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NAMB's Kevin Ezell denies confidential 'Cooperation Agreements' are 'gag orders'

by Joni B. Hannigan | 18 May, 2016

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ALPHARETTA, Ga. (Christian Examiner) – Kevin Ezell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention North American Mission Board, May 17 refuted accusations that "Cooperation Agreements" signed by state executives are "gag orders," but instead said they are "simply a commitment of charity and trust."

Last week, several Southern Baptist state leaders accused NAMB of linking financial support from the national entity to the agreements that were said to include a non-disclosure agreement. NAMB declined to respond to *Christian Examiner's* request for comment, but posted an [article](#) on the organization's website May 17.

"Though NAMB's preference has always been that these documents be available to anyone, currently, the agreement includes a sentence stating 'confidentiality' because that was the stated preference of some of the conventions," Ezell wrote. "Funding amounts for non-south states differ by state based upon convention size, lostness and other factors."

Other than funding, Ezell said the basic terms of the agreements with the non-south states are "the same in content."

"While I would prefer that Southern Baptists, and all the state conventions, know what the funding budgets are for the other states, NAMB has honored the request for confidentiality and will continue to do so," he said.

States that want to share Cooperation Agreements may do so by notifying NAMB, Ezell said, noting the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana agreed to publicize its **partnership agreement**.

Ezell also noted in 2010 when he became president "NAMB was commonly criticized for not having a strategy and not being focused," he wrote. "With leadership from our trustees, we narrowed NAMB's focus. It is NAMB's assigned responsibility to provide accountability for every dollar spent on the mission field."

'PETITION' TO NAMB TRUSTEES

Ezell's comments came a day after Rick Patrick, pastor of First Baptist Church in Sylacauga, Alabama, and founding director of Connect 316, posted a **petition** on the SBC Today blog calling for NAMB trustees to engage in an "independent investigation" of how Ezell interacts with state conventions.

In the petition, Patrick references the non-disclosure agreements noted in a **Christian Examiner article** published May 11, and issues raised by five state executives including Will McRaney, the former executive missional strategist of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware whose tenure ended June 9 of last year.

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- Rick Patrick, Alabama pastor, in a petition for an investigation

"If the **allegations** presented by these Southern Baptist state executives are true, then Dr. Ezell has overstepped his bounds and forfeited the trust of all Southern Baptists," Patrick wrote in the petition. "Appropriate action should be taken."

EZELL SAYS PARTNERSHIPS POSITIVE

In the blog, Ezell said, "NAMB's partnerships are positive and working well," explaining the mission organization works with churches, associations and state conventions. We are grateful for all of our partners."

He noted "Southern Baptists entrust NAMB with about \$120 million annually "to help our churches reach North America for Christ. That is a trust I guard carefully."

"We have an enormous and important task, and we face an enemy that doesn't play fair."

- Kevin Ezell, NAMB president

There are 27 non-south state conventions that Ezell said rely on NAMB for much of their ministry funding, from a total of 42 state conventions.

"We have an enormous and important task, and we face an enemy that doesn't play fair," Ezell wrote. "It's a privilege to work with state leaders who are passionate about reaching people for Christ and committed to pushing back lostness in North America.

'The overwhelming majority of state executives we work with are very competent and strategic leaders," Ezell continued. "They deserve your full support and engagement at the state level."

Ezell's article did not directly reference the McRaney controversy, nor the petition being circulated.

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