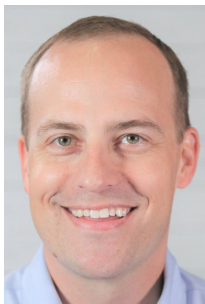


Calls made for investigation of SBC Executive Committee actions on sexual abuse policy development



Slade

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) – Disclosure of purported audio tapes from meetings at the highest levels of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leadership regarding proposed actions to deal with sexual abuse cases has prompted a call from SBC Executive Committee Chairman Rolland Slade for an independent investigation.



Bethancourt

The meetings were recorded by Phillip Bethancourt, who at the time was executive vice president of Southern Baptists' Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville and is presently the lead pastor of Central Church in College Station, Texas.

Bethancourt released the excerpted audio tapes amid growing

controversy over the contents of two letters written by Russell Moore, who stepped down May 31 from the ERLC presidency. In his second letter, dated May 31 and addressed to SBC President J.D. Greear, Moore directly and indirectly accused various Southern Baptist leaders of “stonewall[ing]” calls to address sexual abuse in the SBC.



Moore

In the May 31 letter to Greear, Moore recounted meetings in May 2019 and October 2019 in which he said he encountered opposition to efforts to address sexual abuse in the SBC.

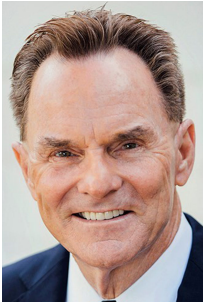
He described as “tense” a May 2019 meeting in Atlanta that included Greear, senior pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C.; Todd Unzicker, Greear’s chief of staff; Ronnie Floyd, president of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville; Bethancourt; and then-SBC Executive Committee Chairman Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Church in Blackshear, Ga.



Greear

Moore was not in attendance but alleged Stone wanted to “delay the formation” of the Credentials Committee, which would be tasked with addressing charges of sexual abuse within the convention.

Moore wrote of the October 2019 meeting that occurred following ERLC's 2019 Caring Well Conference. In an on-stage discussion with Moore at the conference, lawyer, abuse survivor/advocate, and Olympic gold medalist Rachael Denhollander criticized the SBC for what she saw as the convention's failure to adequately confront sexual abuse issues.



Floyd

Moore wrote that in the meeting after the conference, Floyd told him "he was experiencing backlash from his chairman [Stone] and others over what we had allowed to happen," and that they were "especially upset" because the Executive Committee had contributed \$250,000 to the ERLC's efforts to address sexual abuse.

Moore contended that Floyd asked what he should tell Executive Committee members about Denhollander's comments, and that he (Floyd) wanted "to preserve the base" of the SBC. In a statement released June 5, Floyd said he did "not have the same recollection of occurrences as stated. I do take seriously allegations in this letter which may raise concern for Southern Baptists."



Stone

The calls for an independent review comes just days before Southern Baptists gather for the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting, June 15-16 at the Music City Center in Nashville. With more than 16,000 preregistered messengers, it is expected to be the largest in 25 years.



Denhollander

Stone is among four candidates slated to be nominated for SBC president at next week's meeting. In a video posted June 5, Stone called Moore's allegations "ungodly" and "absolutely slanderous."

Two pastors, Ronnie Parrott of Christ Community Church in Huntersville, N.C., and Grant Gaines of Belle Aire Church in Murfreesboro, Tenn., announced June 5 they are preparing a motion to make at the annual meeting that will call for the newly-elected SBC president to appoint a task force for the purpose of hiring "a third party to investigate the allegations made against the executive committee of the SBC."