



GCR TASK FORCE AUDIO FILES

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and published by TAB Media Group***

INTRODUCTION

The following is a compilation of stories that were written and published by TAB Media Group's The Baptist Paper following the release of Great Commission Resurgence Task Force audio files that were unsealed and made available to the public June 16, 2025.

As noted below, the initially released collection includes 57 compact disc recordings, one DVD recording, a few printed blog posts from the pray4gcr.com website (which is no longer functional) and the printed GCRTF progress report from February 2010.

On Sept. 15, 2025, the Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives in downtown Nashville announced it had received an additional four volumes of 1,070 pages. This latest collection contains background

materials, reports detailing progress and recommendations, the final amended report, meeting materials, contributing documents, correspondence, supporting presentations, communications from GCR Task Force chair Ronnie Floyd and task force members to the SBC, prayer partner emails, endorsements, press releases and a directory.

While this report does not include everything that was discussed in the task force meetings, we sought to capture at least a snapshot of the tension and commitment of those in the room who dedicated their time to complete the task that SBC messengers assigned them. It essentially is a conversation starter, not all-encompassing blow-by-blow account of the task force meetings. With that said, we do hope it is helpful.



GCR TASK FORCE FILES UNSEALED, AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW (PART 1)

The voices on the Aug. 11, 2009, audio recording exhibit enthusiasm and excitement as well as intrigue and concern. The people behind the voices seemed to embrace the motivational messages that resulted in seven major components intended to turn Southern Baptists back into evangelistic powerhouses.

In the end, only two of the items were fully completed, but the process to get to the initial proposal of seven was no less intense.

The discussions highlighted the latest difficulties in helping autonomous churches cooperate within autonomous associations and autonomous state conventions — and how the national entities and seminaries fit into the mix.

‘Unprecedented moment’

Twenty of the 23 members serving on the 2009–2010 Great Commission Resurgence Task Force were present that opening day — a day task force chair and then-Arkansas pastor **Ronnie Floyd** described as the start of “an unprecedented moment.”

“We’ve got to seize this moment,” he shared with the group. “This is a moment in our history that is powerful.”

Items in the collection

The audio files from the GCRTF’s 10 months of work were sealed for 15 years, the agreed-upon time by the group.

Those files were unsealed and available to the public at the Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives beginning June 16, 2025, at 8 a.m. The collection includes 57 compact disc recordings, one DVD recording, a few printed blog posts from the pray4gcr.com website (which is no longer functional) and the printed GCRTF progress report from February 2010.

Leaders of the task force did not transfer any other paper documents or notebooks, even though, on the audio file, Floyd refers to a comprehensive manual and directory each member had received.

“No minutes, agendas, programs, notes, outlines or correspondence are included in the collection,” accord-

ing to the collection summary document provided by SBHLA.

How it all started

According to the introductory remarks in the audio files, the resurgence concept related to the Great Commission started with **Thom Rainer**, then-president and CEO of Lifeway, a few years prior to Georgia pastor **Johnny Hunt** being elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

While Hunt ultimately ran with the idea, it was **Danny Akin**, president of Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, who served as the conduit between Rainer and Hunt.

Akin had been chatting with Rainer in the Fall of 2008 about concerns they both saw within the SBC — membership and baptisms were down, and the SBC entity leaders seemed to be living in some type of “dysfunctional” relationship.

“Thom Rainer coined the term Great Commission resurgence. He said that’s what we need,” Akin shared with the GCRTF members during that initial meeting in 2009.

“I said it was a great way to phrase it. He said, ‘Then run with it.’”

According to The Alabama Baptist newspaper, South Carolina pastor **Frank Page** also used the phrase “Great Commission resurgence” in his outgoing presidential address to SBC messengers in June 2008 in Indianapolis. Page urged Baptists to “fall in love with Christ all over again.”

‘Axioms of the Great Commission’

Still, it was Akin who developed, along with consultation from others, a chapel message known as “Axioms of the Great Commission” that ultimately became the foundational — and often controversial — mantra for those championing the cause.

“Brother Johnny asked for ownership, to work with folks to adjust it a bit, to post it on the website and see what happens,” Akin shared with the GCRTF members to bring them up to speed on how the resurgence idea had developed.

For and against

The proposal — written and delivered by **Al Mohler**, president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky — called for creating a task force “to cast a compelling vision for Southern Baptists for the foreseeable future,” Akin said, adding it received 95% affirmation at the 2009 annual meeting in Louisville.

Of course, how can anyone vote against the Great Commission? **Chuck Kelley**, president emeritus of New Orleans Seminary, later asked.

Kelley has been outspoken about his concerns of the GCRTF report through the years and has called out the branding as unfair and a way to prevent pushback.

His latest blog post also mentions a comparison of SBC stats between 2025 and 2010, when the GCR recommendations were adopted.

“The downward trend is unmistakable,” Kelley writes. “Compare those same stats with the statistics from 1990, and the differences are even more stark.”

But in August 2009, GCRTF leaders believed they could turn the declines around with the work they were doing.

‘End game’

Akin shared with the task force members, “My prayer is that ... we will have a greater passion for the Lordship of Christ, a greater understanding of the gospel, a greater desire to love our neighbor as our self, and to reprioritize our entire lives — from my life all the way up to our national entities — to really get after the fulfilling of the Great Commission. That’s my passion, that’s my heart, that’s the end game for me.”

Hunt also spent time describing his vision during that initial task force meeting.

“We flat need God to do something. ... I prayed. I earnestly, earnestly, earnestly prayed. And Southern Baptists [have a desire] for someone to speak into their lives. If you study the Old Testament ... you’ll come on those occasions where the people were asking the prophets, ‘Is there a word from the Lord?’ People in times of desperation just want to know, ‘Is God still saying anything?’”

Hunt added that he believed Crossover 2010 would have 10,000-plus volunteers (fewer than 2,000 showed up) and the 2010 annual meeting would see more than 18,000 messengers registered (a little more than 11,000 registered).

‘Guiding coalition’

As Floyd guided the task force through its opening agenda in August 2009, he noted, “We’ve got to rally

people to a better future. That’s what we’ve got to do. That’s getting what we are doing down to a nutshell. We are going to rally people to a better future.

“We believe there’s a better future than where we presently are headed and we are going to rally them to that future,” he said. “We’ve got to create it first, then we’ve got to rally them, and we’ve got to create this guiding coalition all the way to Orlando.”

Rainer’s message

Rainer’s role during the initial task force meeting was to share data points and define the reality of where the SBC was at that moment.

Following about 45 minutes of sharing research about a variety of declines in SBC life, Rainer wrapped on a final thought:

“Ultimately, any revitalization of any true Christian group has happened at the local congregation up and not on a task force down,” he said. “So, the best thing that I would hope for anything that would happen is that we would remove the barriers so the local church can do its work. Almost any emphasis we’ve had in the SBC, even if had initial success, has not lasted.”

2010 results

During the 2010 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, the GCRTF’s recommendations were approved by messengers with one amendment by pastor **John Waters** of First Baptist Church Statesboro, Georgia.

The amendment added language that says Southern Baptists will “continue to honor and affirm the Cooperative Program as the most effective means of mobilizing our churches and extending our outreach. We affirm that designated giving to special causes is to be given as a supplement to the Cooperative Program and not as a substitute for Cooperative Program giving.”

Those speaking against the recommendations included then-SBC Executive Committee President **Morris Chapman**, who retired in September 2010.

Task force members

Along with Floyd, Akin, Mohler and Page, the other task force members were Hunt as an ex-officio member; **Tom Biles**, then-executive director of Tampa Bay Association in Florida; Pennsylvania pastor **John Cope**; **David Dockery**, then-president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee (now president of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas); **John Drummond**, layman from Panama City, Florida; **Donna Gaines**, pastor’s wife and popular women’s speaker from Cordova, Tennessee; North Carolina

pastor **Al Gilbert**; Georgia pastor **Larry Grays**; North Carolina pastor (and future SBC president) **J.D. Greear**; Texas evangelist **Ruben Hernandez**; **Harry Lewis**, then-senior strategist with the North American Mission Board; **Kathy Ferguson Litton**, pastor's wife, church staff member and popular conference leader, has served in several states; Florida pastor **Mike Orr**; **Jim Richards**, then-executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention; California pastor **Roger Spradlin**; Florida pastor **Ted Traylor**; **Simon Tsoi**,

executive director of Chinese Baptist Fellowship of the U.S. and Canada; **Bob White**, then-executive director of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board; and Florida pastor **Ken Whitten**.

EDITOR'S NOTE — To schedule an appointment to listen to the GCRTF audio files and review the collection items, call 615-244-0344. The SBHLA is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Taffey Hall serves as director and archivist.



MORE HIGHLIGHTS FROM GCR TASK FORCE AUDIO FILES (PART 2)

A team from The Baptist Paper, a sister publication to The Alabama Baptist and part of TAB Media Group, continues its review of the audio files from the 2009–2010 meetings of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force.

They've made it through the first two gatherings of the task force and are currently working through the third meeting.

Highlights from first gathering

A few highlights from the first meeting, which took place Aug. 11–12, 2009, in Atlanta include:

- **Ronnie Floyd**, chair of the task force and then pastor of Cross Church in Springdale, Arkansas, described the importance of preserving the notes from the meetings that were about to take place, at least the audio files.

"This is highly confidential stuff. We can't email about it, tweet about it ... this is really big stuff," he shared with the group. "What we will do before we leave this meeting, we will take a vote (about) how long we are going to preserve this. ... This does not prohibit anything you say because nobody's going to hear it for 10 years at least."

Floyd also focused on the importance of prayer before getting started.

"Any significant moment we've ever had in our lives has happened because somewhere we've gotten with God and somewhere God has spoken into our lives. ... The ultimate purpose of our group is to speak the word of God around the world and to win the nations.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, that's not going to happen until we pray. And I want us today as an act of humility, an act of honor to our Lord Jesus. ... I want us to go straight there before we even introduce ourselves to each other. Because we need the God of heaven, I'm telling you we need the God of heaven, more than we even know we need the God of heaven today. ... Today I want us to ... agree with God together in prayer."

'Spin' and priorities

- **Johnny Hunt**, then-president of the Southern Baptist Convention who appointed the task force and

sat on it as an ex-officio member, shared his concerns about how often he heard promotional items from the SBC level indicating "how good we are doing."

"It seemed like we had the capacity to take a very bad year and spin it and make it sound good," Hunt said. "I just cannot for the life of me say that if 80% of our churches are plateaued or declining, we've had a good year. When you can stand and say we baptized more people in 1950 with 6 million and only God knows how much less money and technology, we can't even go there. How under heaven can we rejoice?"

Hunt also shared his frustration over how Cooperative Program giving seemed to be more important than focusing on the Great Commission.

"When the ... major thing (for state papers to print) is not if any of us love Jesus, if we win souls, if we go overseas but what they print is ... our CP giving. We have gotten to the point like it or not where the test of fellowship for this denomination is the percentage that you put beside CP," he said. "It doesn't matter if we are in a church that has declined in its budget for eight years in a row, just so you gave 10% of whatever is declining."

- Also sharing with the group were **Thom Rainer**, then president of Lifeway Christian Resources; **Danny Akin**, president of Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina; **Al Mohler**, president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky; **Harry Lewis**, then with NAMB; and **Barry McCarty**, longtime SBC parliamentarian.

Their topics covered a wide range of historical, data-driven and contextual topics. They also answered questions and addressed comments from the group.

