

Bush assures Southern Baptists he will defend traditional view of marriage_62804

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Southern
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Convention
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satellite
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from
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Bush assures Southern Baptists he will defend traditional view of marriage

By Steve DeVane

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INDIANAPOLIS-President Bush promised messengers at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting he would "defend the sanctity of marriage against activist courts."

Bush's address via satellite marked the third straight year he has spoken to the meeting. Messengers interrupted his speech more than 15 times with applause, including several standing ovations.

Some of the loudest cheers came when Bush mentioned his defense of marriage.



"The union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith," he said. "And government, by strengthening and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all."

Bush got another standing ovation when he referenced his signing a ban on partial-birth abortions.

"I am working to build a culture of life in America," he said. "Common sense and conscience tell us that when an expectant mother is killed, two lives have ended and criminals should answer for both."

Bush added his administration will continue its support for crisis pregnancy centers, adoption incentives and parental notification laws, as well as other measures dear to the pro-life movement.

"I propose to double federal funding for abstinence programs in schools and community-based programs," he said.

"And I will work with Congress to pass a comprehensive and effective ban on human cloning. Life is a creation of God, not a commodity to be exploited by man."

Bush talked about military victories in Afghanistan and Iraq but said tough challenges lie ahead. "In Afghanistan and Iraq, we will finish the job."

Bush thanked Southern Baptists for their strong support of the war on terror. He called freedom "God's gift to every man and woman who lives in this world."

Bush cited his economic accomplishments and attempts to release federal funding to faith-based groups. He called on lawmakers to stop holding up his judicial appointments.

"It is time for those senators to stop playing politics with American justice," he said.

Before Bush spoke, SBC President Jack Graham praised Bush's strength and resolve, saying the president and Southern Baptists have "strong, shared values."

Tim Goeglein, a special assistant who deals with evangelicals for Bush, talked to messengers a short while before Bush. Goeglein thanked Southern Baptists for praying for "the Bush- Cheney administration."

Bush's address to the SBC this year comes in the middle of his re-election bid. The November election pits Bush against Democrat Sen. John Kerry, with many polls showing the race as a dead heat.

Recently, the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission launched a website, www.iVoteValues.com, to "promote awareness of the immediate and long-term importance of value-based voting."

At a meeting in Raleigh, N.C., about a month before that election, ERLC

President Richard Land told a group God is not a Republican or a Democrat, but God is pro-life, pro-family and not pro-homosexual.

The ERLC website lists issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage on which Bush and many Southern Baptists would likely agree.

An announcement in the SBC Bulletin, distributed daily at the annual meeting, included a statement: "Pastors, you would be amazed at how much freedom you and your church have to legally be involved in the election process-without endangering your non-profit status."

As part of the iVoteValues.com effort, ERLC officials unveiled a trailer designed to help people register to vote and research campaign issues.

The trailer will be hauled across the country between now and the November election.

With additional reporting by Erin Curry of Baptist Press.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.