

President Bush might support a constitutional amendment to prevent same-sex marriage. But he stopped short of endorsing the Federal Marriage Amendment, already introduced in both houses of Congress, in a Dec. 16 interview with Diane Sawyer on the ABC program *PrimeTime*.

"If necessary, I will support a constitutional amendment which would honor marriage between a man and a woman," Bush said near the end of the interview.

In other language sure to please his social conservative supporters, he said he believes the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court "overreached its bounds as a court. It did the job of the Legislature. It was a very activist court in making the decision it made."

Bush left open the possibility of supporting the state option of civil unions for gays, a position that Vice President Dick Cheney supported during the 2000 campaign. And he expressed a states' rights position in terms of marriage decisions, "except and unless judicial rulings undermine the sanctity of marriage, in which case we may need a constitutional amendment."

When asked if the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act was sufficient to protect marriage—as its principal author, former U.S. Rep. Bob Barr, R-Ga., has argued—Bush said, "It may be undermined at this point." He added, "The country be tolerant of people and understand people, but tolerance and belief in marriage aren't mutually exclusive points of view."

Bush dodged the question of whether gays are sinners by saying, "We're all sinners...and having said that, however, I do believe in the sanctity of marriage...but I don't see that as con-

## SEAL OF APPROVAL

**President Bush suggests support of constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage** by Bob Roehr

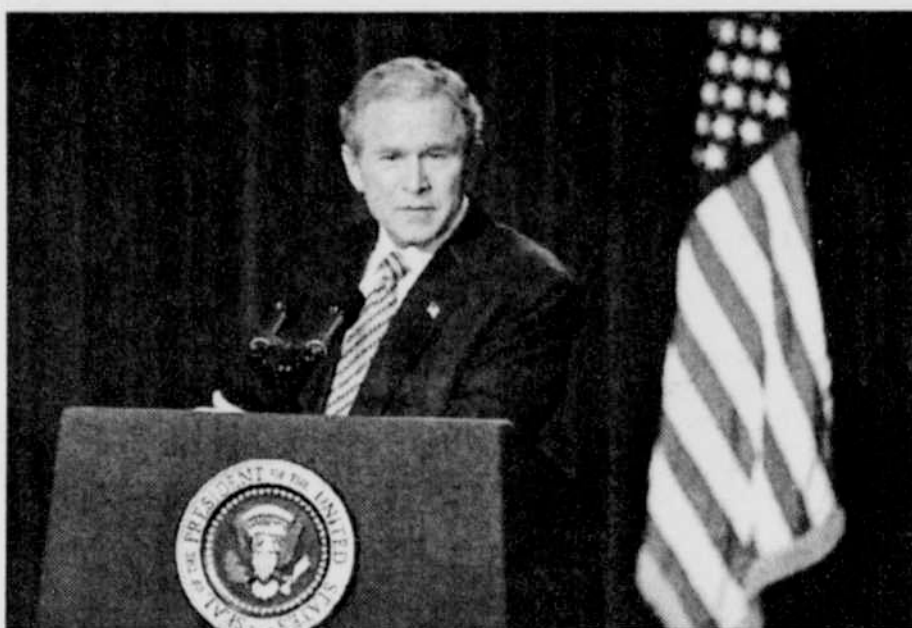
flict with being a tolerant person or an understanding person."

Bush's responses in the interview were essentially the same ones he has consistently given throughout the year when asked about gay marriage. He has stated his belief that marriage is between a man and a woman and that his administration is studying options to preserve that interpretation of marriage.

The incremental change Bush expressed in this interview was in a greater uncertainty about DOMA and in using the specific words "constitutional amendment" rather than the broader concept of examining all options. However, he stopped well short of endorsing either the amendment that is before Congress, or even more restrictive language that would ban civil unions, which some social conservative extremists are considering proposing.

Bush's comments seemed to please no one.

"It's never necessary—in fact it should be shameful—to insert prejudice and discrimina-



President Bush says he would support an anti-gay amendment to the U.S. Constitution "if necessary," a position he believes does not conflict with being a "tolerant" person

tion into the U.S. Constitution," said Winnie Stachelberg, political director of the Human Rights Campaign. "To use this country's most cherished document to strip away individual liberty and freedom would be nothing short of a disgrace—with which the vast majority of the American people disagree."

Log Cabin Republicans "has consistently and clearly opposed any effort to write discrimination into the United States Constitution,"

executive director Patrick Guerriero said. He urged Bush "to avoid a divisive culture war that will only divide the American family."

"President Bush continues to flirt with this anti-family amendment long after every Democratic candidate for president has condemned it," said Dave Noble, executive director of National Stonewall Democrats. "This amendment isn't about protecting marriage, it is about prejudice."

Presidential candidate Dick Gephardt called on Bush "to end his alliance with bigotry once and for all and speak out against the Republican Party's hostile election-year attempt to polarize the election." He strongly opposes the amendment "as purely political and unnecessarily divisive at the expense of those who already suffer from discrimination." However, he stopped short of calling for marriage equality for gays.

"We consider this a declaration of war on gay America," said Matt Foreman, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director. "We cannot and will not be silent in the face of this attempt to enshrine our community with second-class citizenship in this nation's most sacred document."

The far right wasn't exactly jumping up and down with glee, either. Tony Perkins, executive director of the Family Research Council, said, "It sounds as though the administration would support civil unions, which are counterfeits of the institution of marriage."

Andrew Sullivan, a gay conservative supporter of same-sex marriage, offered an analysis on his blog, calling Bush's comments "a carefully tailored piece of obfuscation. It seems to me that, from this statement, we neither have an unconditional endorsement of the FMA nor an uncategorical defense of states' rights with regard to marriage. Bush wants to have it both ways." ■

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