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May 18, 2007

Updated: 5/18/07

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Associated Baptist Press

HOUSTON (ABP)—The front-runner among potential Republican presidential nominees used a speech at [Houston Baptist University](#) to explain his views on abortion rights and other controversial social issues.

But the moderately pro-choice, pro-gay-rights positions former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani staked out in his appearance at the Texas Baptist school still may prove problematic as he attempts to convince social conservatives that he's their best choice.

Rudy
Giuliani
speaking
at
Houston
Baptist
University.
Watch a
[video clip](#)
[of his](#)
[speech](#)
[here.](#)

“There is no candidate for president of the United States with which you completely agree. If there is, then that candidate is probably yourself,” Giuliani said, in a video of the speech featured prominently on his campaign website.

He is the only pro-choice candidate among the major contenders for the Republican nomination. But religious conservatives continue to be a strong presence in the party’s primary process.

Giuliani’s campaign was reportedly eager to clarify his views on abortion after his performance in a GOP presidential debate a week prior to the Houston speech. Many pundits characterized his answers on abortion at that debate as confusing, noting they contradicted some of his earlier positions.

In Houston, Giuliani said his beliefs about the legality of abortion were built on twin “pillars” of principle to which he holds.

“One is I believe abortion is wrong,” he said. “I think it is morally wrong, and if I were asked my advice by someone who is considering an abortion, I

would tell them not to have an abortion, to have the child.”

Nonetheless, Giuliani added, “in a country like ours, where people of good faith, people who are equally decent, equally moral and equally religious, when they come to different conclusions about this ... I believe you have to respect their viewpoint and give them a level of choice here.”

He added, though, that his views on some limitations of a woman’s right to an abortion had “evolved.” For instance, he now supports the federal ban on a kind of procedure that abortion-rights opponents term “partial-birth” abortion, even though he had supported President Clinton’s veto of a similar law.

Giuliani also said he now supports a law—the so-called Hyde Amendment—that bans most federal funding for abortion, even though he once criticized it.

He likewise took a moderate position on gay rights, saying that while marriage was “a sacred bond” and “should remain that way,” he believes that “there should be a way to protect the rights of people who are gay and lesbian.”

Giuliani suggested that the kind of domestic-partnership registries for same-sex couples that he supported in New York would be the best way to guarantee those rights.

He framed his speech by saying that he believes the most important, overarching issues before the electorate are defending the United States against terrorism and maintaining economic growth.

Giuliani said although his views on some of the controversial social issues may separate him from the most socially conservative voters, most Americans could agree with him on the most important issues.

“If we don’t find a way of uniting around broad principles that will appeal to a large segment of this country—if we can’t figure that out—we’re going to lose this election,” he said. “We cannot go into the next election the same way that we went into the last two.”

While the HBU crowd appeared to receive the speech enthusiastically, several Christian conservative leaders seemed much less enthusiastic.

Tony Perkins, president of the Washington-based Family Research Council, denounced Giuliani’s speech in his e-mail newsletter. “When people hear Rudy Giuliani speak about taxpayer-funded abortions, gay ‘rights’ and gun control, they don’t hear a choice; they hear an echo of Hillary Clinton,” he said.

Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s [Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission](#), told the *New York Times* that Giuliani’s position on abortion is “repugnant to pro-lifers” and demonstrates “a moral obtuseness that is stunning.”

Some of Giuliani’s former allies also denounced his abortion positions from the opposite perspective, saying he had betrayed them. The New York affiliate of [NARAL](#) Pro-Choice America released a questionnaire from one of his mayoral campaigns showing that Giuliani was strongly supportive of all its positions on abortion rights—contradicting many of his recently expressed views.

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