One comment focused on Southern Baptists' seemingly avoidance of helping the poor.

Mohler responded, "There's a huge guilt on the SBC for translating the gospel into white bread, middle class Protestantism. We have done that overtly and covertly. We would insinuate if you love Jesus you will dress like us, live like us, make these decisions. ... We expect of our children a middle class identity more often than we expect a gospel identity."

“Our priorities are just all wrong,” Mohler added. “If our priorities were right, then we wouldn’t have to say, ‘Let’s go minister to the poor. We would find ourselves doing that.’

“I’m as guilty as anyone ... here with my fountain pen and Apple computer,” he said. “We are so socially stratified (but) gospel churches find people for Jesus.”

Highlights from second session

A few highlights from the second meeting, which took place Aug. 26–27, 2009, in Arkansas include:

- **Jerry Rankin**, then president of the International Mission Board, gave a report on lostness and shared thoughts on how Southern Baptists could have a greater impact on reaching a lost world. The vision presented was that by the end of 2010, the IMB would have been unable to identify a people group that doesn’t have access to the gospel. “That doesn’t mean they have been evangelized, certainly a major part of the task, but at least they have access to the gospel,” he said.

Rankin noted the importance of more churches in the U.S. being challenged to help reach the ends of the earth, not just their communities, state and nation. It’s not just about evangelism and baptism numbers. It’s about the Great Commission, he said.

“Most Southern Baptists think our missions task is populating heaven with as many people as we can win to the Lord. We could redeploy our missionaries into seven countries — Mexico, Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya, Philippines, Korea and India and double the number of baptisms,” Rankin said. “We could be reporting 2 million baptisms a year. Would that fulfill the Great Commission? It would leave 10,000 people groups, not even hearing the gospel. That’s not our missions task.”

He explained that doing missions requires evangelism, but strictly doing evangelism isn’t the Great Commission. The Great Commission is about getting the gospel to those who have never heard.

Dependency and legacy structure

Rankin also touched on how many pioneer states are too dependent on “NAMB subsidies for their survival and existence.” He addressed how the IMB had to let conventions overseas be more independent and how “they have stepped up and grown. We’re partnering with them and helping train them but not doing it for them.”

He added that “many of our pioneer state conventions ... haven’t made one step toward self-sufficiency” and an “inherent weakness” has been built into the

SBC. As a result, this creates an “enormous price tag.”

“Why do we not have enough money to send missionaries to the peoples and fulfill the Great Commission? We have built into a legacy structure that is dependent on subsidy.”

New presentations, programs and promotions aren’t going to “cut it until the grass-roots church members are sharing their faith,” he said.

Rankin also said churches need to have more control of where their Cooperative Program support goes. He went on to say the SBC is not being led by leaders but by those who first set up the structure and wrote the bylaws. They are “calling the shots.”

Churches need to be able to take more ownership and need an “avenue of strategic allocation.” Right now churches are “too locked in,” Rankin said, noting that individual churches need to be able to make more decisions on where their funding goes.

‘Follow the money’

- Mohler gave a “follow the money” report to committee members addressing cooperative agreements between NAMB and state conventions. He said that as a result of cooperative agreements with various state conventions (each involving different agreed-upon amounts of funding), “more than every dollar sent through the Cooperative Program to NAMB went back to the states.”

“If NAMB was funded only by the Cooperative Program, it would have actually sent more back to the states than it received through the Cooperative Program. That difference is the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.”

Mohler said “roughly one penny on average from all the state conventions” of every CP dollar in the offering plate was making it to the International Mission Board for overseas missions.

While Mohler said the purpose of the report wasn’t to “point blame,” he noted that it does reflect Southern Baptists’ priorities. He added many seminary students would be “horrified” to learn how much was actually making it to overseas missions work.

‘Shared goals’

- Mohler and Floyd presented a first draft of the committee’s “shared goals” and asked the committee to help complete them. The committee was invited to share ideas and what needed to be changed in the list of five items — a list that would be expanded to six goals.

The group debated some of the phrasing and the or-



der of the goals, but eventually everyone agreed on the list. Floyd noted the list could be adjusted as needed throughout the process.

Ultimately, the shared goals focused on Southern Baptist unity, vision and a “renewed passion” for the Great Commission, directing more attention on the nations, while also impacting “underserved people groups” in the U.S. and Canada. The list included looking at reformulating the way SBC leaders asked churches to be more involved in missions through going and giving — and figuring out a way to reduce “overhead administrative expenses.” Mohler and Floyd clarified that the list of shared goals was “not” for the final task force report but to be used as a guide in formulating the report.

- During the Arkansas meeting, committee members discussed a variety of ways to help get more CP dollars overseas which included everything from looking into merging some of the seminaries as well as NAMB and IMB to “doing away with” the SBC Executive Committee and changing it to a “standing committee” and farming out responsibilities in a more part-time capac-

ity to needed committees or groups that could handle SBC auditing and various financial responsibilities.

At one point, Mohler noted the Executive Committee did not function as “a deliberate body on behalf of the convention” but “instead now functions as a bureaucratic unit that just quite frankly, I think, is unnecessary. Some would say unhelpful. Some would simply say unnecessary.”

Frank Page, who would eventually become EC president for a few years, cautioned the committee from picking on one entity. He noted other entities have issues as well and that while IMB gets a lot of positive attention it should not become a “sacred cow.”

- At the close of the second group meeting, the committee discussed what to say in press releases about the meeting. **J.D. Greear**, North Carolina pastor (and future SBC president), asks at one point for coaching or advice on how to handle calls from the media and what to say and what not to say. Committee members have been counseled to refer media to Floyd regarding more in-depth questions they may not feel comfortable answering.

GCR TASK FORCE FILES (PART 3): DALLAS-FORT WORTH MEETING SPARKS ‘POLARIZED’ DISCUSSION

Staff members of The Baptist Paper, a sister publication to The Alabama Baptist and part of TAB Media Group, continue their review of the audio files from the 2009–2010 meetings of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force. They’ve made it through the third meeting, held at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, which took place Oct. 27, 2009. This meeting has been broken-up into two parts. Stay tuned for the next report.

A few highlights from the meeting:

- **Ronnie Floyd**, chair of the task force and then pastor of Cross Church in Springdale, Arkansas, said, “We’re often asked, ‘What is the agenda of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force?’” That is a “loaded question,” he added.

“It’s almost like the mindset is that we have all gotten in a room and decided we’re going to have an agenda. The agenda has really been passed on to us, and the agenda has been given to us not only by the Southern Baptist Convention, but the agenda most of all has been given to us by Jesus Christ.”

After sharing about Walmart’s success and commitment to growth, Floyd said Southern Baptists should be committed to growing the Kingdom.

“What is our priority? Our priority is to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and make disciples of all the nations. ... That’s our agenda.”

Seeking to ‘scare’ and ‘slay’ elephants

- **David Hankins**, then executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, gave a report to the task force representing state Baptist conventions — with 22 executive directors present in the room. His report focused on the value of state conventions and the need to continue the structure of the Cooperative Program and the partnership — specifically the cooperative financial agreements with the North American Mission Board.

Hankins said he wanted to confront any elephants in the room and “scare them out of hiding and tame them or slay them.”

“None of us are satisfied with the declines in membership and baptisms and missions support. But we have had remarkable results and staying power, even up until today in the Southern Baptist Convention. ... We are not at the top of our game, but we are very much in the game. Pronouncements that the SBC is dead are not only premature, they ignore a vast array of data to the contrary.”

Among some of the “affirmations” for state convention work, Hankins noted “the structure that has served Southern Baptists in the past is well suited for the future. ... structure is our servant, not our savior.” Citing two surveys — one he had previously commissioned and another the Executive Committee, working with Lifeway Research in 2008, had commissioned — he went on to say Southern Baptists “want a structure.”

Hankins noted, “the rank and file of Southern Baptists are basically happy with allocation decisions.”

“We disagree with those asserting we are using out-moded structures that will not work in the 21st Century. ... Whatever failings can be credited to our structure are due less to flaws in the structure and more to neglect of the structure.” He pointed to the Cooperative Program’s ability to unify, cooperate and mobilize “at every level.” Hankins noted the current structure has “boots on the ground everywhere.” He also credited NAMB’s partnership and described the funding that state conventions receive as a “lifeline” to strategy and success, especially in pioneer areas across the country.

Pointing to ‘stewardship problem’

Hankins pointed to a main issue, not being the state conventions and the structure, but church giving. “The allocation problem we have is not between the state conventions and the SBC. It’s between the church member’s pocketbook and the offering plate. Our most serious problem is a financial stewardship problem, which is indicative of a Lordship problem. ... We are giving a smaller percentage than the generation of the Great Depression.”

Concluding his report, Hankins summarized that state executives are “very interested in supporting this Great Commission Resurgence process, but not at the price of having our constituents told they ought to devalue our work. ... If we do not achieve real partnership, it doesn’t matter how magnificent or inventive our recommendations may be, we will all fail.”

Fielding questions

Following Hankins’ report, Floyd opened the meeting up to questions from the task force.

- **J.D. Greear**, task force member and pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina (and future SBC president), asked why the few Southern Baptist churches that designate their money to SBC entities — but choose to bypass the state convention — couldn’t be counted as a CP cooperating church if most churches reportedly are fine with the current CP structure. Hankins noted he and other state convention executives are convinced that significant changes to the SBC structure — without cooperation — would “accelerate” and “dismantle” the Cooperative Program.

Churches can designate funds now, Hankins added, but it’s counted as designated giving and “not called the Cooperative Program.” He said, “Churches, you are certainly free to do what you want to do, but we unapologetically and enthusiastically ask you to support the whole program. ... To have a designated system unravels that. There’s no way to maintain a unified system of funding without a unified system of funding.” Overall, he noted, the SBC will experience significant decline if more Southern Baptist churches bypass parts of the Cooperative Program.

‘Been there before’

- **Rick Lance**, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was among the 22-state convention executive directors in the room. He shared how he had pleaded with Alabama Baptist churches that were “designating around the SBC” not to keep their money in the state. “I said do not do that. Please do not do that. That’s not being family, that’s not reaching the nations.”

Lance said his goal was to get designated giving in his state down to “zero.” Any change to the structure, Lance noted, would cause some people to come back to him and say, “Are you not a hypocrite? You told us not to designate around the SBC, but the SBC is blessing an effort to do that to the state convention. ... My sentiment is that if we’re not able to do it together, we’re not going to be able to do it separately.” He added

that changing the structure is “not our desired future.”

“We have been there before. Before there was General Motors, we had horses and buggies,” he told the group. “We do not need to go back to horses and buggies, even if we can text each other while we’re doing it. Our desired future ought to be to move together cooperatively, and take as many as we can with us.”

- Hankins, recalling “Planned Growth and Giving,” a previous effort to get more money outside the state, said he’s ready to revisit the idea of state conventions going to a 50/50 split (keeping 50% of funds in the state and sending 50% to SBC causes). “Planned Growth and Giving was Southern Baptists’ attempt to do what I’m recommending today, 25 years ago. It was a dismal failure. Mostly it was a dismal failure because we had bigger fish to fry.

“We had to get our theological house in order, and it didn’t matter what the giving was if we didn’t know what we believed,” he said. “So it got set on a shelf. ... It was gonna move money from the church member’s pockets to the churches, to the Cooperative Program, to the world. That was the dream.”

