

# Bush Addresses SBC Via Tape

President Bush sent a videotape message to the Southern Baptist Convention Tuesday morning in Phoenix. It was not announced ahead of time or listed in the convention program. Last year Bush addressed the SBC live via satellite, making this the first time in history that a sitting president has spoken to the annual convention two years in a row.

“You and I share many common values,” Bush told convention messengers in Phoenix. “We believe in fostering a culture of life and that marriage and family are sacred institutions.” He also noted their shared opposition to human cloning, abortion and the appointment of federal judges who “legislate” rather than interpret the law.

He also mentioned his \$15 billion effort to fight AIDS overseas and vowed to continue to “hunt down” terrorists. He also touted his “faith-based” initiative, which would make it easier for religious organizations to contract with the government to provide social services.

Last year Bush praised Southern Baptists for their tradition of church-state separation and religious tolerance. In the months after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the president was sounding a theme that Americans shouldn’t blame terrorism on Muslims. Bush apparently was unaware that a day before a former SBC president denounced Islam’s founder as a “demon-possessed pedophile” and a terrorist.

Bush also didn’t mention his “roadmap” for peace in the Middle East. Prominent Southern Baptists are among recent critics of the plan, saying it does too little to safeguard Israel’s interests.

A Baptist ethicist criticized both Bush and convention leaders for playing politics.

“President Bush’s infomercial at the Southern Baptist Convention was shameful,”

said Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics. "It looked more like a political ad to campaign workers than a moral message to a religious gathering."

"Regrettably the president missed an opportunity to distance himself from a right-wing Christian agenda which demonizes Muslims, disregards the human rights of Palestinians and argues for the Bible as a blueprint for American foreign policy in the Middle East," Parham said.

"As for the fundamentalist leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, they have demonstrated again their lack of discernment. They tie the SBC too closely to the White House. They apparently desire the cultural affirmation which the president provides more than the prophetic distance which the biblical witness requires."

Southern Baptists have regularly invited sitting Republican presidents to speak at their annual convention. They did not extend invitations to the last two Democrats, however, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, who, ironically, both worshipped in Southern Baptist churches.

In other business on the convention's opening day, Southern Baptists adopted a budget that reduces funding for the Baptist World Alliance by \$125,000, to \$300,000. Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said a BWA study committee recommended the cut because of disagreements between the two groups.

While a main dispute centers on a pending membership application by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Chapman said the SBC delegation was more upset that a committee studying the matter denied due process in announcing its recommendation to allow the CBF into membership before an official vote.

Messengers also re-elected Jack Graham, pastor of the 21,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, to a second one-year term as president.