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Bush lip service moot

'Federal Marriage Amendment' fails again — though supporters vow to keep pushing constitutional intolerance

by Donald Miller

WASHINGTON, D.C. — It was reminiscent of a scene that should have made its way into the film "Wag the Dog" — a 1997 comedy about an American president's attempt to divert attention from scandal by conjuring up some positive spin.

Initial invitations to the press conference President George W. Bush held on Monday, May 5, indicated his proclamation of support for the anti-gay "Federal Marriage Amendment" (FMA) was to be held in the White House Rose Garden.

Some of the supporters of the FMA — namely Focus on the Family's James Dobson and Matt Daniels from Alliance for Marriage — were reportedly going to stand side by side with Bush.

In what was apparently a last-minute dust

up of the plans — possibly an effort to soften the impact of Bush's support for the divisive FMA, the conference was moved from the historic Rose Garden to the more austere Roosevelt Room in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. When he appeared before the camera, President Bush stood alone.

White House spokesman Tony Snow claimed that no one else was scheduled to appear with the president and the event was never scheduled for the Rose Garden, despite the previously released announcement.

"It wasn't moved is the answer," said Snow, explaining that some of the invitations were sent out "preliminarily before the president had an opportunity to examine the schedule and before people had signed off on it."

Originally scheduled for 1:30 p.m., the conference began more than 15 minutes past its scheduled time, giving even more credence to the last-minute shuffle.

Political insiders are speculating that the move was in reaction to Democrats, who days earlier had cried foul over the usage of the Rose Garden for such an announcement.

Additional speculation indicated that presidential advisers privately expressed concern for Bush to be seen appearing with individuals that are regarded as extremists by a majority of Americans.

When Bush finally did speak, he seemed somewhat ill-at-ease and half-hearted with his pronouncement.

"You come from many backgrounds and faith traditions, yet united in this common belief — marriage is the most fundamental institution of civilization and it should not be redefined by activist judges," said Bush. "You are here because you strongly support a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as a union of a man and a



'An amendment to the Constitution is necessary because activist courts have left our nation with no other choice.'

— President Bush in a conference endorsing the 'federal marriage amendment'

woman and I am proud to stand with you."

Repeatedly using the phrase "activist judges," Bush talked about the need for the amendment on a national level to "fully protect marriage."

"Some argue that defining marriage should be left to the states," Bush continued. "The fact is, state legislatures are trying to address this issue, but across the country, they are being thwarted by activist judges who are overturning the expressed will of their people."

"This national question requires a national solution. And on an issue of such profound importance, that solution should come not from the courts, but from the people of the United States. An amend-

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25 years and counting

A look back at the history of the AIDS pandemic

by Bob Adams and Michael Edwards

The first human known to be infected with HIV was a man from Kinshasa, Congo who had his blood stored in 1959 as part of a medical study, decades before scientists knew the AIDS virus existed.

Presumably, someone in rural Cameroon was bitten by a chimp or was cut while butchering one and became infected with the ape virus. That person passed it to someone else, who, in turn, passed it to another.

Twenty-one years would pass before the virus showed up in the United States. The path that the virus took from Africa to the gay community in Los Angeles will — in all likelihood — remain a mystery forever.

On American shores, it started as only five cases of a disease in a city of 3 million people — at three separate hospitals — over a seven-month period. It might have gone unnoticed but for the fact that five gay men turning up with Pneumocystis pneumonia in Los Angeles between October 1980 and May 1981 was hard to ignore.

Physicians got to work trying to diagnose the accompanying illnesses and to save the lives of the men, women and children who began showing up in epidemic numbers. Researchers puzzled over just what was happening. "It," of course, was HIV.

Those earliest cases were described in a profoundly prophetic editorial note in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report" on

June 5, 1981: "Pneumocystis pneumonia in the

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The phrase that epitomized the early years of the AIDS crisis: Silence=Death.

A soldier's story

A letter from Iraq

Editor's Note: These are the thoughts of a gay soldier — a North Carolina native — who has been deployed to Iraq. Because of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, he must remain anonymous.

Man is it hot here. We haven't seen a day under 115 for a few weeks. It feels like a blow dryer on high constantly aimed right at you. The ongoing barrage of heat leaves me drenched in sweat and frequently on the verge of exhaustion. It's not hard to remember to drink lots of water to avoid dehydration. Believe me — I can't wait for some cold weather.

Since the last time I wrote to you there have been two very close calls for me — one closer than anything ever.

On both occasions it was indirect enemy mortar fire — the closest being two pieces of shrapnel over 13 inches long and three inches wide, which flew over my head not more than three feet away. If I had not done the drills for this sort of thing that I learned earlier on, I could have been hit and

killed. I can still remember my heart racing both times it happened.

When you hear a mortar hit the first thing you do is drop to the ground, cover your head and face and lay as flat as possible. Even now I can hear the sound of the steel flying through the air from the 120 mortars that hit.

That's one of the most knuckle-whitening things that's happened since I've been back here — and trust me, I'm not downplaying it.



Physically I'm okay, but mentally it takes a toll. Training pays off when you do things right but I'm still keeping a lower profile and staying inside buildings a lot more.

I feel like the prayers and support from home have built a wall of protection around

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