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Bush signs executive order giving religious group services funding

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush, challenging traditional notions about separation of church and state, opened the door Monday for religious groups to receive government money for their work aiding addicts, prisoners, the homeless and more.

"We will not fund the religious activities of any group, but when people of faith provide social services, we will not discriminate against them," Bush said.

By his signature on a pair of executive orders, Bush created a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives — with counterpart offices in five Cabinet-level departments — that will facilitate competition by religious groups and charities for a share of the billions of dollars that the government pays out for social services.

On Tuesday, during a visit to northeast Washington's Fishing School, a spiritual youth center, Bush planned to unveil the legislation he



BUSH

will submit to Congress opening all federal grant programs to participation by religious groups. His proposals will also include tax incentives and liability protection to encourage more charitable giving, aides said.

"Problems like addiction and abandonment and gang violence, domestic violence, mental illness and homelessness — we are called by conscience to respond," Bush said during Monday's signing ceremony in the White House's Indian Treaty Room.

"As long as there are secular alternatives, faith-based charities should be able to compete for funding on an equal basis and in a manner that does not cause them to sacrifice their mission."

Religious leaders of varied faiths and political backgrounds — a Catholic nun in her blue habit, a Muslim imam in his turban, an Orthodox Jew in his yarmulke — surrounded Bush for a smiling photo. Among them were ministers Walter Fauntroy and Floyd Flake, both of them prominent black Democrats.

In a private meeting beforehand, Bush, who was opposed by nine of every 10 black voters in November, as-

essed the group and, according to several participants, joked: "If this was about politics, this room would be kind of empty, if you know what I mean."

Carol Porter, executive director of the Houston-based Kidcare, a 16-year-old "meals on wheels" program for children, told Bush in that meeting that the only condition tied to federal money for religious groups should be: "No proselytizing."

"I don't think the religion of anyone should be shoved down anyone else's throat as a prerequisite for service, Jesus didn't do that," Porter told a reporter afterward.

Bush put University of Pennsylvania political science professor John J. Dilulio Jr. in charge of the new White House office and asked former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith to watch over the initiative from a seat on the board of the Corporation for National Service.

The idea of religious participation is not entirely novel. The 1996 welfare overhaul signed by President Clinton — and implemented in Texas by then-Gov. Bush — allowed religious groups to help the government move people off welfare and into

jobs. Seventeen of those groups in Texas are now being sued by American Jewish Congress, a Texas Civil Rights Project challenging the constitutionality of a "charitable choice."

At the Washington-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Rev. Barry Lynn said Bush's planned expansion of aid on constitutional principle that only lead to more litigation.

"The First Amendment was intended to create a separation between religion and government, a massive new bureaucracy unites the two," said Lynn, an attorney and United Church of Christ minister.

Another opponent, Rep. Charles Stenholm, D-Texas, said he was concerned that religious organizations, with tight regulation, could discriminate in a way federal programs normally would not countenance.

"I don't want Bob Jones University to be able to take federal dollars for an alcohol treatment program put out a sign that says no Catholics or Jews need apply here for a federally funded job," Edwards said.

Rescue efforts continue in India

Survivors say lack of equipment hindering search for bodies

BHUJ, India (AP) — The discovery of a living 8-month-old baby — covered in his dead mother's blood but cradled in her lap — on Monday captured the heartbeat and the singular miracles of India's killer earthquake.

The rescue was rare cause for hope following the earthquake, which killed at least 6,200 people and caused damage estimated at up to \$5.5 billion. India's prime minister acknowledged Monday that his country was ill-prepared for disasters.

In the case of the miracle baby, doctors said the warmth of his mother's body helped him survive three days in the ruins of a collapsed building in Bhuj's Kansara Market.

"We saw the baby in the mother's lap, we saw some movement from the baby," said R.K. Thakur, a Border Security Forces assistant commandant. "I took the baby in my hand and I found it was alive."

The boy, Murtza Ali, was rushed to a medical center, surviving relatives were found, and the child was conscious and smiling, Thakur said, adding: "It was miraculous."

There are few even partly happy endings in western India these days. Survivors complained Monday

that confusion and a lack of equipment were hampering rescue efforts. Rescuers lacked cranes and bulldozers, and many units did not even have generators, making night work impossible without lights. Soldiers hunting for survivors began work at first light and stopped when the sun went down.

"I'm here to express my solidarity with the Indian people."

— Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Prime Minister

The hope of finding many more survivors "is dwindling hour by hour, but as long as there is hope, we won't give up," said Joachim Ahrens, who represents a Swiss rescue team in Bhuj.

In the first estimate of damage, the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Secretary General Amit Mitra said quake losses may be as high as \$5.5 billion besides a daily production loss of \$111

million. However, officials in Gujarat state, epicenter of Friday's magnitude 7.9 quake, put the figure at \$2.17 billion.

A grim-faced Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who toured Gujarat on Monday, said he was forming a national disaster agency to ensure immediate response to emergencies.

"The country is not ready to face such disasters," Vajpayee told reporters in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's economic hub. He also announced federal grants totaling \$108 million for the state.

The prime minister noted that when a cyclone killed 10,000 people in the eastern state of Orissa two years ago, his government had trouble responding. He said it was facing similar problems now.

"I'm here to express my solidarity with the Indian people," Vajpayee said. "They are not alone in this."

In New Delhi on Monday, Agriculture Minister Bhaskar Barua appealed to private aid groups for field hospitals, clothing, volunteers to put up tents and prepare and distribute food, and cranes and other equipment.

News in Brief

Minister pleads guilty to sexual abuse of children

GREENWOOD, S.C. (AP) — A minister and former elementary school aide who videotaped himself molesting children pleaded guilty Monday to sexually abusing nearly two dozen youngsters and was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

The Rev. Fernando Garcia, 47, pleaded guilty to 47 counts. He admitted molesting the 23 victims ages 5 and 13 at his church office and at the school.

After his plea, the minister stared at the courtroom floor while the mother of two of the victims, boys 10 and 12 at the time, called Garcia "this evil incarnate" and said her family would never be the same.

Garcia, who grew up in Mexico, said that as a boy he was abused by a Roman Catholic priest.

"Your kids need special counseling. I don't know what to do to help," he said. "What are seeing here is the result of somebody who never took a chance to be counseled."

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