

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Nashville, Tennessee**

Bush speech beats war drums, focuses on 'compassion' agenda

By Robert Marus

Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com

January 29, 2003

Volume: 03-08-3429

MAR 24 2003

WASHINGTON (ABP) – Amid talk of international armed wars, President Bush spent much of his second State of the Union speech touting domestic positions that likely will lead to a few home-grown ideological conflicts.

Addressing a packed House of Representatives chamber Jan. 28, Bush recited a litany of causes he believes justify an attack on Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, made glancing references to the ongoing war on terrorism, and argued for tax-cut proposals and an expansion of his faith-based initiative that already have congressional Democrats strongly opposed to him.

While Bush spent much of the second half of his speech laying out his case against Iraq, he devoted much of the first half to issues on what White House officials call his "compassion agenda." Bush said he wants "to apply the compassion of America to the deepest problems of America. For so many in our country – the homeless, the fatherless, the addicted – the need is great."

Bush alluded to a 19th-century hymn well-known to Baptists: "Yet there is power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people."

Bush again urged Congress to pass his "faith-based initiative" – a plan that includes expanding the ability of government agencies to give taxpayer money to churches and other deeply religious institutions to perform social services.

"Americans are doing the work of compassion every day – visiting prisoners, providing shelter to battered women, bringing companionship to lonely seniors," Bush said. "These good works deserve our praise. They deserve our personal support. And, when appropriate, they deserve the assistance of our government."

Faith-based legislation stalled in Congress last year, due in part to objections from religious-liberty and other civil-rights advocates. Opponents contend that providing government money to churches and mosques violates the First Amendment's ban on government support of religion and also contend that it is wrong to provide government funding to organizations that can legally discriminate in their hiring on bases such race, religion, and sexual orientation.

However, Bush used an executive order in December to circumvent Congress and implement many of the controversial aspects of the faith-based initiative. However, he is asking Congress to pass legislation so that his changes cannot be revoked by executive orders of future administrations.

Interviewed after the President's speech, Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) said Bush's proposal violates the goals of the framers of the First Amendment because it ultimately will lead to divisiveness and competition among religious groups. Nadler is the ranking minority member of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution.

"When you start giving money to the al-Qaida Mosque...or to the black Muslims, or to the Wiccans...some more people will be against this," Nadler said. "It is important to have a strong separation of church and state when talking about appropriations because the Founding Fathers knew it could tear people apart. Appropriations is already a vicious enough process but when the fight [over appropriations] is between the Baptists and the Presbyterians every year, it will get really ugly."

Bush also opened a new legal front for the faith-based initiative in his address. He proposed a new \$600 million plan that would allow those being treated for drug or alcohol addiction to receive government "vouchers" that they could use at the treatment program of their choice, including religious programs that involve conversion.

The Supreme Court has not ruled on the constitutionality of social-service voucher programs that include religious groups, although last year the Court did approve an Ohio school-voucher program that includes religious schools. A lower federal court recently gave the OK to a similar voucher drug-treatment program in Wisconsin.

Ira "Chip" Lupu, a George Washington University law professor and co-leader of a legal research project for the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, said he believes a voucher-style "faith-based" program could survive constitutional review.

"They [White House officials] are being very shrewd constitutionally, because a direct financing program that would include faith-intensive drug treatment organizations such as Teen Challenge.... would be unconstitutional under the current law," Lupu said. He and colleague Robert Tuttle predicted several months ago in a law review article that the Supreme Court's decision on school vouchers would open the next legal frontier for religious social-service agencies that wanted to receive government funding.

But Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), a Baptist and veteran of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, said he is still suspicious of the White House's plan because, even through vouchers, government funds organizations that are allowed to discriminate in hiring and provision of services. "I want it to be free of discrimination based on religion, based on race," Lewis said. "I think whatever we can do in a proper and appropriate way to combat drugs we should do...but we must maintain a strong and solid wall between church and state."

Bush also reiterated his support for additional tax cuts, drawing mostly partisan applause from his Republican supporters in the House chamber. Many Democrats and some Republicans claim Bush's tax cuts are fiscally irresponsible and do little to stimulate the economy because they mainly benefit those – the wealthiest Americans – who are least likely to spend any money saved immediately.

Bush drew some of his strongest applause from most Republicans and some Democrats when he touched on life-ethics issues. Calling on Congress to help create a "culture that values every life," Bush said, "in this work we must not overlook the weakest among us. I ask you to protect infants at the very hour of birth and end the practice of partial-birth abortion. And because no human life should be started or ended as the object of an experiment, I ask you to set a high standard for humanity and pass a law against all human cloning."

A ban on certain late-term abortion procedures that abortion opponents label "partial-birth" abortion is expected to pass Congress this year. However, the fate of a cloning ban is less certain. Competing versions of a cloning ban died in the Senate last year amid controversy over whether a cloning ban should include so-called "therapeutic" cloning to produce replacement organs and tissues.

Saying, "As our nation moves troops and builds alliances to make our world safer, we must also remember our calling, as a blessed country, to make this world better," Bush proposed a program to combat AIDS in Africa. Noting that there are around 30 million Africans living with AIDS, but only 50,000 are receiving the kinds of life-extending drug treatments available to Westerners who have the HIV virus, Bush proposed what he called "the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief." He asked Congress to commit nearly \$10 billion in new funds for building a AIDS clinics in several African nations, funding health-care professionals to treat the disease and providing HIV-prevention education as well as antiretroviral drugs to those already infected. The White House has not said whether the AIDS prevention efforts will operate from an abstinence-only perspective.

Reporters awaiting entry to the House press gallery were given a grim reminder of the wartime nature of Bush's speech via a videotape instructing them how to don new airtight masks designed to protect Capitol employees and visitors from chemical and biological weapons attacks. In his speech, Bush made mention of continued successes in the ongoing war on terrorism, but he did not mention one name – that of terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden.

To the cheers of conservative Republicans – and the stony silence of liberal Democrats – Bush set a unilateral tone in his pronouncements on Iraq. "All free nations have a stake in preventing sudden and catastrophic attack. We are asking them to join us, and many are doing so. Yet the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others," Bush said. "Whatever action is required, whenever action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people."

Accusing Iraq of numerous violations of United Nations resolutions, Bush declined to provide hard evidence that Iraq was hiding chemical or biological weapons. Recounting the Iraqi regime's numerous egregious violations of human rights, Bush said, "If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning."

Calling freedom "not America's gift to the world" but "God's gift to humanity," Bush said the U.S. will lead a coalition to bring freedom to Iraq.

Bob Edgar, National Council of Churches president, said Bush still had not made an adequate case for attacking Iraq in Christian terms. "We should all be concerned about the tone of the President's war rhetoric," Edgar said.

Noting the World Health Organization's estimate that an American war on Iraq right now could kill as many as 500,000 Iraqis, Edgar said, "Americans are right to be uneasy about the morality of a pre-emptive American invasion that, even with extreme care on our part, could kill a staggering number of innocent civilians."



Copyright 2002 Associated Baptist Press. All rights reserved.

Go To: [[ABPNews Home](#)] [[What's ABP?](#)] [[Links](#)] [[Town Hall](#)] [[The Stacks](#)] [[React!](#)]