

Cheney differs with Bush on amendment to ban gay marriage: A decision for the states

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Shortly before the start of his party's national convention, Vice President Dick Cheney surprised many of his and President Bush's most conservative supporters by publicly differing with the president on the issue of same-sex marriage.

The next day, Republican Party officials ratified platform language that strongly endorses Bush's support of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. The platform committee also declined to include a "unity plank" sought by some moderate GOP groups that would have acknowledged that differences exist amid party members on gay-rights and abortion-rights issues.

During a morning campaign stop August 24 in Davenport, Iowa, Cheney indicated that he was maintaining the same position on legalizing same-sex marriage that he espoused during the 2000 presidential campaign—that that decision should be left up to individual states. He also publicly acknowledged, reportedly for the first time, that his daughter Mary, who works in his campaign, is a lesbian.

His comments came after an audience member asked him what he personally believes about gay marriage. According to a White House transcript of the event, Cheney responded: "Lynne and I have a gay daughter, so it's an issue that our family is very familiar with. . . . With respect to the question of relationships, my general view is that freedom means freedom for everyone. People ought to be . . . free to enter into any kind of relationship they want to."

But Cheney added that Bush "makes basic policy for the administration" and that the president had endorsed the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment in February because he believed some state and federal courts "were making the judgment or the decision [on legalizing same-sex marriage] for the entire country."

Cheney also said the constitutional amendment—which failed a July vote in the Senate by a wide margin and is expected to come up for a vote in the House in September—“hasn’t had the votes to pass.”

Both gay-rights activists and conservative Christian groups criticized the administration for the conflict in message between Cheney’s statements and the Republican Party’s official stance.

“Vice President Cheney must explain how he can stand behind a platform that discriminates against families like his,” said Cheryl Jacques, president of the Human Rights Campaign, in a press release. “There are millions of Republican families who don’t want to see their sons and daughters discriminated against. It must be hard for these families, including the vice president’s, to reconcile their own support for inclusion and this divisive platform.”

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said FRC staffers had been involved in making sure the anti-gay-marriage language, as well as planks on other social issues, are in the Republican platform. “Unfortunately, protection of our values is made more difficult when mixed messages emanate from the White House,” Perkins said in a statement.

“I find it hard to believe the vice president would stray from the administration’s position on defense policy or tax policy,” Perkins continued. “For many pro-family voters, protecting traditional marriage ranks ahead of the economy and job creation as a campaign issue.”

Richard Land, the principal Southern Baptist spokesman on social-ethical issues, downplayed Cheney’s difference with Bush. “Politically, this is not that big of a deal because this is not any different than what Dick Cheney’s been saying,” Land said in *Baptist Press*. “It’s just that he’s publicly distancing himself from the president’s position,” which Land described as “the only position that counts.” —*Associated Baptist Press*