



Faithful Progress

A Newsletter for Religiously Progressive Oklahomans

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Director Attends White House Event on Climate Change

OFN Director Dr. Bruce Prescott received an invitation to attend a White House Event with Faith Leaders on Environmental Stewardship and Climate Change. The event was held on February 25th.

The meeting addressed the moral imperative for people of all faiths and philosophies to respond to the challenge of preserving a hospitable and inhabitable environment for future generations. The Obama administration brought together a diverse group of leaders from across the country representing multiple faith groups with the intention of uniting them to address climate change.

Melissa Rogers, Special Assistant to the President and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, opened the meeting by calling attention to President Obama's June 2103 speech at Georgetown University on Climate Change (www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/25/remarks-president-climate-change.)

In that speech President Obama told the students, "I refuse to condemn your generation and future generations to a planet that's beyond fix-



ing" and unveiled a new national climate action plan. (www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/image/president27sclimateaction-plan.pdf)

The major address at the White House event was given by Gina McCarthy, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She insisted that "We have a moral obligation to live within the resources of this country" and added that "We have a moral obligation to protect this planet and the people who live in it."

McCarthy unveiled an Energy Star Action Workbook for Congregations that can be found on the Energy Star website (www.energystar.gov/buildings/sector-specific

resources/congregation-resources).

These Congregation Resources are designed to assist houses of worship in meeting the goals of President Obama's Climate Action Plan which calls for all commercial buildings, including worship facilities, to reduce energy costs and related greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020.

Event participants heard two panel discussions at the meeting. One focused on uniting to address climate change and environmental justice. The other highlighted pulpit leaders taking action on the climate.

One of the pulpit leaders, Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, discussed the work of Interfaith Power and Light which is a national

organization providing resources and networking for a religious response to global warming. (www.interfaithpowerandlight.org)

Another pulpit leader, Rev. Mitch Hescox, discussed the work of the Evangelical Environmental Network which provides resources, networking and training for evangelicals concerned about creation care and environmental stewardship. (www.creationcare.org)

The US National Academy of Sciences and the U.K. Royal Society just released online a highly readable report on "Climate Change: Evidence & Causes." (<http://dels.nas.edu/resources/static-assets/exec-office-other/climate-change-full.pdf>)

Every religious leader needs to begin addressing environmental stewardship with their congregation.

Inside this issue:

- Southern Baptists and the Rise of the Religious Right **2**
- Who's Who in the Religious Right (Part Two) **3**

Southern Baptists and

by Dr. Bruce Prescott

In the mid-1970's, Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Richard DeVoss, President of Amway Corporation, and Art DeMoss, board chairman of the National Liberty Insurance Co., acquired the Christian Freedom Foundation (CFF).

Their vision for the CFF was to recruit, train and then elect Christian conservatives to Congress. In the words of DeMoss, they wanted "to rebuild the foundations of the Republic as it was when first founded -- a 'Christian Republic.'

They used the CFF's status as a non-profit to solicit funds for a for-profit Third Century Publishing company whose mission was to wed a conservative political agenda with evangelical Christianity. A sales executive with Colgate-Palmolive was hired to run the organization.

This was the beginning of a career that would earn Ed McAteer, a lay leader at Adrian Rogers' Southern Baptist megachurch in Memphis, the title "Godfather of the Religious Right."

By the pivotal year of 1979, McAteer had become Field Director for the Conservative Caucus — a grass roots, right-wing public policy advocacy group founded by Howard Phillips in 1974.

1979 was the year that McAteer, Phillips, and Paul Weyrich approached Jerry Falwell and helped him found the Moral Majority. (See *Faithful Progress* December 2013)

In the early spring that same year, McAteer organized the Religious Roundtable. Nelson Bunker Hunt, a layman at First Baptist Church in Dallas funded the start up. Its purpose was to mobilize Southern Baptists and other evangelicals to get active in secular politics. Evangelist James Robison became chief spokesman for the organization.