Two or three conventions went to 50/50, he said, but “the churches didn’t come through” and “we nearly went out of business” and had to back up. “I believe had we not had to stop and take care of our theological issues that it might have been possible. ... There was already the mood to do that, to fulfill a dream that started in 1925, we just never have been able to manage.”

Hankins added, “I’m ready, these guys are going to shoot me for saying this, but I’ve been committed to this for a long time.” That means, he clarified, “state conventions are willing to look at what they do, keep their valuable ministries but also be very lean and mean, which we already do. We’re streamlining.” Hankins noted the Louisiana Baptist Convention had 153 employees in 1985, and now has 91. “Could we not give the Cooperative Program one more chance?”

- **Al Mohler**, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said when the Cooperative Program was formed in 1925, it was an “experiment in progress, as was the Executive Committee (which was) formed at the same time.”

“It took Southern Baptists some successive years, 25 to 30 to make some adjustments and try to work some things out. But it was an experiment. The levels of percentages were not fixed in stone,” he said. “There were decisions made back then that made a great deal of sense. ... The big question I think a lot of people

are asking us now. What makes sense today? And all of this conversation is helpful to help bring that into focus.”

‘I have socks older than you’

- Greear asked to hear what state conventions can do better with the money kept in the states that the churches cannot do or the IMB could not do better overseas? He clarified, “I do recognize there are things (state conventions) can do. I just want to be clear to what those are — and help me determine how much budget that’s worth.”

John Sullivan, then executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, who would retire in 2012, offered to respond to Greear’s question. He began by listing off numerous ways Florida Baptists are not only doing international missions, but also addressed what they are doing to address the need for theological education — and how that is a critical need. “Theological education is a passion of mine; we must do that — or we’re going to produce the kind of churches that we simply do not want to produce.

“So I would simply say to you, state convention work we’re doing in Haiti, we’re doing work in Cuba. We’re doing work in Brazil and the Amazon Basin, where they tell us there are probably 30,000 villages that have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. We go and get on a boat and take the jon boats into the little villages, so we’re doing some things that are not being done by the International Mission Board and probably won’t be done by the International Mission Board in some aspects of it.”

As Greear thanked Sullivan for his response, the state exec quipped, “By the way, I have socks older than you.” The room erupted into laughter.

- **Danny Akin**, task force member and president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, followed up Sullivan’s response with a report of data from an outside “independent think tank” studying denominational giving. Akin said of “\$12 million given by churches last year, 98 cents on every dollar never left the borders of the United States of America.” He added, “That’s an accurate report.”

- **Kathy Ferguson**, task force member and women’s ministry speaker whose husband, Rick, died seven years earlier, asked Hankins to share more information on his report’s conclusion that most Southern Baptists are pleased with how CP funds are dispersed.

Hankins cited the EC survey that was done two years prior to his report about “90% of laymen who

answered the survey on the question about allocations between SBC and state conventions and on other allocations said they thought they were about right.

“Pastors, as I recall, 70% said they thought the allocations were about right,” he said. “11% wanted more to stay in the state convention. And the balance, my math puts that somewhere around 20–25%, wanted more money to go to SBC.”

Ferguson, who had recently married Alabama pastor **Ed Litton** (a future SBC president), responded: “I just feel like that the grassroots Southern Baptists that were probably never touched by that survey — that understand much about unpenetrated parts of our nation — I just find it hard to believe that those people would be pleased with allocation decisions.”

Hankins countered, “I don’t know what to tell you. It was a bonafide survey done by **Ed Stetzer**. They stand by the accuracy of it, plus or minus 3% accuracy on a random survey. ... All I know to say is we did a survey and that’s what the answer came back.”

- **Roger Spradlin**, a task force member who died in 2023 and was co-senior pastor of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California, affirmed the work of state conventions while also pressing Hankins on why not put another CP “hook in the water.” He said this would affirm those churches that want to give more to SBC causes instead of giving to other groups outside the Convention.

Hankins said no one was being forced to do anything, “You don’t make anybody. You prefer. ... The SBC and the state conventions prefer the unified plan. Somebody wants to give another way, we’re not going to curse at them. But we just say we prefer. Like these guys mentioned, we say to these folks that want to designate around the SBC. We say we’d rather you not do that. We’re partners.”

‘Lepers’ and a ‘sick’ SBC

- Floyd responded to Hankins noting, “You said you wouldn’t curse them, but they are at times treated like lepers. They’re written about in a negative way, or they’re referred to in a negative way that they’re not quote ‘cooperative Baptists,’ which is ridiculous or they wouldn’t be giving anyway.” Floyd added, “The culture in the SBC is sick. I think it is very 1 Corinthians 3 and rarely 1 Corinthians 13. ... I’m talking about in the overall SBC. The culture needs — we call it renewal, revival. Call it what you want, I just call it how to treat people.”

- Mohler addressed what he described as a “polar-

“The biggest problem we face here is we can’t in honesty look to the cross of Christ and say our funding is where it ought to be — either in the aggregate amount or in the percentages. And I’m not looking at you as a state convention and saying it’s your fault. ...”

AL MOHLER

president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

ized” tone of the meeting. He said, “This meeting has been more polarized in spirit — and frankly even in data — than it needed to be.”

“Going out, I just want to tell you ... if you left this meeting just based on this conversation, I think you have a false understanding of what we’re all about on both sides,” he said. “I do want to say at the end of the day, what brought about this whole process, a great deal has to do with a younger generation that really isn’t very represented in this discussion.”

Mohler added, “And they’re asking some questions, that I’m thankful they’re asking. They’re looking at a generation of opportunity. They’re looking at the history of the modern missions movement. They’re looking at evangelical Christianity in America, and they’re seeing us failing to live up to what we say we’re all about. ... They are being driven by a passion that is far more out there than right here. The biggest problem we face here is we can’t in honesty look to the cross of Christ and say our funding is where it ought to be — either in the aggregate amount or in the percentages. And I’m not looking at you as a state convention and saying it’s your fault. ...

“It’s a good reminder to us that we are living with a succession of decisions that the worst of those decisions is at the level of the local church,” he said. “And as a seminary president, I’m not in a position to criticize the local church. But as a theologian, I’ve got to say we’ve got a problem here.”

Looking ahead

Mohler closed the session with state executive directors by noting, “I hope we give leadership to where we’re supposed to be rather than having a generation that decides we’re not only old fashioned, we’re just sinful and missing the point. And I don’t want that to happen. I don’t want that to happen to Southern Seminary. I don’t want that to happen to the SBC. I don’t want it to happen to the state conventions. I don’t want it to happen to any level of Baptist life. And we’re all gonna discover we’re living in a new age whether we like it or not.

“If we’re not as Baptists — as Baptist bodies, entities, systems and structures — the answer to the question that the coming generation is asking, then we will go on but they’re gonna go on without us. And I don’t want to see that happen. I don’t think you do either.”



GCR TASK FORCE FILES (PART 4): RISE OF GREAT COMMISSION GIVING

The Baptist Paper staff members continue their review of the audio files from the 2009–2010 meetings of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force. This report is part 2 of the third meeting of the task force. Staff members are currently working through audio files from the fourth meeting and will release highlights from that meeting in the coming weeks.

Picking back up on the third meeting, which took place Oct. 27, 2009, Dallas-Fort Worth, here are a few more highlights:

- **Ronnie Floyd**, chair of the GCR Task Force, asked the members to share their thoughts and “download” on **David Hankins’** report covering the work of Baptist state conventions shared earlier that day. At that time,

Hankins served as executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

‘Download’ on state Baptist conventions

Ken Whitten, then pastor of the Tampa-area Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Florida, opened the discussion saying the “information was very helpful,” but noted that some of the comments were “unnecessarily dismissive or adversarial and not helpful.”

John Cope, senior pastor of Keystone Community Fellowship in North Wales, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, shared his overall thoughts on the Southern Baptist Convention, noting “there is a lot of good here.”

“The reason I’ve stayed SBC — and a lot of my friends have pulled out of the SBC — and the reason

why I stay is ... I stay because of the cooperative effort.” He added, “I’m all about team, and I like that emphasis.” With that said, Cope noted, he believes the SBC lacks “clear vision.” “I feel like we’ve done a poor job casting clear vision. And it really frustrates the crud out of me because we’ve got more resources than any denomination in America. And I think we do as poor a job as you can communicating what happens across our convention.”

Kathy Ferguson Litton, a women’s ministry speaker who previously served on church staff with Floyd, said she’s still not convinced Southern Baptists are overall satisfied with how Cooperative Program dollars are allocated. “(Hankins) made a statement that the structure works ... but I think the question we have to ask, based on what we see, is it working?”

J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina (and future SBC president), noted that “what was a little frustrating, I felt like there were a few times that it seemed like we were talking ... right past each other. ... The question I’ve got with the state convention that I was trying to bring up is when they sell themselves to me in our state as we do international missions, we do a really good Easter outreach project, and we have a soup kitchen in your city. I look at all three of those things, and I’d rather have the International Mission Board doing missions than you guys. I think we, the churches, can do a better Easter outreach than you can here in the Raleigh-Durham area. And thirdly, I think we can probably do a better soup kitchen, too, because we’re the local church and we feel like this is our place. That doesn’t sell me at all.”

He added, “Now if they were to develop some things we could not do as churches — and that other agencies couldn’t do — I would more gladly be able to give my money to them,” Greear said. “For example, one thing that comes to mind is in our city, we’ve got all of these international students. There is no way a church like ours can have 19 different language ministries to Iranian, Iraqi, Africa (etc.). That would be something I would say that’s something that I can get excited about, and I can tell our church that ‘these guys do it and we partner with them.’ ... If they can be valuable, we will support them.”

Larry Grays, a church planter and then senior pastor of Midtown Bridge Church in Atlanta, shared how he didn’t appreciate the dismissive tone of the meeting. Grays specifically referred to a quote by an executive director noting he had socks older than Greear, who

asked a question about the work of Baptist state conventions.

“Even as a pastor [if] you feel that way, you don’t say that to your people,” he said. On a positive note, Grays said he thought it was encouraging that the state executive directors seemed “willing to challenge state conventions to move toward a 50/50 arrangement (holding 50% of funding for state ministries and sending the remaining to SBC causes) as long as churches were challenged to increase their CP giving.” He added, “I do think that’s positive if the state execs are open to moving toward challenging state conventions to go 50/50.”

Johnny Hunt, SBC president at the time and pastor of First Baptist Church Woodstock, Georgia, said he felt like the state executives were “biting the hand that feeds them” by criticizing churches for not giving more. He added that he wished “one” state Baptist paper would report more positive things about the task force’s work and the positive impact that “mega” churches have on the Cooperative Program. “I think if we check, the mega church in the Southern Baptist Convention may be what’s keeping the Convention from showing greater loss of percentage. ... The state convention has no right to speak back and tell the local church what to do. ... I think it came across that the state convention is the headquarters of the Southern Baptist Convention, not the local church.”

Bob White, then executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, pushed back on Hunt, noting that most state convention executives he knows would be the first to say the church is the headquarters of the SBC. (See related comments from White below.)

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted that what he heard from the state executives’ defense of the CP structure and unwillingness to change will not “come close to inspiring a vision that will move our convention forward.” Akin said he interpreted the state executives’ message as saying, “Bottom line, for the most part, things are good and if our folks will give more, our problems will be taken care of.”

