions committee reconvened Tuesday evening and subsequently asked the committee on order of business for time Wednesday to present a new resolution. The committee on order of business approved, and messengers agreed to vote on the resolution Wednesday.

Messengers affirmed a statement decrying "every form of racism, including alt-right white supremacy, as antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

The resolutions, five months into the presidency of Donald Trump, highlight divisions among Southern Baptists. White evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Trump, and many of the denomination's top leaders have become advisers to the president. Still, at least one Southern Baptist leader, Russell Moore, president of the denomination's public policy arm, strongly opposed his candidacy.

Dwight McKissic, an African-American pastor from Arlington whose resolution last year repudiating the Confederate flag was amended before passage, requested that the alt-right resolution be brought to the messengers for consideration. He called the separatist movement "darkness that's invading our nation right now."

Duke responded that the committee spent "considerable time" mulling the proposed statement but decided it was "too open-ended" and could be misinterpreted.

The predominantly white SBC has made pointed efforts in recent years to apologize for its history—founded in the defense of missionaries who owned slaves—and to attract African-Americans.

## **Importance of moral leadership**

The resolution “On the Importance of Moral Leadership,” rewritten by the committee, originally was proposed by Tennessee pastor Micah Fries with exactly the same language as a 1998 resolution adopted during the time when President Clinton was being questioned about an affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

“This resolution was originally approved by the SBC during a Democratic presidency, and now we have an opportunity to remain clear and consistent in our convictions during a Republican presidency,” Fries said in an interview.

But the committee added language commending “those leaders who choose not to meet privately with members of the opposite sex who are not their spouse.” The added language is intended to ensure that leaders leave no room for temptation and “to avoid any suspicion of wrongdoing.”

Just as the committee two decades ago opted not to include Clinton’s name in the statement, the 2017 committee did not include either the names of President Trump, or Vice President Mike Pence, who has said he never eats alone with a woman other than his wife.

### **Other resolutions, all of which passed with no discussion:**

- Called for Congress to defund Planned Parenthood and urged the Justice Department to pursue criminal changes against it and its affiliates “for actions that may be in violation of federal law.”
- Marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by promoting its emphasis on “the sufficiency of Scripture.”
- Condemned the “deceptive sin of gambling” and urged the end of state-sponsored gambling.
- Reaffirmed the biblical doctrine of “penal substitutionary atonement,” the idea that Jesus took the place of sinners on the

cross.

- Called for Southern Baptists to pray for the next 21 days for God's mercy on Southern Baptists and to commit to spend at least 15 minutes a day in prayer.