Shortly after the Religious Roundtable was organized, evangelist Billy Graham, an-

other member of First Baptist in Dallas, and Campus Crusades' Bill Bright invited select influential churchmen to Dallas to discuss secular politics. They were alarmed that a Dallas TV station took evangelist James Robison off the air for repeatedly broadcasting unconscionably riotous invectives against homosexuals.

Among those present were Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Jimmy Draper, and other fundamentalist minded ministers who were involved in a plot to take-over of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). That takeover would soon put the vast resources of the SBC under the control of leadership that would be both deeply engaged in and visibly partisan in their relationship to secular politics.

Evangelist James Robison recounts the dialogue at the Graham-Bright gathering;

"Billy Graham said, 'I believe God has shown me that unless we have a change in America, we have a thousand days as a free nation . . . three years.' Bill Bright said, 'I know. . . I do not believe we'll survive more than three years as a free nation. It's that serious.' And Pat Robertson said, 'I believe the same thing.' Charles Stanley was standing there and I can just remember so well, he put his hand down on the table with resolve and said, 'I'll give my life to stop this. I'll give everything I've got to turn this country.' And I said, 'Me too. I'll die to turn this country. Whatever it takes. We can't lose the country.' And each man around the room said, 'We're going to get involved.' Except Rex Humbard. He said, 'I'm uncomfortable politically. I really am very uncomfortable.' And Dr. Graham said, 'I cannot publicly be involved. I can only pray. I've



Ed McAteer (1926-2004)

been burned so badly with the public relationships I've had. I can't afford it, but I care so much."

In June of 1979 Adrian Rogers was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Prior that that time the presidency was considered an honorary office and nominations for the office were made informally. Previously, there were no organized campaigns for the office.

Rogers and the SBC fundamentalists, however, had an agenda that included influencing secular politics. For them organizing get-out-the-vote campaigns for the denomination's president would be good tune-ups for bigger contests that lay ahead.

They were wildly successful. Fundamentalists have elected every president of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979.

Among the takeover presidents are three with ties to Oklahoma -- Bailey Smith (1980-1982), Jimmy Draper

the Rise of the Religious Right

(1982-1984), and Tom Elliff (1996-1998). At one time or another, all were pastors of First Southern Baptist Church in Dell City.

An endorsement of a Fundamentalist presidential candidate by John Bisagno, another former pastor of that same Dell City church, was credited with swinging a hotly contested election.

Along with the presidency came the power to appoint likeminded trustees to all the agencies and institutions of the SBC. Within five years, Fundamentalists controlled all the denomination's boards.

They wasted no time in replacing all the moderate leaders in Baptist institutions with leaders from the takeover movement. After ten years, moderate Baptists left and formed a separate convention.

SBC Fundamentalists also wasted no time organizing themselves for secular political purposes.

Within weeks after Rogers first became SBC president, Charles Stanley, an Atlanta megachurch preacher with a national TV audience, began fulfilling the pledge he made at the Graham-Bright gathering.

Stanley invited scores of Georgia preachers to meet at his church for a "Campaign Training Conference." There Paul Weyrich told them how to get their congregations politically involved without jeopardizing their churches' tax exemption. Stanley would later be elected president of the SBC from 1985-1987.

Weyrich fondly remembers that Paige Patterson, then President of First Baptist Dallas' Criswell Bible Institute, playfully attempted to dunk him, a Catholic, in the baptistry at Stanley's church during that Atlanta meeting.

Paige Patterson, along with Houston appellate court judge Paul Pressler, organized the political takeover movement within the SBC.

Patterson would later be elected president of the SBC from 1998-2000.

