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We expect our government to insist that nations who want to be in good relation with us cease and desist from persecuting Christians. A foreign policy that denies our basic values and seeks only to meet the requirements of commerce and business is totally unacceptable.

Some foreign governments think America is a "money-bags" democracy for sale to the highest bidder and enslaved by the bottom line. They are wrong. Most Americans still cherish the timeless truths of our Declaration of Independence. America still believes "that all men are created equal" and "that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights" and "that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

That is our priceless, timeless heritage as Americans, and Americans want our government to make that clear to all the governments of the world. (Salt, 1997)

Dr. Richard Land
President, SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

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[Alito nomination may be battle over abortion](#) The confirmation of federal appeals court judge Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court looks more and more like it may come down to a showdown over abortion.

[Marriage amendment delayed in committee](#) It appears the Senate Judiciary Committee will not act on a constitutional amendment to protect marriage before 2006.

[Panel urges U.S. to press China on religious liberty](#) The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has urged the federal government to communicate a "consistent, candid and coordinated message" to China that it needs to reverse the deteriorating conditions for religious freedom and other human rights in the world's most populous country.

[Same 8 regimes named worst religious liberty violators](#) The U.S. State Department has named the same eight governments to its list of the world's worst violators of religious freedom for the second consecutive year.

[Lawmakers urge Bush to protect chaplains' freedom](#) Members of Congress have called on President Bush to ensure the religious freedom of chaplains in the armed services.

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Alito nomination may be battle over abortion

The confirmation of federal appeals court judge Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court looks more and more like it may come down to a showdown over abortion.

The Senate Judiciary Committee is scheduled to open confirmation hearings on Alito Jan. 9, with Republican leadership hopeful there will be a floor vote Jan. 20.

President Bush nominated the veteran judge from the Third Circuit Court of Appeals Oct. 31, immediately pleasing social conservatives and eliciting vociferous opposition from abortion rights advocates and other liberals.

Alito, 55, has a reputation for judicial restraint and adherence to the text of the Constitution. As an appellate judge, he has ruled clearly on the pro-life side only once in four abortion-related cases, abiding either by Supreme Court precedent or basing his opinion on administrative law in the other three rulings, according to the National Right to Life Committee.

The Washington Times, however, reported Alito said in a 1985 document that he was "particularly proud" of his work for the U.S. solicitor general supporting the government's argument before the high court that "the Constitution does not protect a right to an abortion." That report has intensified the opposition against Alito and increased the uncertainty of his eventual confirmation.

Bush announced Alito's nomination only four days after his most recent nominee, White House counsel Harriet Miers, withdrew from consideration. Alito has been a member of the Third Circuit, based in Philadelphia, since 1990. The President said Alito "has more judicial experience than any Supreme Court nominee in more than 70 years."

Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said after the announcement, "The President has once again fulfilled his campaign promise to nominate to our nation's federal judiciary strict constructionist, original intent jurists of the first rank."

Bush "has underscored his commitment to the promises he made in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns," Land said. "Colleagues who have worked with Judge Alito describe him as 'brilliant,' 'fair' and 'tough,' three important qualities in a federal judge."

If confirmed, Alito will replace Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who announced her retirement July 1. O'Connor agreed to stay on the court until her replacement is confirmed. She has been a swing vote during her 24 years on the court, often siding with liberals in abortion and church-state cases.

[Back to Top](#)

Marriage amendment delayed in committee

It appears the Senate Judiciary Committee will not act on a constitutional amendment to protect marriage before 2006.

The Constitution, Civil Rights and Property Rights Subcommittee forwarded the Marriage Protection Amendment to the Judiciary Committee in a 5-4 vote Nov. 9, but action in the full committee was blocked Nov. 17. The Senate plans to recess soon, so it appears the committee will be unable to vote on the measure until next year.

A Democratic member of the committee used the one-time privilege of holding over the amendment, thereby preventing a vote at the panel's Nov. 17 meeting.

The subcommittee's vote was along party lines, with Republicans in the majority. Sen. Sam Brownback, R.-Kan., subcommittee chairman, called the vote "an important step in the fight to protect traditional marriage. We should act as soon as possible to protect traditional marriage."

The amendment, [S.J. Res. 1](#), simply reads: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any state, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

Last year, the Senate failed even to give an up-or-down vote to a similar amendment. Supporters gained only 48 of the 60 votes needed to halt debate and allow a vote—a procedure called invoking cloture. Fifty senators voted against cloture, thereby blocking a vote.

The House of Representatives achieved a majority on the Marriage Protection Amendment in 2004 with a 227-186 vote, but it fell far short of the required two-thirds, or 290 votes, needed for passage.

Ratification of an amendment to the federal constitution requires passage by two-thirds of both houses of Congress and approval by three-fourths of the states.

[Back to Top](#)

Panel urges U.S. to press China on religious liberty

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has urged the federal government to communicate a "consistent, candid and coordinated message" to China that it needs to reverse the deteriorating conditions for religious freedom and other human rights in the world's most populous country.

