

Waffling on Homosexual "Marriage"

by William F. Jasper

"Bush Appears to Open Door to Same-Sex Unions." That was the headline of a December 17 Reuters news story by Randall Mikkelsen, reporting on an interview of the president by ABC's Diane Sawyer the previous day. The Reuters story began: "President Bush on Tuesday appeared to open the door to same-sex unions that stop short of marriage, by saying people should be able to make 'whatever legal arrangements' they want as long as a state recognizes them."

The headline and theme of the Reuters story contrasted sharply with most other news coverage of the interview, which tended to give

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the impression that President Bush is a strong champion of the sanctity of marriage. The headline of the Associated Press story on the Sawyer interview read, "Bush Says He Could Back Gay Marriage Ban." The *New York Times* ran a similar story headlined, "Marriage Amendment Backed by Bush."

So, is the president for or against same-sex "marriage"? More importantly, what will he do in terms of public policy and in terms of steering the Republican Party's position on this and other homosexual "rights" issues?

Here's what the president actually said, when Sawyer asked if he would support a constitutional amendment "against gay marriage and against gay civil unions." "If necessary," said Bush, "I will support a constitutional amendment which would honor marriage between a man and a woman, codify that, and will — the position of this administration is that whatever legal arrangements people want to make, they're allowed to make, so long as it's embraced by the state...."

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, which supports the amendment effort, said that President Bush's statement "sounds as though the administration would support civil unions which are counterfeits of the institution of marriage." The Reuters report noted the president's comments "indicated that Bush, as he heads into his reelection campaign, was walking a fine line between the interests of his social conservative base which favors a constitutional ban on gay marriage and other voters who have shown more acceptance of same-sex unions."

The Bush camp has been straddling this fine line since before it came into office. In an October 2000 campaign debate, then-vice presidential candidate Dick Cheney addressed the issue in a way that alarmed conservatives and cheered the homosexual lobby. "I think states are likely to come to different conclusions, and that's appropriate," he said. Cheney, who has an openly lesbian daughter, continued by proposing that "we ought to do everything we can to tolerate and accommodate whatever kind of relationships people want to enter into." Accommodate? How? This seemed, at the very least, a major GOP weakening in the direction of accepting some sort of legal "civil union" status.

Republican Party Chairman Jim Nicholson tried to soothe anxiety over the remarks by saying that Bush and Cheney recognized that the civil-unions question was a "complicated" issue.

But Nicholson left little doubt of the GOP's direction. "We're a tolerant party," he said. "We don't support discrimination of any kind." Observing the Bush-Cheney-Nicholson dance over the civil-union issue, *New York Post* columnist Rod Dreher wrote at the time: "If a gay-friendly GOP administration takes over, there will be very little effective political opposition standing in the way of what gay-rights activists want. Social conservatives will be further isolated within the GOP." That is precisely what has been happening. Dreher continued: "Add that to both Bush and Cheney's weak responses on the RU-486 question, and social conservatives this morning have to be feeling shell-shocked by the men leading the party they thought was their home." ■