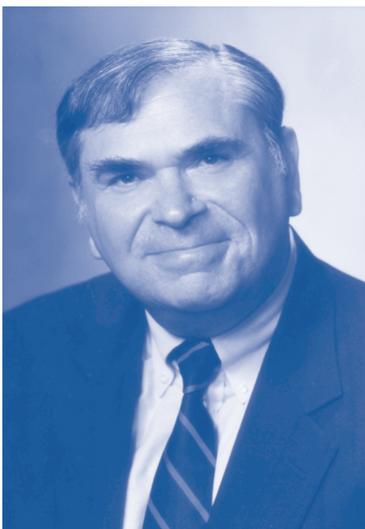
The movement to take over the SBC and the movement to make conservative evangelicals a force in secular politics worked hand in glove. Nowhere was that more apparent than at the National Affairs Briefing that Ed McAteer and James Robison organized in August 1980.

McAteer brought 15,000 pastors and conservative activists together to hear then presidential candidate Ronald Reagan endorse them and their movement.

In a PBS documentary, James Robison brags about being the one who prompted Reagan to tell meeting participants, "I know that you cannot endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing." A four minute video excerpt of this is posted online at vimeo.com/14282481.

Continued on back page

Who's Who in the Religious Right



Howard Phillips (1941-2013)

Born into a Jewish family, Phillips converted to Christianity as an adult, and was closely associated with the theocratic Christian Reconstructionist movement.

A 1962 graduate of Harvard, he achieved prominence during the Nixon Administration. When Nixon refused to veto government funding for health, education and welfare programs, Phillips resigned as head of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).

In addition to the Conservative Caucus, he was involved in founding the Moral Majority and the Religious Roundtable. In 1991 he founded a third political party under the name of the U.S. Taxpayers Party. The name was changed to the Constitution Party in 1999.

The U.S. Taxpayers/Constitution party holds that the United States is a Christian Nation

founded on the Bible. Its mission is to "restore American jurisprudence to its Biblical premises and the federal government to its constitutional boundaries."

The party maintains that civil power should lie in the hands of the states and localities, rather than the federal government. They would abolish the Internal Revenue Service, repeal the federal income tax, and eliminate the national debt — while giving priority to balancing the federal budget. Members also affirm absolute rights for the unborn and are adamant about the need to preserve the death penalty and uphold the constitutional right to bear arms.

Phillips ran unsuccessful campaigns as the party's U.S. presidential candidate in 1992, 1996 and 2000.



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Southern Baptists and the Religious Right —continued from page 3

The same documentary shows the leaders of the movement seated on the platform behind Reagan as he addressed the meeting. Most of the influential churchmen named by Robison as being invited to the Graham/Bright gathering, as well as numerous SBC takeover leaders, are visible on the platform in the online excerpt mentioned above.

One created a firestorm of controversy that threatened to overshadow Reagan's endorsement. Oklahoma pastor Bailey Smith, then president of the SBC, gained notoriety by proclaiming, "God almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew!"

Perhaps to repair the damage caused by Smith's remark, McAteer, with the help of the National Religious Broadcasters in

Washington, launched an annual National Christian Prayer Breakfast for Israel in 1981. The intent was for evangelical Christians to demonstrate their support for Israel. His efforts were so successful that twenty years later he was heavily, but unsuccessfully, promoted as the Religious Right's nominee for ambassador to Israel.

Many political analysts identify the 1980 Religious Affairs Briefing as the watershed event propelling the religious right into political prominence. Religious conservatives are credited with being the crucial block of voters that put Ronald Reagan in the White House.

The impact of that meeting remains evident to this day. One student attending a Southern Baptist seminary in Fort Worth

quit school to help McAteer and Robison with the logistics for the 1980 meeting in Dallas. Mike Huckabee never finished seminary. He did go on to become Governor of Arkansas and a candidate for the U.S. presidency.

Huckabee may prove to be a more viable candidate than was Howard Phillips. The man who founded the Conservative Caucus and hired Ed McAteer to organize the conservative religious movement, ran unsuccessfully for U.S. president three times from 1992 to 2000. He ran as a third party candidate for the economically libertarian and Christian Nationalist U.S. Taxpayers/Constitution Party.

In many ways, that party was a precursor to the modern Tea Party.