Reporting Nov. 9 on its two-week trip to China, USCIRF found a crackdown continues on unapproved religious groups and called on Washington to take a variety of steps to influence reform under the communist regime.

"The commission finds that the Chinese government continues to systemically violate the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, contravening both the Chinese constitution and international human rights norms," the bipartisan panel said in its report. "The room for political openness, public activism and greater civil and individual freedoms is narrowing in China."

The Chinese government especially suppresses Protestant Christians and Roman Catholics in unregistered, or underground, churches, as well as Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims and the Falun Gong, a meditation sect.

The commission called on President Bush to press Chinese leaders for change on religious liberty and other human rights when he meets with them soon in Beijing. The President is scheduled to be in China Nov. 19-21.

Among the USCIRF's recommendations to the U.S. government are: (1) Urge Beijing to end its suppression of religious groups and its efforts to force religious adherents to renounce their beliefs, and to release prisoners held because of their faith; (2) bring up China's human rights abuses before United Nations bodies and at other multi-national meetings; (3) implement a March agreement with China in which parents would have the right to educate their children based on their religious beliefs and underage children would have the liberty to practice their faith, and (4) continue to press Beijing to protect North Korean refugees who flee to China for asylum.

ERLC President Richard Land, a USCIRF commissioner, said all of the recommendations are important, "because together the whole is more than the sum of the parts. And we hope that taken together that these policies will be a tsunami wave that will go over [the] top and then undermine the levees of intolerance and persecution."

Land, one of seven commissioners on the two-week trip in August to China, said the report is "a candid assessment of what we found when we were there, that there is significant religious repression and significant discrimination and persecution of people of religious faith who refuse to dot the i's and cross the t's and live within the government's onerous and repressive regulations."

The USCIRF's report and recommendations on China may be accessed online at its website, www.uscirtf.gov.

[Back to Top](#)

Same 8 regimes named worst religious liberty violators

The U.S. State Department has named the same eight governments to its list of the world's worst violators of religious freedom for the second consecutive year.

On Nov. 8, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Vietnam had been redesignated as "countries of particular concern" (CPCs), a classification reserved for governments practicing or permitting particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

The State Department, however, refused to include three other countries—Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—recommended for CPC designation by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan panel that advises the executive branch and Congress.

"The omission of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan from the CPC list is particularly troubling and a discredit to Congress' intent in passing the International Religious Freedom Act," USCIRF Chairman Michael Cromartie said in a written release. "Turkmenistan, among the most repressive states in the world today, allows virtually no independent religious activity. The government of Uzbekistan places strict restrictions on religious practice and continues to crack down harshly on individuals and groups that operate outside of government-controlled religious organizations."

The State Department is in late-stage discussions with one or two possible CPCs and could make additions to the list at any time, said John Hanford, ambassador at large for international religious freedom.

The CPC list is dominated by communist and Islamic regimes. China, North Korea and Vietnam have communist-controlled governments, while Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan have Muslim-dominated regimes.

ERLC President Richard Land is a commissioner on the nine-member USCIRF.

The State Department's full report may be accessed online at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/>.

[Back to Top](#)**Lawmakers urge Bush to protect chaplains' freedom**

Members of Congress have called on President Bush to ensure the religious freedom of chaplains in the armed services.

Senators and representatives, led by Rep. Walter Jones, R.-N.C., have written the President asking him to issue an executive order protecting the "right of military chaplains to pray according to their faith." The 71 representatives and two senators said in the letter they had learned in all the military branches "it is becoming increasingly difficult for Christian chaplains to use the name of Jesus when praying."

The lawmakers focused most of their attention on guidelines recently proposed for Air Force chaplains, describing them as restrictive and suppressive. They also expressed the concern the guidelines, if adopted, might be implemented in the other branches of the armed services.

Six days after Jones sent his letter, Sen. Sam Brownback, R.-Kan., wrote Bush Oct. 31 requesting he review the Air Force's interim guidelines and seek to make sure all military directives for chaplains "truly protect free exercise of religion."

Jones and his colleagues told the President, "The current demand in the guidelines for so-called 'non-sectarian' prayers is merely a euphemism declaring that prayers will be acceptable only so long as they censor Christian beliefs."

Brownback echoed Jones and the others in expressing concern about a provision in the proposed guidelines apparently limiting Air Force members' discussions on religious faith to peers. Another section seems to restrict "how, when and where" chaplains and other Air Force members may pray publicly, he said.

The interim guidelines do not include a statement on evangelism included in the Code of Ethics issued only in January by the Air Force Chaplain Service. That document said of a chaplain, "I will not actively proselytize from other religious bodies. However, I retain the right to instruct and/or evangelize those who are not affiliated." The Air Force withdrew that code Aug. 10 and issued the interim guidelines Aug. 29.

The Air Force's interim guidelines may be accessed online at www.af.mil/library/guidelines.pdf.

[Back to Top](#)