

Bush will not 'compromise' on gay 'marriage'

Says he wants
it restricted to
man and woman

By Bill Sammon
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President Bush yesterday said he would not "compromise" on the issue of homosexual "marriage" and said administration lawyers are exploring ways to restrict marriage to heterosexuals.

"Marriage is between a man and a woman, and I think we ought to codify that one way or the other," Mr. Bush said in a wide-ranging press conference in the Rose Garden. "We've got lawyers looking at the best way to do that."

In his most extensive comments on homosexuality since taking office, the president tried not to be judgmental, though he suggested homosexuality is a sin.

"I am mindful that we're all sinners, and I caution those who may try to take the speck out of their neighbor's eye when they got a log in their own," he said. "I think it's very important for our society to respect each individual, to welcome those with good hearts, to be a welcoming country."

"On the other hand, that does not mean that somebody like me needs to compromise on an issue such as marriage," Mr. Bush added. "And that's really where the issue is heading here in Washington, and that is the definition of marriage."

The call to "codify" marriage as union between a man and woman went beyond the president's remarks earlier this month, when he



Photo by Jessica Tefft/The Washington Times

Taking a stand: In his first press conference since the start of the Iraq war, President Bush yesterday said his administration is working to restrict marriage to heterosexuals.

said a constitutional amendment to block homosexual "marriages" might be unnecessary. That proposal is backed by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Tennessee Republican.

It is also supported by Sen. Rick Santorum, Pennsylvania Republican, who drew the ire of homosexuals earlier this year by likening homosexual behavior to incest and bigamy.

The issue has become more urgent since June, when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Texas law banning sodomy. Meanwhile, courts in Massachusetts and New

see BUSH, page A22

• President Bush defends Condoleezza Rice on uranium claim. A3

BUSH

From page A1

Jersey are expected to rule soon on whether to allow homosexual unions, a step that Canada has recently taken.

While some Democrats and journalists have tried to portray the Republican Party as homophobic for opposing homosexual marriages, the American public increasingly rejects the concept. A recent Gallup poll showed that 48 percent of Americans support homosexual marriage, down from 60 percent before the Supreme Court ruling.

Homosexual rights activists yesterday criticized Mr. Bush's comment that "we're all sinners," saying the remark was directed at them.

"While we respect President Bush's religious views, it is unbecoming of the president of the United States to characterize same-sex couples as 'sinners,'" said Matt Foreman, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's executive director. "It's also sad that, at a moment in history that cries out for leadership and moral courage, President Bush has instead opted for the divisive, antigay politics of the past."

White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan defended Mr. Bush, saying the president had not intended to single out homosexuals as "sinners."

"The president doesn't believe in casting stones. He believes we ought to treat one another with dignity and respect," Mr. McClellan said.

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's biggest homosexual and lesbian political group, charged that Mr. Bush's desire to have a law restricting marriage to heterosexuals was a "call to codify discrimination."

Mr. Bush also covered a range of other domestic and political topics, including his re-election campaign. When a reporter asked how he can spend upwards of \$170 million in a primary campaign with no opponent, the president shot back, "Just watch."

Mr. Bush also shrugged off the same reporter's suggestion that he was "unduly attentive" to rich political donors.

"I think the American people, now that they've realized I'm going to seek re-election, expect me to seek re-election," he said. "They expect me to actually do what candidates do. And so, you're right, I'll be spending some time going out and asking the American people to support me."

The president was unapologetic about his fund-raising prowess, which has far surpassed that of his Democratic challengers. He hinted the funds were a harbinger of his chances for a second term.

"We're having pretty good success," he said. "It's kind of an interesting barometer, early barometer, about the support we're garnering."

Mr. Bush also defended his tax cuts, though he acknowledged they were responsible for about a quarter of the federal deficit.

"We would have had deficits with or without tax cuts, for this reason: The slowdown in the economy, the decline in the stock market starting March of 2000, plus the recession, reduced the amount of revenues coming into the federal treasury," he said.

"Secondly, we spent money on the war and we spent money on homeland security," he added. "My attitude is, if we're going to put our troops into harm's way, they must have the very best."

Mr. Bush said the economic recovery could accelerate in the coming months. But the president added that Congress must do its part by passing legislation that he said would aid the recovery.