He added, “Things are not good. I don’t know how you can look at where we are, even with pointing out that we’ve grown by 3 million over the last 20 years. If you look at the demographics of the American population and our growth, we have not kept up — not even close. I understand why they have the perspective they do, but I am very convinced that perspective will not promote or enable their viability for the future. ... I don’t think this committee is their enemy. I think we

“Send me ideas. Tell me how to do this. We don’t know, and I don’t think they think we know.”

RONNIE FLOYD
chair of the GCR Task Force

are their friends, and I want to see them have a viable future, where they are making a very significant impact for the Kingdom of God and the Great Commission.”

Al Gilbert, then pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, said there seemed to be a lot of defensiveness when it comes to protecting the current structure of the CP. He added he didn’t agree with the assessment “we have the boots on the ground everywhere.”

“That kind of summary statement is what’s killing us,” said Gilbert, who would go on to serve the North American Mission Board as executive director of Love Loud, a revamped ministry evangelism arm of NAMB following GCR. “We don’t have boots on the ground everywhere. We don’t even have boots on the ground everywhere in the U.S. That kind of talk that we’re doing such a good job because we’re so comprehensive, that’s what’s going to be the killer of this convention if we don’t find a way to own the fact we are not doing a good job, instead of spending all of our time defending.”

Outside chatter

White also shared how “the blogs and the twitters are not our friend in this process.” There are many in the SBC, he said, who are concerned about potential changes that GCR is going to bring to the Convention. “I think some of the defensiveness that you heard this morning is a pretty good reflection of what I’m hearing, and (the state executives) are hearing out in the state.

“I’m afraid that if we don’t get a positive act together, we’re going to have an explosion in Orlando that’s not going to be pleasing to the Lord — or to any of us and it’s going to hurt our efforts.”

White later added — after Floyd pushed back on his assessment — that most Southern Baptists were generally on board with the Great Commission Resurgence efforts when they voted for it during the previous SBC annual meeting, but some have since raised concerns. “Nobody wanted to vote against the Great Commission,” White said, alluding to the label put on the proposed task force and study effort. “I’ve had folks

say to me, ‘I had concerns about what this study would involve, but I’m not going to vote against the Great Commission.’ ”

Floyd expressed a need for more help, materials, information and feedback.

“Send me ideas. Tell me how to do this. We don’t know, and I don’t think they think we know. ... I want to testify to everybody: I don’t know, and I’ve been all over this for months — and it’s very, very challenging.”

Task force ‘strategy team’ & ‘core values’

- Near the end of the session, Floyd shared how the task force “strategy team” — eight members of the task force who were selected by Floyd to work together between large group meetings (more details to come on this subset) — had met in person the day before and previously once by phone. “We met yesterday, and we talked about several things in relationship to what we’re going to talk about today. That group is helping me chart what we deal with, which is difficult and challenging.”

Floyd also discussed efforts to create a “new culture” in the SBC. He specifically addressed how the “core values” the strategy team had discussed in their meetings could “run through everything” and were up for discussion among the entire task force. He also noted that the core values should determine the structure. The values were Christ-likeness, truth, relationships, trust, teamwork, future, local church and Kingdom.

‘Funding mechanism of the SBC’

- Among a major part of one of the sessions, was the task force discussing the “funding mechanism of the SBC.”

The strategy team developed a proposal that Floyd presented to the group for adoption to be presented to messengers at the upcoming SBC annual meeting: “That the Southern Baptist Convention affirm a national giving option for the Cooperative Program, that would allow churches to send contributions directly to the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist

Convention, and for those churches to designate the percentage to be distributed between the respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program Allocation Budget.”

White immediately voiced opposition to the proposal. Ultimately, White noted, these types of changes could cause the convention to “fly apart.” “I don’t see this as healing. I don’t see it as a positive move or helpful for our future at all, and I’m opposed to this statement.” He said if the proposal is going to sign off on an option to designate funds to SBC causes, it should also include designating funding to state convention causes as well. His comment ignited more discussion.

Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, expressed a need to reach out and “provide another way” of support than traditional CP giving for younger pastors and others who struggle to support their state conventions. He noted, “the mall approach” of expecting people to come to one place to find everything no longer appears to work for a new generation of Southern Baptists. While “die-hard Southern Baptists” will remain, he noted, the SBC needs to reach out to others that are “on the fence.”

Mohler later added the “elephant in the room” is that “state by state it’s different. It all depends which state you’re in on how bad the squeal is. ... There are some states where the squeal is really loud. In particular — where there is a sense of violation — the people are not going to give if \$1 million is going to be distributed to three or four colleges that they don’t support and call it missions money.”

He noted, “that’s why in those states, you try to sell the Cooperative Program, and you can’t get past the fact that in some states over 50% of what’s called the Cooperative Program dollar is going to colleges that the church won’t send anybody to. I’m going to say bluntly, that ain’t going to sell. And if that’s where we’re stuck, I’m going to teach the Cooperative Program, I’m going to promote the Cooperative Program, and we’re going to lose — if that’s where we’re stuck.”

‘Breakthrough’

After much discussion, White proposed changing what Floyd had presented to calling it a “Southern Baptist Plan of Giving,” with the addition of what would be defined in that meeting as “Great Commission Giving.”

- The task force agreed to not change the formal definition of the traditional way of giving through the Cooperative Program, which was adopted by SBC messengers during the annual meeting in 2007.

Instead, the task force worked on wording to add a “Great Commission Giving” option, which formally recognized “Cooperative Program giving and designated gifts given to the Southern Baptist Convention, the state convention or the local association.”

Mohler noted, “That’s one step beyond what we thought this proposal was... I think that is a transformative idea.”

Roger Spradlin, co-senior pastor at the time of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California, expressed concern that this had some potential to cause long-term “danger” and create competition that has “entrenched all our agencies one against another.” He added that 20 years later, “we’re celebrating Great Commission Giving, when in reality we’re celebrating churches that excluded everything except one entity.”

White agreed this was a legitimate risk.

Mohler noted the SBC’s financial giving plan, which restricted entities from directly approaching churches for money, should help deter much of the issue Spradlin addressed. But, he and other task force members also recognized this could not completely stop competition between the entities or entities or associations from all together ignoring the plan and approaching churches for funds.

The task force went on to add minor copy edits to the Great Commission Giving proposal and adopted it in that meeting. Floyd would agree to rescind the strategy team’s initial idea and have it “bow” to White’s proposal.

The team closed out the meeting discussing the significance of future meetings and the release of the next press statement.

White asked Floyd, who referred to the addition of Great Commission Giving as a “breakthrough” moment, if they wanted him to “mine” that proposal “a little bit” with some of the state executive directors. Floyd responded, “Not yet. I think we need to be real careful. ... I’m real hesitant. I don’t want to see disarray in our report before we get to February in Nashville (the SBC Executive Committee meeting).”

Looking ahead

Floyd concluded, “I think we need to wear this for 30 days. Look at it and feel it. There are some things I thought we’d have already done by now, and right now they’re not even on my agenda.” He did not specify specifically what those things were, but among the big issues he mentioned on the radar included the future of the North American Mission Board.

GCR TASK FORCE FILES (PART 5): SAVING NAMB

The Great Commission Resurgence Task Force gathered Nov. 30–Dec. 1, 2009, in Atlanta for its fourth meeting, which began on a somber note as task force chair **Ronnie Floyd** asked the group to keep fellow task force member **Frank Page**, who did not attend the meeting, and his family in their prayers. Page's 32-year-old oldest daughter, Melissa, had died tragically a few days before the meeting. Floyd noted Page had expressed his appreciation for task force members reaching out to him after the news broke. Current SBC president **Johnny Hunt** also was not at the meeting because of a prior commitment.

As the business of the meeting got underway, Floyd noted the first order of business focused on the “status of the North American Mission Board.” Below are the highlights of the discussion:

- **Ted Traylor**, task force strategy team member and chair of the NAMB president search committee, shared how the search committee had “put the brakes on” its search until after the GCR Task Force finalized its work.

“Our search team is really backing up as I’ve led them to kind of put the brakes on and say ‘Let’s wait and see where GCR takes us, and then what the SBC assignment is to us,’” Traylor said, noting the search team planned to talk again by phone the following week.

“I believe NAMB has one last chance — and if we don’t get this right, I don’t believe NAMB is going to survive.”

‘We need some help’

- On that note, **Tim Patterson**, chair of the NAMB trustee board who would eventually serve as executive director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan before retiring in 2024, was a guest presenter for the task force at this meeting. He shared personal observations of serving NAMB. By his side were **Tim Dowdy**, vice chair of NAMB’s board, and NAMB’s interim president, **Richard Harris**, who had stepped in after former president Geoff Hammond’s departure.

Patterson, who noted his report was built on nearly a decade of serving on the trustee board, said the current spirit of the board was better “than it’s ever been.” He described trustees as “energized, excited and on task.”

He noted that while some may believe NAMB is ready for an “estate sale,” he contended it was time for a “good garage sale.”

“We just have too much junk in the garage,” Patterson said. “We need to clean it out. Not do away with it, not do away with the ministry of NAMB — but let’s bring it down to a size or a focus where we can truly, truly make a difference.”

At the time, NAMB had about nine ministry assignments. The entity could probably do about three or four of them “really well” so “we need some help,” he added.

Patterson listed evangelism, church planting and missions mobilization as some of the assignments he believed NAMB should keep.

Another area needing attention, he emphasized, was “cooperative agreements.”

“As you know, not every one of them are the same,” Patterson said. “They’re pretty much different. It’s whatever, whoever was the best negotiator, had the most leverage and could pull the most power on them. That’s what they got.”

He added, “I understand there is a basic structure ... but I think you need to revisit those things.”

Overall, he noted a need for more accountability and a need for change in regard to NAMB funding “state programs,” where “95% of it comes from [NAMB].”

“There’s no growth, and the evangelism, church-planting, and the things that are really important ... are not there.”

While there “are structures that worked very, very well in the past,” they’re now “stuck in our garage,” he said.

“I think we need to get rid of some of that and put in some new organization structure in how we do what we do out in the states. We need to refocus what we’re doing and go back to evangelism, church planting and missions.”

Focusing on ‘the main things’

- Harris described NAMB as a “coordinating, net-working, facilitating and sending agency.” He shared a conversation he had with **Bob Reccord**, who left the president role under pressure in 2006 for his handling of the organization.

Harris said Reccord asked him what he could have done better. Harris said he responded, “Bob, you settled for doing a lot of good things to the neglect of doing a few great things.” Reccord agreed, according to Harris, stating, “I think you’re 110% right.”

Harris added, “I think that is the problem of the agency. It needs to focus on the main things.”

Among one of the highlights for Harris was one of NAMB’s current projects — an evangelism initiative called GPS (God’s Plan for Sharing).

“It’s probably one of the best evangelism initiatives I’ve seen come along in recent years, certainly the last 12 to 14 years,” Harris said. “It has unbelievable potential. It calls us back. Every person sharing. Every person hearing. It’s the heart of the Great Commission.”

The main problem with Southern Baptists, he noted, is a “spiritual problem,” and “aggressive leadership” was his suggestion to fix the issue.

“When you have churches not baptizing people — and that number just continues to go up — churches are forgetting why God put them in their location to fulfill the Great Commission.”

• **Ed Stetzer**, executive director of Lifeway Research at the time, also attended the meeting to present his “statistical analysis of church planting from a study of 11 different denominations that we did at the North American Mission Board” report.

