

EC REJECTS NOMINATION OF WELLMAN; LAUNCHES NEW SEARCH



Several members of the new search committee, including Corey Cain, center, pastor of First Baptist Church, Seymour, and others gather for prayer after the May 1 EC meeting. – Photo by Marc Ira Hooks / The Baptist Paper

DALLAS – Meeting behind closed doors in executive session today (May 1), the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention rejected the nomination of Jared Wellman as its new president/chief executive officer by a vote of 50-31.

Wellman, 39, pastor of Tate Springs Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, informed his church on April 30 that he was the nominee to lead the EC.

There were 81 of the 83 trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee in Monday's executive session, according to *The Baptist Paper (TBP)*.

TBP reported 12 of the 83 joined via Zoom due to health and other issues preventing their ability to attend in person. One staff member, the parliamentarian and legal council, also participated in the meeting.

Hours after Monday's vote, a press conference was held in Dallas and was made available via zoom for media members who were not able to attend in person. David Sons, EC chairman and member of the president search committee, fielded questions from reporters during the roughly 25-minute press conference.

Sons noted the process of finding a new president/chief executive officer began almost immediately after Monday's vote had been tabulated and finalized. He said the first step was to form a new search committee, which was done after nominees were given from the floor.

Sons said he did not know, and would not speculate, on a potential timetable for the new search committee to present a candidate.

Sons said he and other members of the search team were disappointed by the vote, but said it is ultimately the role of the trustees – not the search team – to choose a candidate. “We respect (their decision),” he said.

Baptist Press reported that Wellman spoke to the EC after the decision and said, “It’s been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve the Southern Baptist Convention through the Executive Committee.”



Wellman served as a member of the EC from 2015-2023, and had been chairman since June 2022. *Baptist Press* reported April 30 that Wellman stepped down from the position in a confidential letter to EC officers on April 17, according to Sons, who was the newly-named chairman.

The Baptist Paper reported that while there are 86 trustee seats on the EC, three stepped down in recent days, including Wellman, who resigned from his trustee role and chair position April 17.

The full body was made aware in a confidential communication on April 19, Sons told *Baptist Press*. Yet, the decision to call a special meeting on May 1 was announced on April 4.

It was also in the April 19 email that the full body was made aware of Wellman’s selection as the presidential candidate. Sons said it was kept confidential among EC trustees “to give Jared the opportunity to inform his church of his candidacy when he could do so in person.”

Wellman served on the presidential search team as an ex-officio member until he recused himself on Jan. 26, Sons told *Baptist Press*.

During Monday’s press conference, Sons said the committee did not consider Wellman’s time on the search team to be a conflict of interest, noting that there were other examples “in SBC life” where similar situations had occurred.

Sons also said Wellman “did not insert himself into the process” of being a candidate and was instead “invited” by other team members to be considered.

Adron Robinson, search committee chairman, said the group was impressed by Wellman’s leadership of the EC since being voted chairman last June.

“Jared’s demeanor and experience fit with both the candidate profile of the search team and with much of what heard we had heard from those we surveyed,” Robinson said in the *BP* report.

As news leaked late last week of Wellman's nomination, Baptists from a wide variety of backgrounds and opinions expressed concern over the process of how Wellman's nomination came about.

The *Baptist and Reflector* published a [column](#) by Chris Turner and Lonnie Wilkey on its website April 29 entitled "So Much for Restoring Credibility." The editorial raised several questions about the nomination process, including questioning why Willie McLaurin – the EC's interim president and CEO – was disqualified for the position.



Willie McLaurin. – File photo by Van Payne / The Baptist Paper

When he was elected as interim president and CEO, McLaurin became the first person of color to lead one of the SBC's ministry entities in its more than 175-year history

The National African American Fellowship (NAAF) also raised questions about the search team bypassing McLaurin. In a letter to Sons – which was made public on NAAF's Twitter account – the organization said it was expressing "disappointment and bewilderment at a search process gone awry."

The letter said, "The primary concerns were matters of integrity and transparency with the introduction (of) a new candidate that served on the EC Trustee Board, who was now a candidate for the EC CEO position."

The letter continued, "As you know, the SBC has come under much scrutiny over the past few years for what, some have called, a lack of transparency, cover ups, and ineffective leadership. To add to this already tarnished image a process that has raised so many questions is unconscionable. Others have questioned why a highly-qualified, extensively experienced denominational worker, and former Vice President, who has pastored and been well received in a variety of SBC circles as the Interim CEO, was not given the opportunity to serve permanently in that role?"

The new search committee members are:

- **Corey Cain, Tennessee**
- Neal Hughes, Alabama
- Drew Landry, Virginia
- Nick Sandefur, Kentucky
- Sarah Rogers, South Carolina
- Nancy Spaulding, Michigan.
- Sons also will serve as an ex-officio voting member of the committee.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled for Monday, June 12, just before the kickoff of the 2023 SBC Annual Meeting in New Orleans.

The *Baptist and Reflector* will provide continued coverage of the search process as developments unfold. **B&R** – *This article includes reporting from The Baptist Paper and Baptist Press.*