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A For Faith & Family Ministry Partner

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The institution of marriage—the covenantal union of a man and woman—has served for all of history as the bedrock of society. The marriage of one man and one woman is the fount out of which flows the critical values that sustain and benefit societies. There is inconvertible sociological evidence that proves that when marriages fail, families are weakened; and when families are weakened, society as a whole feels the impact. It was not happenstance that the first institution established by God was marriage.

God has ordained three institutions in human society to enable individuals to fulfill their God-given purposes: Marriage (the family), the Church, and Civil Government. Each of these institutions is indispensable in our society and each makes certain uniquely valuable contributions to society. If any of these institutions are impaired, society will suffer in some very specific ways. If the church is undermined, people will have a reduced opportunity to hear the counsel of God; if the government is undermined, the people are not protected from predatory evil; and if the institution of marriage is undermined, families suffer, with the weakest and most defenseless among us—the children—suffering the most grievously. If any of these three institutions seek to dominate the legitimate sphere of the other, or surrenders its proper sphere of influence, society's very foundations are imperiled.

The family is a critically important institution. It is within the family that children learn the vital attributes of compassion and mercy—essential elements that compel us to care for the weak in society. Family members learn how to cooperate with each other—an essential social trait that enables individuals to combine their energies to accomplish great things for God. They learn the value of making and keeping commitments to others—an indispensable characteristic that assures unity and success in our God-given purposes. Most importantly, in families individuals learn to sacrifice for the needs of others—the linchpin of healthy human relationships and a strong society.

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

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ERLC opposes asylum changes in terrorist bill The ERLC is opposed to new legislative language that could hinder refugees fleeing to the United States from religious and political oppression.

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Showdown reportedly near on judicial filibusters

The Republican leadership in the U.S. Senate apparently is moving toward a showdown over judicial filibusters.

It appears likely Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee will call for a vote in the next few weeks to change the Senate's rules in order to bar filibusters of judicial nominees, according to *The Washington Post*. If the vote succeeds, only 51 votes will be needed to confirm a nominee, instead of the 60 votes now required to break a filibuster.

Democrats used the delaying tactic in the first administration of George W. Bush to block 10 of his 52 appellate court nominees. They are poised to use the filibuster to block some of the same judges from confirmation this year as well. While all of the filibustered nominees had more than 50 votes for confirmation in Bush's first presidency, they could not achieve the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture and end the filibusters.

Among the nominees who have been filibustered are Janice Rogers Brown, an appointee to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals; Priscilla Owen, a nominee to the Fifth Circuit, and William Pryor, a nominee to the 11th Circuit.

Foes of the nominees have accused the filibustered judges of being outside the mainstream, but much of the opposition appears to be based on the nominees' pro-life rulings and viewpoints.

To contact your senators to express your opinion, you may call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or email their offices through the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's Web site, www.faithandfamily.com

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Battle over same-sex 'marriage' continues in states

The states continue to form the battleground over homosexual "marriage."

Among recent developments on the issue, according to Baptist Press:

- The Oregon Supreme Court invalidated in a unanimous decision April 14 the marriage licenses issued to same-sex couples last year in Multnomah County, the state's most populous county. The court ruled that the licenses violated Oregon law and refused a request to legalize civil unions, which provide homosexual couples with most of the benefits of marriage.
- Connecticut enacted a law legalizing civil unions for same-sex couples. When Gov. Jodi Rell, R., signed the bill into law April 20, Connecticut joined Vermont as the only states to endorse civil unions. The law, however, defines marriage as between a man and a woman.
- Kansas voters approved by a 70-30 percent margin April 5 a state constitutional amendment

restricting marriage to a man and a woman. It became the 18th state in 18 tries to pass a marriage amendment. The Kansas version prohibits both same-sex "marriage" and civil unions.

- A California appeals court ruled April 4 the state's domestic partnership law does not violate Proposition 22, the 2000 voter-approved prohibition on homosexual "marriage." Domestic partnerships, which are similar to civil unions, provide same-sex couples with nearly the same benefits as marriage. The court decided, however, the legislature cannot legalize homosexual "marriage" without permitting voters to decide the issue.

Most pro-family organizations, including the ERLC, are seeking to build support for a federal amendment will define marriage as a union of only a man and a woman.

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Land urges pressure on China to help North Koreans

ERLC Resident Richard Land joined Sen. Sam Brownback, R.-Kan., and other human rights advocates in calling for action on behalf of North Korean refugees who escape to China. They urged pressure on China to protect refugees fleeing North Korea, a communist dictatorship ruled over by Kim Jong Il and widely considered the world's most oppressive regime.

The calls for action at the Capitol Hill news conference followed a screening of two public executions secretly recorded and smuggled out of North Korea. The video, which was telecast first by the Japan Independent News Network, showed the executions by firing squad of two people March 1 and one person March 2. The executions took place after brief, outdoor trials at sites in North Korea near the Chinese border. Those executed apparently had helped refugees cross the border into China.

While Land, Brownback and others condemned North Korea's act of executing its citizens for non-capital crimes, the focus of their criticism was China's refusal to protect the refugees. China has been returning North Korean refugees to their home country, where they face imprisonment, torture and sometimes death.