Stetzer, who would be invited to sit in on the remainder of the meeting following his report, noted the study tracked the first three years of the 1980s. Southern Baptists, Nazarenes and Assemblies of God tracked similarly in number of church plants, he pointed out. “But ... over the last 10 years, Southern Baptists have trended decidedly down, whereas other denominations have actually remained plateaued in the area of baptisms.”

He later added that Southern Baptist church planters need to be more realistic with their expectations. He said too many of them go to conferences where the speaker has planted a church that has grown to 4,000 in attendance, “and they think that’s normal.”

“That’s not normal,” Stetzer said.

Jumping through ‘hoops’

Stetzer contended that NAMB needs to become a more lean organization. “I’m not saying we need to lay off everybody, but I’m saying in my observation, that denominations that are doing it well have a lean church-planting structure.”

He added that part of the challenge with SBC church-planting efforts is the number of hoops and the

amount of permission that is needed to plant a church.

“Even though we are not a hierarchical denomination, it feels like you have to get permission from typically five groups of people before you can actually plant a church,” he said. “You have to first get permission from a sponsoring church, secondarily an association — which in many states is much harder than any other of the hurdles — (and thirdly) you’ve got to get permission from the state convention. Fourthly, you’ve got to get permission from the North American Mission Board. Fifthly, you’ve got to get permission from your wife.” All of that, he said, is currently needed to plant a church.

Stetzer later noted, “When we get to a place when a system has existed for a long time, it gets rusty.” He agreed with the other NAMB leaders at the meeting — that the agency needed a narrow focus, and that they need to be experts on church planting.

NAMB is “remarkably complex,” he said.

When Floyd later asked the task force, “What do you want to do with NAMB?” the room fell silent.

After several moments of silence, Floyd said he had already met with the task force’s eight-member strategy team for “hours” on a conference call and communicated through emails to map out ideas. He noted he could go straight to that plan but wanted to give the group the opportunity to share ideas.

“I’ve got so much information that could flow out of me,” Floyd said. “I’m not trying to dominate. I’m not trying to direct you. I’m trying to facilitate you. ... You want to talk about a global mission board? We can go down a lot of tracks.”

After more silence, **Al Mohler**, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (who served on the strategy team), chimed in, “I think the problem is ... it’s like trying to grab a cumulus cloud. The three things that come to my mind: We definitely want a church-planting strategy. We want a people group strategy. And we want to break the pattern so that eventually money can flow to the less-reached regions of ... North America, rather than the more highly-reached (areas).”

Regarding discussions of a global mission board, Floyd said the strategy team “walked away” from the idea because if the SBC went to one mammoth missions agency, it would put more than 70% of Cooperative Program dollars for SBC missions and ministry causes in the hands of one leader.

“That’s only as good as your leader,” Floyd said.

Avoiding ‘tripwires’

As discussion continued about next steps and possibly

creating a new entity, Mohler added, “Ronnie, I think politically speaking, we want to thrill the SBC, we want to stretch the SBC, we want to surprise the SBC. But, we also want to get our report passed by the SBC. I think if we can avoid having anything that’s a tripwire to requiring two subsequent conventions that is to our advantage.”

During the meeting, the group seemed to settle on continuing with two missions boards but mentioned adjusting IMB’s ministry assignment to expand access to “unreached people groups” in the U.S., working in cooperation with NAMB, of course.

Mohler suggested leaving IMB’s ministry assignment the same but adding a line that frees them to go after “unreached people groups wherever they are found.”

Ken Whitten, then pastor of Tampa-area Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Florida, (who also was a member of Floyd’s strategy team), suggested giving NAMB “the teeth” to say, “We’re going to strengthen churches. We’re going to train, we’re going to be the experts. We’re not going to let anybody go outside of us anymore and say we’re going to get our training somewhere else. We are going to be the best, and we’re gonna start planting churches. NAMB is going to be known as a church-planting center nationally.”

Taking on cooperative agreements

The conversation eventually shifts to “cooperative agreements.” Floyd noted the sensitivity of this particular topic.

“There is a lot of affection, a lot of emotion, and some money is tied up here in this. To the tune of \$50.7 million dollars this year.”

He added, “Plus, an additional \$10 million to pay the benefits of those personnel. Plus, an additional \$5 million that somewhere along the line will be put back into those state conventions for various strategies.”

He proposed deciding a time when those types of agreements would be discontinued.

Jim Richards, task force member and then executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, noted that discontinuing those agreements is “going to affect some of the old-line states a lot, in the sense of absorbing it in their budget. And then on the new-line states, the pioneer areas, they’re going to be impacted even more severely in the sense that many of their staff are NAMB employees. ... Let’s take New Mexico for instance, I think everybody except the executive director gets their salary from the North American Mission Board or Lifeway.”

While Richards noted any change to cooperative agreements would “impact everybody,” he added, “I think it has to be done because I don’t think the system is working. We’re losing people. There are lost people going to hell because our system doesn’t work. We’re rewarding mediocrity at best and failure at worst by keeping the system we have. And that’s not to in any way denigrate fine, godly good people who give 100% effort in many of those states, but I just think that our system is wrong.”

Bob White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention at the time, mentioned the fallout of “doing away with pioneer state conventions” would be “very bad.”

Floyd clarified, “I didn’t say do away with.”

Richards responded, “You don’t have to do away with. If you end the cooperative budgets with those states (the pioneer states), it will do away with those state organizations.”

Roger Spradlin, pastor at the time of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California, added, “If you do away with cooperative agreements ... it collapses. Basically, everything but the mainline state conventions. The state that is the most affected is California because they get the most money. It would without a doubt collapse that convention. It would no longer exist.”

Floyd added, “You all know the train wrecks more than I know the train wrecks. All my thinking is if NAMB is going to be effective, it’s going to have to decentralize. They’re going to have to get closer to its field with leaders and strategists in those situations.”

He noted, “We certainly don’t need California to fold. ... But some of the mentality in it is as long as we support it, it’s never going to be on its own.”

Floyd later asked, “Is our goal to build Baptist conventions or is it reach North America?”

Kathy Litton Ferguson, task force member, later added there is “no big emotional attachment (to the state convention structure) in most of those (pioneer) states. (A regional concept for NAMB) would be much more pragmatic ... not the emotional connection to state conventions.”

‘They will vote for souls’

Richards said the key to “sell it” to SBC messengers is to focus on what it takes to reach North America. “That’s how we sell it. Messengers will vote for souls. I guarantee you they will vote for souls,” he noted.

Stetzer, who by invitation remained in the room after his report, added, “I think right now, you have a bully

pulpit nationally, your task force and coming into the SBC. ... I think part of your recommendation has to be an aggressive recommendation that states move to 50/50, and that cooperative agreements, if you're going to do that, that those funds need to go into pioneer areas. And you're just going to have to encourage them in that way ... you can't do it any other way."

Who 'holds the strings'?

The conversation then turned to how much authority NAMB has in negotiating the cooperative agreements. Floyd suggested NAMB go back to the states and "renegotiate" their cooperative agreements.

Danny Akin, task force member and president of Southeastern Seminary, asked, "What if NAMB said we're cutting (the agreement) in half? What can they do?"

White responded, "Not much."

Akin added, "NAMB holds the strings."

Floyd said, "NAMB is the one who has to sign off and writes the check."

Richards said, "You heard the two guys from NAMB today. Both of them were pleading with this group to help them. Because the trustee board, forgive me, Ted (Traylor), has lacked the courage to do what has to be done, and the leadership surely has. So that's the reason why we're in the mess we're in. And nobody wants to take the heat, and they stood there, both of them, and begged us to help them do it because they won't cover for it."

'Go for broke'

Akin then pulled out his phone and read to the group a text he received from "one of (the NAMB leaders) after they left (the meeting)." The message, according to Akin, said: "Whatever you heard us say, go further. Go for broke. Do it. Help us. If you think you're going too far, go further than you think you're going to go."

Floyd then asks, "What if we made it really clear in our report. No longer do we want the North American Mission Board funding Baptist conventions. That is not our role. Our role is to accomplish the specific ministry assignments that we have now given them. Period. And those agreements are not to be agreed upon. The budgets are not to be funded unless they compliment the ministry assignments of the North American Mission Board. And that's what it is."

White quipped, "You'll have a huge turnout in Orlando."

The room responded with loud laughter.

J.D. Greear, task force member and lead pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

(and future SBC president), asks Akin what he thinks "go further" actually means.

Akin responded, "It means they believe that their entity is broken. It is dysfunctional. ... Any of the good things they are doing are overshadowed dramatically by the failures. They are tired. They have been going through it now for three presidents, a decade in a half. They see this as a golden opportunity for us to come alongside of them and help them get out of this mess."

Floyd noted, "Our mission is to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations. We can't do that funding Baptist conventions and their ministries.

"We've got to fund church planting and evangelism and building leaders across America to make a difference."

He later emphasized, "Do we really want to go down in trying to preserve future Baptist entities and the institutionalization of the SBC or do we want to go down ... for the gospel?"

Discussion continued on how much time to give old-line states and pioneer states before discontinuing cooperative agreements.

All eyes on NAMB's next leader

As that evening's meeting began to wind down, the focus turned to leadership and the kind of leader NAMB would need.

Mohler said the task force is answering a question that has needed answering for a long time. "Is the NAMB problem a leadership issue or a structure issue. As much as I have waded neck deep in this stuff ... I'm convinced it's primarily a leadership issue. Because if we had a leader at NAMB who resonated with the very things we're talking about — and had the leadership ability to pull it off — we would not be having this meeting."

He cautioned, "The search process that is going on right now is far more important than anything we do. As we sit here, I'm thinking prayerfully we need to make it easy for the new president of NAMB to be a rip-roaring success in mobilizing Southern Baptists just to reach North America. We need to do nothing that's going to make his life more difficult. And I do not mean to throw a wrench into this, but I'm listening to this thinking we could sink his ship before he even gets behind the wheel if we create animosity from the state conventions that is not tied to a direct benefit."

Mohler later added, "At the end of the day, we've got to hand it over to whoever this new president is, and I just want to make sure we think through how we make his runway clear rather than putting obstacles in his way."

GCR TASK FORCE FILES: 1,070 PAGES OF MORE MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

If you've been looking for more written materials related to the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force files unsealed in June, over 1,000 pages of additional content are now available.

The Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives in downtown Nashville has confirmed it received four volumes of 1,070 pages late Monday afternoon (Sept. 15). This latest collection contains background materials, reports detailing progress and recommendations, the final amended report, meeting materials, contributing documents, correspondence, supporting presentations, communications from GCR Task Force chair **Ronnie Floyd** and task force members to the SBC, prayer partner emails, endorsements, press releases and a directory.

'More complete' record

Taffey Hall, SBHLA director and archivist, expressed gratitude to Floyd and his team for compiling and organizing the materials, noting the latest additions "make the historical record from the work of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force more complete."

On June 16, audio files of GCR Task Force's 10 months of work in 2009 and 2010 were unsealed after 15 years, which was the agreed-upon time by the group. The audio collection consists of 57 compact discs and about 90 hours worth of discussion, debate and presentations. It is unclear why the various supplement materials recently added were not included initially. As more people expressed interest in reviewing the files, the question surfaced repeatedly about the missing pieces.

Chuck Kelley (pictured above), president emeritus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, shared his excitement when he learned about the arrival of the additional materials. Kelley visited the Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives earlier this summer to begin listening to the GCR Task Force audio files.

"By adding these supplementary materials to the audio of (the GCR Task Force) meetings, you dramatically



enhanced the ability of researchers and interested others to gain a much fuller understanding of GCR," noted Kelley, who also serves at NOBTS as distinguished research professor of evangelism. "It is now a true archive. Anyone who wants to understand the what, why and how that was behind the proposals made to the SBC is in a much better position to do so."

GCR TASK FORCE AUDIO FILES (PART 6): REACHING THE WORLD AND ‘PULLING GUM OUT OF AN ANGORA SWEATER’

Here are a few more highlights from the meeting in Atlanta (Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2009): **Morris Chapman**, then president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, was a guest presenter and shared his thoughts on the Southern Baptist Convention’s future and the EC’s role as an “arm of the SBC” that provides “checks and balances.” Much of his report focused on a need for more cooperation, a united spirit and a need to address funding redundancy and waste, while maximizing resources. Chapman had recently announced his plans to retire from EC at the end of September 2010.

Among Chapman’s concerns, he pointed to the need for International Mission Board leadership to work with the Woman’s Missionary Union to set more “realistically, obtainable” Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goals.

Chapman noted the goal had only been met four times since 1981. “Though unmet in the 1980s and the 1990s, gifts were frequently within one to four percentage points short of the goal,” he said.

Competition vs. cooperation

Since meeting its goal in 1997, Chapman noted, “seven of the next 11 years saw shortfalls of 8% or more.” The previous year’s goal was nearly 17% short of the goal, he reported. The SBC, he said, had entered into an “era of competition for resources rather than cooperation with resources, and gifts continue to decline.”

Chapman agreed with North American Mission Board leaders, who had previously presented, that NAMB had become overloaded with tasks. They need four or five assignments at most, he said, highlighting evangelism, church planting, disaster relief and Christian education.

The task force later discussed the Executive Committee’s ministry assignments and what could be streamlined to help the EC be more effective and avoid redundancy. The task force specifically discussed mov-

ing Cooperative Program promotion and stewardship under the responsibility of state conventions.

‘Anxiety about the West’

Discussion returned to NAMB and tightening its ministry assignments. The task force also discussed best approaches on NAMB eliminating cooperative agreements with state conventions, specifically the negative financial impact it would have on state conventions outside the South in “pioneer areas.”

Bob White, then executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, shared how he “woke up with some anxiety about the West.”

“I understand we don’t need to be in the business of propping up state conventions, but I’m also deeply concerned about saying to California and Arizona — and some of these other states out here, that are doing good work — ‘You’ve got three years. Are you gonna be closing your doors?’” White asked if the task force could adjust the wording in the report to allow the North American Mission Board to provide some flexibility as they worked with the conventions.

The task force discussed cooperative agreements phasing out over a three-to-five year period. “I can’t imagine us wanting to go beyond five years if we’re trying to help them become independent,” task force chair **Ronnie Floyd**, then senior pastor of First Baptist Church Springdale, Arkansas, noted.

Discussion on this issue would continue into the new year at the group’s meeting in San Antonio.

Highlights from San Antonio meeting, Jan. 26–28, 2010

A few highlights of the meeting in San Antonio, Texas, held at the end of January 2010, include the following:

The task force continued its discussion on cooperative agreements, specifically ending them within four years, decreasing the amount of Cooperative Program dollars that go back to each state by 25% annually

until each agreement concluded. The task force discussed how certain states may need to retain resources to continue particular ministries. Floyd acknowledged the concern, and then added, “And what we’re saying is these agreements are over after four years, period.”

Frank Page, who at the time served as vice president of evangelization for NAMB, and would be a future president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, expressed concerns that states retaining resources for particular ministries would ultimately reduce the amount of funds that make it outside the state, to the nations.

“If the wording that we’re dealing with now says we’re saying to states, ‘You can keep more,’ I’m telling you it’s going to end up sending less to the nations than more to the nations,” Page said. “Because we just opened Pandora’s box. ... They’re probably going to do that anyway, but we have now given official sanction to keeping more in states, sending less out of state. And that is contrary to what I — and I think the vast majority of us, the heart of this — wants. That’s my prediction, may it be wrong.”

White — and others on the task force — responded to Page’s concern, noting that in conversations he had with other state convention executives they seemed focused on getting more funding to the nations, not conserving funds.

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted at one point that there is no way for the task force’s report to control how much money actually makes it to the nations.

“There is no way this committee can dictate that,” he said. “At the implementation level, we’re going to have to trust that good, godly people will lead the way.”

‘Hottest issue in the SBC’

Page also at one point addressed potential concerns that some Southern Baptists may wonder why the task force put so much focus on “micromanaging” NAMB and the EC — and not enough on other areas of the convention.

Floyd responded to Page’s assessment about NAMB and the EC being “micromanaged”:

“That hasn’t been my agenda,” he said. “I don’t receive that statement personally. If it’s somebody else’s agenda I’d like to know.”

Page noted those two groups have been the primary focus of their recent meetings.

Floyd responded, “That’s probably because it’s the big issues.”

Page acknowledged they are big issues.

Floyd noted, “The North American Mission Board. They left these issues to be issues. It’s the hottest issue in the SBC. Everything has come back to NAMB. Constantly. More than I would even prefer.

“But when we get into the specificity issues, to say that we want NAMB to be the leader, NAMB should be fired up about that,” he added. “I don’t think NAMB is necessarily the leader now. I think that’s really a debate.”

Addressing the task force’s attention to NAMB, **Ken Whitten**, then pastor of the Tampa-area Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Florida, noted at one point, “I think what we have here is — keep in mind — we’re pulling gum out of an angora sweater here.

“We’re not picking on one particular group,” he said. “We have found just like a surgeon getting in there ... we are trying to help a convention and communicate to a convention that we are not just some bureaucratic anomaly that we’re not just talking missions.

“We’re talking motivation, and we’re trying to get them excited about their own denomination. ... I do believe what’s going to happen is the churches are going to rally and more money is going to come back in because (NAMB is) going to be a better defined animal.”

Addressing changes to NAMB’s ministry assignment and cooperative agreements, **Al Mohler**, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, described the work of the task force as being a “traumatic change agent for NAMB.”

“Surgery is trauma. Not all trauma was bad. I think this is a reminder we’re really going to have to contextualize this, introduce it well, let people know we worked with NAMB to develop this,” he explained.

“This is not something imposed upon NAMB. This is the kind of strategic direction NAMB wants, to have control of their initiative and to be mobile to reach North America,” he added. “We’re not telling them where they can’t spend a dime. We’re going to have to come up with our talking points to understand we’re not restricting them from spending a dime. They just can’t do it out of the old habits of the cooperative agreements. They’ll create new habits.”

In regards to the challenge of brainstorming and compiling what to communicate to Southern Baptist messengers, Mohler added, “I’m literally trying to scratch out a report here. I’ve got pages and pages of stuff here. Let me tell ya, our first hope is going to be that somebody reads it — and the second hope is that

they find the good parts and not just the things that they may want to argue about.”

‘Bottom line’

Floyd said, “If NAMB can effectively accomplish this, we’re going to have more churches, we’re going to have more revenue, we’re going to be able to do more for God than ever before. Hopefully, that’s going to be the result.”

Whitten added, “It’s got to result in more baptisms.”

Floyd agreed. He later added, “We’re saying after all of our study — after listening, after hearing, after looking — if we’re going to penetrate lostness, the bottom line is we’re only going to do it through planting new churches and evangelizing through those new church plants. IMB has proven that true all across the world. Well, let’s prove it true here.”

CLOSER LOOK AT THE GCR TASK FORCE STRATEGY TEAM

Throughout the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force meetings, chairman **Ronnie Floyd** mentions lengthy meetings with a group of task force members called the “strategy team.” In addition to Floyd, the strategy team includes **Danny Akin, Al Gilbert, Johnny Hunt, Al Mohler, Roger Spradlin, Ted Traylor** and **Ken Whitten**.

At the end of the first meeting in Atlanta —right

before the task force headed to the press conference — Floyd noted, “Y’all cannot simply rely on my wisdom on how we go in this. Twenty-two people (on the task force) is a lot of people. ... I’ve got to have help on helping us charting our future. I’m going to ask these people to serve with me on a strategy team to help us chart our future.”

He emphasized, “That strategy team has a purpose, one purpose — chart our future.”

GCR TASK FORCE FILES (PART 7): ROBIN HOOD, ‘DAD IN THE ROOM’ AND THE SBC EXEC COMM

At the beginning of a GCR Task Force session in San Antonio, Jan. 26–28, **Johnny Hunt**, then president of the Southern Baptist Convention who appointed the task force and sat on it as an ex-officio member, addressed the task force.

Hunt affirmed chair **Ronnie Floyd**’s leadership, and he encouraged the task force to adopt a “Robin Hood mentality that we feel we need to take some from the more prosperous and give to the poor. People like that ... so I think when we stand up between the presidential address, which will be hand and glove with this address, and say to our people, here’s where we want to take Southern Baptists, and what we’d like to see for our greater days, I believe there is going to be a rally cry that will shock us.”

Hunt, then pastor of Woodstock Baptist Church in Woodstock, Georgia, contended that despite some pushback by SBC Executive Committee leadership — what he referred to as a “cheap shot” — to his call during the last SBC annual meeting for the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force, “95% of messengers” still approved it.

“Are they listening to the pastors of 43,000 churches or to Executive Committee leaders?” Hunt asked. “I want them to listen to both, because I want us to be on the same page. We did not go into a convention last year on the same page. And God has done a deep, deep work. ... I’m encouraged. And I think we’re on the right page.”

Hunt ended his remarks by noting “Ronnie, again I affirm you for your tenderness and affirm you for your conviction to be able to say, ‘Here is somewhere I think we need to stand.’ So, for what it’s worth, God bless you, Robin Hood.”

Streamlining

The task force continued earlier discussions on how to streamline the SBC Executive Committee’s ministry assignments. Much of the discussion involved whether

state conventions, instead of the EC, would be more effective handling Cooperative Program promotion — but the EC would still be given the role to “facilitate.”

Jim Richards, task force member and then executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, expressed concern about handing that responsibility over to state conventions because of varying interpretations of what CP is and questions about who would have the most influence and sit “in the driver’s seat when it’s all said and done.”

Al Gilbert, task force member and then pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston Salem, North Carolina, agreed and noted that “most Southern Baptists, can’t get their minds around (the Cooperative Program’s) complexity.”

“North Carolina had to vote just a few years ago to not count CBF (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship) money as Cooperative Program. ... When a state convention is given the authority to define Cooperative Program, it’s a very tenuous position,” said Gilbert, who would go on to serve the North American Mission Board as executive director of Love Loud, a revamped ministry evangelism arm of NAMB following GCR.

Bob White, task force member and then executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, expressed concerns of working with Executive Committee leadership as a facilitator and suggested it might be best to keep it as is with the EC. He noted state conventions encountered challenges in past attempts to work with EC leadership on CP promotion. “Some of our meetings turned into explosions and a brick wall,” recalled White, who mentioned he had participated in some conversations between the EC and the Cooperative Program task force for a year and a half.

“And it went nowhere. ... It didn’t gel, and we didn’t get a good outcome,” White added. “If everyone feels comfortable with it being in the Executive Committee, I’m certainly good with that. I think that is the most logical place for it to be.”

Roger Spradlin, task force member and then pastor of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California, contended that trimming the EC ministry assignment and giving CP promotion to the states is an obvious spot to eliminate some redundancy.