"There is only one reason [the North Korean government] continues to exist, and it's because of the support of China, and it is time that the international community shame China and put some pressure behind that shame," Land said.

"It is time for us to call China to account, not just through protests but through concrete methods," he said. "If China continues to act in an uncivilized way toward its own people and North Korean refugees, it is time for those of us who are resolved to do what we can to insist that the considerable influence and the considerable resources of the United States are on the side of the oppressed and not the oppressors, to develop creative ways to force China to choose between its continued support for the regime of Kim Jong Il and its own economic progress."

"We become partly responsible for the oppression when we continue to treat an oppressor nation as if it were a civilized one," Land said.

The methods could include economic boycotts, calls for relocation of the 2008 Olympics set for Beijing and a boycott of the Olympics, Land said.

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ERLC opposes asylum changes in terrorist bill

The ERLC is opposed to new legislative language that could hinder refugees fleeing to the United States from religious and political oppression.

The ERLC has joined a coalition of organizations opposing provisions in the REAL ID Act, H.R. 418, that change federal law regarding asylum for refugees. The bill is intended to strengthen safeguards against terrorist entry into this country, but the revisions to asylum law in section 101 will not provide greater

protection for Americans, according to the ERLC.

The changes are "well-meaning attempts" to protect Americans from terrorist attacks, but they "will not protect an organized, well-financed terrorist," ERLC Vice President Barrett Duke said at an April 12 Capitol Hill news conference, according to a text of his statement. "They will only deny protection to people who have nowhere else to turn, who believe that the United States is a haven of peace for the oppressed, down-trodden and persecuted people of the world.

"The changes being proposed are ill conceived in large measure because they make the wrong assumptions about the groups of people they are addressing," said Duke, the ERLC's VP for public policy and research. "The changes assume that the terrorists we are worried about are ignorant, ill prepared and disorganized, and that the people we want to help are clear headed, well prepared and well acquainted with our asylum system—all of which are too often not the case."

The U.S. House of Representatives already has passed the measure and sent it to the Senate. The House voted 261-161 for the bill Feb. 10.

The ERLC does not oppose other portions of the bill, only the asylum section.

A summary critique of section 101 includes the following among the asylum provisions in the REAL ID Act that are disconcerting to the organizations: (1) It requires "insurmountable burdens of proof" for refugees to document they have been victims of persecution; (2) it mandates refugees prove the "central" motive for those who persecuted them; (3) it eliminates judicial review of refugees' cases.

A detailed analysis of section 101 of the legislation is available at <http://www.jubileecampaign.org/home/index.php>.

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Administration officials criticize Bush stem cell policy

Some officials in President Bush's administration criticized his opposition to federal funding of destructive embryonic stem cell research during a recent congressional hearing.

Various directors at the National Institutes of Health expressed before a Senate committee their frustration with the Bush policy, which bars federal funds for stem cell research that results in the destruction of human embryos. The rule permits funding for such research only on stem cell lines already in existence prior to Sept. 9, 2001, when the President announced the policy.

The directors' testimony warned researchers might move to countries where there are more lenient rules and abundant funding, *The Washington Post* reported.

"Progress has been delayed by the limited number of cell lines," said Elizabeth Nabel, new director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, in written testimony, according to *The Post*. "The NIH has ceded leadership in this field."

Duane Alexander, director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, cited "cumbersome procedures and long waiting times" for legal stem cells, which frequently are inferior and expire when thawed, *The Post* reported.

The negative testimony regarding Bush's policy came April 6, about two weeks after it was revealed the Republican leadership of the House of Representatives has promised a vote on legislation designed to liberalize the rule.

Rep. Michael Castle, R.-Del., is sponsoring the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, H.R. 810, while Sen. John McCain is the sponsor of the Senate version, S. 471. The House has 193 cosponsors, signaling it could pass. If the House and Senate agree on the same measure, Bush would have to veto it to prevent it from becoming law.

The ERLC and other pro-life organizations oppose embryonic stem cell research because it requires the

of embryos.

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Appeals court upholds Ten Commandments display

The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, which is based in Chicago, has upheld a Ten Commandments display that is similar to one currently being considered by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The appeals court announced March 25 an Indiana county's display that includes the Ten Commandments is constitutional. The split, three-judge panel said it sees no reason why the display of historical documents "must be purged of the Ten Commandments to survive constitutional scrutiny."

The Seventh Circuit decision came as the Supreme Court prepares to deliver by July opinions in two cases regarding Ten Commandments displays. One involves the inclusion of the Ten Commandments in a display of historical documents in two Kentucky county courthouses, while the other focuses on a stand-alone monument on the state capitol grounds in Austin, Tex.

The latest appeals court ruling came in a case involving a "Foundations of American Law and Government Display" in a county administration building in Elkhart, Ind. The county commission approved the display of the documents, which were privately donated, in 2003. In addition to the Ten Commandments, other documents in the display included the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Mayflower Compact and the Magna Carta. The documents were the same size. Also included was an explanation of the historical importance of each document in the display.

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