“If we don’t do this, then we’ve done a lot of talk about getting money to the nations, and if we’re not even willing to deal with something that is this bureaucratic and this redundant ... well, right here it is,” Spradlin noted. “There is not a more glaring example in the SBC than the redundancy of the Cooperative Program promotion with the Executive Committee doing it in an ineffective way, and the state convention having to pick up the ball and do it because of the Executive Committee’s failure. If we don’t address this redundancy that is so glaring, I kind of wonder what we’re doing here. ... It’s right in our face.”

The word ‘facilitate’

Spradlin noted that the Executive Committee would still be a part of the process if the task force added that the EC would be able to “facilitate” CP promotion and state conventions would be given the task of promoting it. “You still have the EC involved in the process if we use this word ‘facilitate’ ... but you don’t have them stacking up videos in the basement.”

Floyd shifted conversation back to their earlier decision on affirming Great Commission giving, and how the SBC should get to a place where the Convention celebrates every level of support to CP.

“We don’t say, ‘Well, you could be doing more or you should be doing this.’ We celebrate what they give,” he said. “If we celebrate what they give, they will

be more likely to give more. If we condemn what they give, they will be less likely to give more.”

He added, “So we celebrate if they give \$100 to the Cooperative Program. We celebrate it as much as we celebrate the \$100,000 or whatever comes.”

Reallocation

The meeting soon moved into looking more closely at how to reallocate CP funds to help get more CP dollars to international missions, specifically the International Mission Board. The task force members went back and forth on percentages and what amounts to take from each entity and shift toward IMB. The more the discussion continued, the more the focus centered on pulling at least 1% from the Executive Committee — and how that would be the easiest place to reduce an allocation percentage.

Gilbert added, “It might be good for this group to know that every year the Executive Committee goes through a drill of having every entity come and report as though we might actually change this with a perfectly good knowledge that nothing will be changed. ... There’s a very elaborate presentation and absolutely nothing happens.”

Al Mohler, task force member and president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, added, “It is an exercise in deliberate dishonesty that amounts to a floor show for demented Southern Baptists.” The room broke into laughter.

Gilbert responded, “That is exactly what I was trying to say.”

More discussion focused on “the vast expansion” of the Executive Committee and ERLC, and the chal-

“There is not a more glaring example in the SBC than the redundancy of the Cooperative Program promotion with the Executive Committee doing it in an ineffective way, and the state convention having to pick up the ball and do it because of the Executive Committee’s failure.”

ROGER SPRADLIN

Task force member and then pastor of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California

lence of decreasing the allocation from either entity. Mohler noted that any trimming of the budget would dramatically impact any entity, especially the smaller ones. He specifically noted how “politically protected” the ERLC has become, while also expressing concern for pulling funds from any of the seminaries.

“I mean all **Richard (Land)**, then ERLC president) has to do is go to the microphone on the floor and say, ‘With the Barack Obama administration, do we really want less Southern Baptist presence and influence on these issues?’ I think the air goes out of our tires. ... Quite frankly, the economic recession has put the real pressure on the academic institutions. ... Anything you change here is just going to mean higher tuition for students, and you’re going to be disincentivizing the very younger generation we’re trying to reach. I just think every part of this gets sticky.”

After more back and forth debate, Gilbert suggested, “Why is this rocket science? Why don’t we just take 1% from the Executive Committee and put it with IMB? I mean ... I don’t know messengers that are going to say please give more to the Executive Committee. I don’t know of anybody in the audience that really likes the Executive Committee. (Some laughter breaks out in the room.) I mean let’s call it like it is.”

Mohler at one point cautions, “The weirdest thing we’ve got right here is that if we’re not careful, we’re talking ourselves into the corner, where the only way we actually reach the nations is through the IMB budget.”

He added, “If that’s what we believe, then we shouldn’t fund any theological education or anything else. If theological education is not a way of getting people to the nations, then don’t fund it. I just think once we get into reallocating the SBC budget, unless there is a clear rationale for how, we’re saying to someone, ‘We need you to do less of something.’ And I thought that’s what we were saying to the EC.”

Richards later said, “I think that the Executive Committee ought to be the one that takes the hit. There’s your 1%. I think that is the easiest one to pass.”

Gilbert added, “I think that’s the easiest one that people understand.” He then jokingly asked, “These (GCR Task Force audio file) tapes are sealed for 10 years, right?”

Task force vote

Floyd responded, “Yes, that’s right.” The room breaks into laughter.

“And that was **Al Gilbert** who made that motion,” Floyd added. “Is there a second?”

Floyd then noted, “Seconded by **Ruben Hernandez** (then associate Spanish pastor at the Dallas-area Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas).”

After the task force voted to add that latest move to their report, they then discussed concerns of getting the EC to pass the report in its upcoming meeting. This prompted discussion of whether the EC actually had the authority to keep the task force from bringing their report to the messengers on the floor of the annual meeting. The task force also was fast approaching a deadline to send a draft of their report to **Morris Chapman**, then president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee.

‘Crack the window’

Mohler asked SBC parliamentarian **Barry McCarty**, who had been invited by the task force into the meeting to answer questions related to SBC polity and procedure, to share his thoughts on the EC’s ability to keep the task force’s report from going to the floor of the SBC annual meeting for a vote.

“I’m of the opinion that it is perfectly within order for the Convention, for the messengers who will receive your report, that they have the right to instruct their own committees, which would include the Executive Committee.”

McCarty then compared it to when his two sons were riding with him in the car, and one had the window seat and the other son sat in the middle between him and his brother — and the son in the middle wanted the window down. While the one with the window seat sat with his hand on the window button, the one in the middle can always appeal to “dad” to have the other brother roll the window down if he refuses.

“Dad can say ... ‘Lower the window,’” McCarty said. “The ‘Dad’ in the room are the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention. (The EC is) going to make the argument that a special committee can’t tell them to do one of these things. Well, the Convention can sure tell them to do it. ... The Convention can say, ‘Crack the window.’”

McCarty continued, “I think the messengers said to you, ‘Tell us what you think.’ Now the suits in Nashville aren’t going to like that, and they’re all friends of ours, but you have an ethical obligation. You guys have prayed this thing up and thought this thing through, and you have an ethical obligation to make your best statement here.”

GCR TASK FORCE AUDIO FILES (PART 8): EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE LEADERS VOICE CONCERNS

J.D. Greear, task force member and pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina (and future SBC president), had concerns for how younger pastors would perceive the GCR task force's report to the Southern Baptist Convention.

During the task force's meeting in San Antonio, Jan. 26–28, 2010, Greear specifically voiced how the report needed to hold up the “centrality and primacy” of the local church.

He shared, “What I hear from people that are watching us, especially those that are in my generation — whatever that means — is there's an expectation that what's going to come out of this group is ‘business as usual,’ just like a really jazzed-up, excited version of it — where we're going to have a bunch of new slogans come out for NAMB and the IMB.

He continued, “Like same song, louder verse, but it's going to be the same thing. And what many of them really want to hear is ... to be released and have the onus put back on them.”

Greear went on to explain the need to move this challenge up in the report, “In our church we noticed an explosion of ministry when we clearly communicated to everyone, the best ideas for ministry are not in the central offices of this church. They're in the congregation.” He added, “It was a night and day difference.”

While task force chair **Ronnie Floyd** contended that challenge would be well communicated, Greear urged the task force to “(go) overboard in communicating the message.”

Running low on time

Meanwhile, the task force feverishly worked on readying a shortened version of recommendations that they planned to deliver that evening to **Morris Chapman**, then president and CEO of the Executive Committee. Chapman had requested the update

before the task force presented its “progress report” during EC's upcoming February meeting in Nashville.

The task force settled on the fact there wasn't enough time to finish a fuller report, and bullet points would have to suffice.

The list included recommendations they'd hashed over in previous gatherings, which included recognizing Great Commission Giving as an endorsed way of Southern Baptist giving, refocusing NAMB and reducing its ministry assignments, allowing IMB to pursue unreached/unengaged people groups in North America, calling on state conventions to lead out Cooperative Program promotion and stewardship, and reducing the EC budget by 1%.

Al Mohler, task force member and president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted the task force needed to make it clear the report could be adjusted or changed all the way up to when they gave their final presentation in Orlando. Lessons had been learned, Mohler added, from mistakes made with Covenant for a New Century, an effort in 1995 to restructure and streamline SBC agencies.

“(That report) was typeset, in print — which ours will be — and on May 1, we released it. I think we made a mistake. ... We thought that we could not revise it after that date. I want to contrast that with the Baptist Faith and Message Committee 2000. [Adrian] Rogers said, let's ask Southern Baptists to respond to what we release May 1, and see if we want to take any of their wisdom into account or at least know where we stand.

“That produced an enormous groundswell of basic good will in which people felt like they could have a say,” Mohler added. “I'm going to suggest that we at least consider following that same example, putting it out May 1 and saying ‘we want to hear what you think about this.’”

Danny Akin, task force member and president of

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, added, “That lets them buy in big time. They can’t say, ‘Well, we didn’t even have a chance.’ No, you do have a chance. We’ll be listening.”

Parliamentarian **Barry McCarty** agreed and cautioned the task force from feeling like they needed to give a lot of detail to Chapman and to the EC with their progress report.

“The most powerful person in the Southern Baptist Convention is the average messenger who comes from his church and sits out there in that seat,” McCarty said of the upcoming annual meeting in Orlando. “The rules we follow are adopted by the messengers. The budget, the nominees, everything that happens in Southern Baptist life eventually is traced back to a decision of the messengers.

“As little as you can spend doing these legal dances with Morris and his team and the more you can focus on how you’re going to roll this out to the most powerful people in the convention, the messengers, I think the better off you are.”

Out of order?

The next morning, Chapman and **Augie Boto**, then executive vice president, and then SBC legal counsel **Jim Guenther** and **Jamie Jordan** arrived to share initial impressions of the report that was sent to them.

Guenther expressed concern about the task force speaking out of order with some of their recommendations. He advised the task force to present their report as a “vision statement” of ideas that the messengers can vote in support of. If approved, it would be the EC’s responsibility to handle specifics on carrying that approved vision statement out.

Boto later added, “there are things you cannot recommend, that only the Executive Committee can recommend. ... If we get there by a path that is legally impermissible, we have bolloxed the entire framework.”

Mohler responded matter-of-factly, “Augie, we know that, but there’s no reason why the task force cannot recommend that the Executive Committee ‘consider.’”

Boto affirmed that sentiment. “Sure, sure, and report to the Convention on the matter. We do that all the time. If we get a motion from the floor about A or B, we ask the Executive Committee to study this.”

He later added, “The whole goal there, Dr. Mohler, was just to make sure that we understand it. ...

When someone tells me in a law office, ‘I understand completely,’ I almost always know they don’t. There are these slippage areas, so I was just trying to make it clear. I’m sorry for going over the top.”

At one point, Chapman expressed concerns, specifically regarding the official SBC endorsement of Great Commission Giving and that it runs “parallel to Cooperative Program giving.” He voiced concerns it could be seen to imply “the Cooperative Program is not about the Great Commission.” While he noted he would be “thrilled” for any pastor to be recognized for their giving to missions, he noted there is “still a distinction.”

He also expressed concerns of CP promotion being turned over to state conventions, noting there would be a variety of ideas of how to promote it. He added common ground could be found if the EC was considered an equal partner in the process.

Another one of Chapman’s primary concerns was the EC losing 1% of its budget, which he noted would “knock a hole in a good many of things that we have been able to accomplish over the last 18 years, and it would be a significant setback to us.”

‘Greatest fears’

Chapman at one point noted that the EC is the only entity that operates solely on the Cooperative Program, adding his concerns about more funding going to the International Mission Board. In a previous meeting, Chapman had specifically expressed concerns regarding IMB’s lack of clarity in ministry reporting.

“There are growing number of questions about the baptismal count that is given each year and what does that comprise,” Chapman said. “Growing questions about church planting and what is the make-up of the churches being planted. Now I’m not here to say the counting and the planting is not exactly what needs to be happening, but I am raising the question, ‘Do Southern Baptists understand how their Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and other gifts are being utilized?’”

Chapman later added, “I regret that my greatest fears are being realized in that what I’m looking at so far, the bureaucracy is being defined as the Executive Committee.”

Floyd, then pastor of Cross Church in Springdale, Arkansas, responded, “No one here has any question about the validity of the Executive Committee. That is non-existent.”

Floyd added a concern involved redundancy in efforts, and “the real thinking in that is the state conventions are closer to the churches. ... By no means do we want the EC to be alienated from the process.”

The task force later decided to adjust the wording to strengthen the EC’s role as a partner with the state conventions in CP promotion and stewardship.

‘Repentance and stewardship’

Later the task force discussed meeting with Executive Committee leadership and how support for the Cooperative Program continued to decrease.

Referencing an earlier comment from Boto on how churches needed to repent for poor stewardship and declining CP support, **Larry Grays** — a task force member, church planter and then senior pastor of Midtown Bridge Church in Atlanta — took issue with some of those comments. “I would also argue there is a generation of pastors who are giving. They’re just not giving to the Cooperative Program,” he said. “And that doesn’t call for repentance. I do have to give to God, but I don’t have to give to the Cooperative Program — and neither do any of my friends.”

He added, “There are guys giving. They’re giving large percentages to missions — it’s just not through CP. To tell a guy you have to give to it because we said you have to give to it because that’s history and precedent, I just reject. And if that spirit comes out at the Convention, I think it will also be offensive to a bunch guys.”

Lack of vision

Mohler agreed that too many Southern Baptist leaders are seeing CP as the “end” instead of the “means” to support missions. He added, “If people are not buying your cars guess what? They’re not popular. The reality is you can’t just talk about the Cooperative Program. The Cooperative Program is not the end, it is a means. And there’s a complete absence of ‘end,’ in vision, here.”

Floyd added, “no vision.”

Mohler continued, “Saying the Cooperative Program is the answer is like saying our confidence is in the popularity of our vehicles. People aren’t buying them. If that’s our confidence, we’re sunk.”

Frank Page, task force member and vice president of evangelization for NAMB, at one point asked how task force members should handle questions related to why they focused primarily on changes to the

Executive Committee and NAMB — and not other entities.

Floyd countered that they did look at all of the entities, but Page disagreed.

After some back and forth, Floyd noted, “As far as answering it, we’ve had seven months. We’re trying our very best to look at things as much as possible. Our priority is the Great Commission, and that’s where we’re trying to focus our attention.”

Page conceded that there simply was not enough time to address every need. “Seven months did not avail the opportunity to go deep in every particular aspect of SBC life,” he noted. “And that’s OK with me.”

Where’s J.D.?

As the San Antonio meeting wound down, **Ken Whitten**, task force member and then pastor of the Tampa-area Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Florida, addressed concerns that their report will be lives-treamed during the February Executive Committee meeting.

Whitten expressed concern about how his congregation might perceive the task force’s process. “If today was any indication ... if my crowd saw what went on, they might walk. I don’t think we’ve built enough credibility. And the people who are going to watch that are going to be a younger generation, and I don’t want to turn them off before we get an opportunity to turn them on.”

Referencing the perspective of younger pastors, Whitten noted, “**J.D. (Greear)** hadn’t been back. I don’t know where he went. He looked out the window half-way through this thing, and he never came back.”

Akin noted that Greear had to catch an early flight back to North Carolina, and “he’s gone.”

Whitten added, “Just look at (Greear’s) body language. He looked out that window, and I’m telling you he was glad he had a flight.”

Akin agreed, “Yes, he was.”

The task force can be heard chuckling as Whitten mentioned Greear’s absence. Whitten eventually laughed off his concerns about Greear and said the task force could disregard.

In the coming weeks, Floyd presented a brief report during the Executive Committee’s February meeting in Nashville. The task force would meet back in Music City in April for their last official meeting.

GCR TASK FORCE AUDIO FILES (PART 9): THE FINAL MEETING AND ‘TO GOD BE THE GLORY’

The final official GCR Task Force meeting began in Nashville on April 26, 2010. “Here we are,” chair **Ronnie Floyd** declared as he ran through a few housekeeping items. He mentioned task force member **J.D. Greear** was unable to attend the meeting. Task force members **Donna Gaines** and **Jim Richards** had not yet arrived at the start of the meeting, but Floyd said they planned to attend. The task force was meeting 50 days before the opening gavel of the 2010 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

“We are on a winning ball club,” Floyd declared. “We may lose the vote, but we’re not going to lose the battle. ... God has so changed my life. You have good weeks, and you have bad weeks in this battle. We must not get tired of doing good. We will reap at the proper time if we do not give up.”

Floyd continued, “I think you will find we have heard Southern Baptists. I believe you will find we are working for the good of all.”

The task force ran through a list of side items for SBC messengers to hear, and at some point consider addressing, but that were not included in the final report. These were compiled by task force members **Bob White**, **Frank Page**, **Harry Lewis** and **Richards**. Among those issues were race relations, Christian education and a variety of other issues and ministry.

Floyd gave the task force an hour to read through the formal report and make notes on possible revisions. Hoping to avoid nitpicky edits being made late into the day, he cautioned the group not to get too caught up in personal preferences but to look at the overall message and concepts.

“Nothing that we have is sacred, but we have acted as a committee,” he noted. “We will be here until midnight if we scrutinize every word.”

‘We’re going to be here all day’

Al Mohler, task force member and president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was designat-

ed the “main general editor and overseer” of finalizing the written report and went through each line. Floyd said the purpose of the editing session was to make sure they send a clear message that they have listened to Southern Baptists.

Mohler noted that he wrote the report “with the present very much in mind ... but also with a sense of history.” He added, “We connect to the past, and we want to be well-remembered by the future.”

The task force once again discussed cooperative agreements and how the plan had been adjusted from phasing them out in five years to “hopefully within seven years.” The committee discussed the use of “pioneer” states and how it was more timely to refer to them as “underserved areas.”

Barry McCarty, who serves as parliamentarian at SBC annual meetings, reviewed the report and noted that it was “very carefully crafted” and he did not note any specific concerns.

Page, a self-described “obstructionist” in the report process, at one point noted he also was “overall pleased with the report” and believed it would pass.

As the group went through the report, scrutinizing every single word sentence by sentence became too much of a temptation for the task force to resist.

At one point an exasperated Mohler noted, “We’re going to be here all day.” But the frustration seemed to be short-lived. The team pressed forward.

The task force also revisited decisions involving the Executive Committee and criticism they had received since their progress report at the EC meeting that February.

“For the Executive Committee’s present leadership to accuse us of going after them, and we’re picking on them, it’s junk,” Floyd noted. “They run the stinking Southern Baptist Convention. ... They can sink everything we’re doing if they so choose to ... because of the bylaws, which is fine. That’s the way it is supposed to be.”

GPS strategy ‘making a difference’

The discussion moved to evangelism, and Page revisited the evangelism effort that the North American Mission Board was currently trying to get off the ground.

“God’s Plan for Sharing (GPS) emphasis (the 10-year strategy plan set to begin that year and that NAMB was heavily promoting) is making a difference,” said Page, who at the time served as vice president of evangelization for NAMB.

Page described GPS as a strategy that “encourages churches to have revivals, to have neighborhood block parties, whatever it takes to win the lost for Christ. It is very exciting.”

He noted several states that were up “significantly” in baptisms — South Carolina, Alabama, Montana and Wyoming. “Most of our states that are reporting (are up in baptisms),” Page noted.

“All that I know of so far have reported, and we believe next year, we will see significant gains because the GPS will really start kicking in 2011.”

He added, “We may see some tremendous turnaround in baptisms in the coming days. I think we may even see it this year, which would be very exciting for our country after so long of decrease.”

“But just know,” Page added, “the North American Mission Board is promoting the use of revivals, evangelism, evangelists.”

Floyd responded, “Great. Good report. Encouraging.”

Some task force discussion continued on how the SBC is in “serious trouble with evangelists,” but it is not clear who made that comment. The task force member went on to note how Texas had one of the largest fellowships of evangelists in the country, averaging about 200 active participants. But in January they had to cancel a two-day retreat because there was not enough participation.

The final report eventually was approved by the committee.

White, task force member and then-executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, noted he didn’t see why Southern Baptists “wouldn’t be thrilled to death and excited about (the report).”

Floyd agreed and later added, “Bottom line is we’re putting our lives on the line here, guys. And we need to be able to tell our folks, ‘Hey, this is where we’re going.’”

The committee discussed upcoming events, addressing the media and setting up meetings with state

convention executives and entity leaders to get their impressions on the report after its release to the public for feedback.

Floyd engaged the task force for more discussion on who should be included and which leaders they needed to make sure were on board.

At one point, Mohler interjected, “I say at this point, our report is in formal territory. I think we invite everybody, at every table. I think to fail to do that looks like we’re overly strategizing, overly marketing.

“I say if we have something with state convention execs, invite every one of them. If we have something with SBC entity heads, invite every one of them.”

He joked, “If we have something with the third sons of British royalty, invite every one of them.”

Special prayer time

Floyd reminded the task force to be at a special prayer time during an evening session of the SBC Pastors Conference in Orlando. **Kevin Ezell**, then pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky (who would be named the next president of NAMB later that year), served as president of the Pastors Conference that year.

“The Monday night at the Pastors Conference, everyone needs to be at the Pastors Conference if at all possible,” Floyd said. “They want to have us on the stage. Kevin called me last July and said, ‘You tell me whatever you want me to do to help the GCR, and I’ll do it.’ I said, ‘Kevin, you just need to pray about it, seek the Lord. I’ll pray about it for you.’ He’s had such a great spirit.

“The bottom line is Kevin ... is determined that every session, he’s going to have one of our pastors on the GCR to stand up and to give a two-minute testimony and a three-minute prayer, praying for the GCR report. ... In other words building anticipation,” Floyd said.

Deciding when to unseal the task force files

Ken Whitten, task force member and then pastor of the Tampa-area Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Florida, asked when the meeting recordings would be unsealed. Floyd said the plan was to unseal them in 10 years, but he noted that timeframe could be adjusted.

Page at one point said, “Well, we better not change it (to be less than 10 years), or I wouldn’t have said half the things I said.”

Mohler jokingly suggested they follow the example of the “Warren Commission,” a group tasked with

investigating the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and set the release to be “15 years after the death of the last surviving member.” Laughter followed.

Danny Akin, task force member and president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, concluded that “no one will care” about the task force meeting files in 10 years. He asked how many listened to the

1985 Peace Committee meetings related to the Conservative Resurgence and then said that only a few people listened to it. “Al, me ... and a doctoral student.”

After hearing several task force members say “15,” Floyd agreed the files would be unsealed in 15 years.

The group concluded their final meeting in prayer and in singing “To God be the Glory.”

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