

Transcript - CNN - CROSSFIRE

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ROBERT NOVAK, CO-HOST: In explaining his call for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, George W. Bush today said he believes that marriage between a man and a woman is the ideal. He added -- quote -- "It is a president's job to drive policy toward the ideal."

In the CROSSFIRE, from Chicago, Congresswoman Jan **Schakowsky**, Democrat of Illinois. With us here in Washington, Congress Jim DeMint, Republican of South Carolina.

(APPLAUSE)

BEGALA: Thank you both for joining us, Congresswoman **Schakowsky** and Congressman DeMint. Awfully good of you to come by.

REP. JIM DEMINT (R), SOUTH CAROLINA: Thank you, Paul.

BEGALA: This is not the first time George W. Bush has been asked about the issue of gay marriage and the federal role in it. When he was running to be our president, he was asked about Vermont, which at the time had had a big issue about civil unions and homosexuals.

And he said this: "It's the right of the state to make that decision, just like it's the right of the state of South Carolina to make the decision on the flag." Back then, President Bush didn't think we should amend the Constitution. This is a big flip-flop for him just before the election. Isn't that kind of unprincipled?

(CROSSTALK)

DEMINT: Paul, It's not a flip-flop at all.

In fact, the point of this amendment is to protect states like Illinois and South Carolina, who have laws against same-sex marriages. And that's what this amendment will do. And the president has stepped in here because misguided judges are starting to impose their will on different states. This amendment

(CROSSTALK)

BEGALA: With respect, with respect, with respect, both Vice President Cheney and President Bush in 2000, Vice President Cheney much more forcefully, argued the federal government should have no role, that, if state A wants to recognize it and state B does not, and there's nothing that's changed in this, except states are actually doing what Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney said they should, which is deciding it for themselves.

DEMINT: The president...

(APPLAUSE)

DEMINT: ... in supporting this amendment is actually protecting the states, because this amendment defines marriage as between a man and a woman, but leaves other agreements up to the states.

NOVAK: Congresswoman **Schakowsky**, I'd like to get your view on this. Are you ready for some court, maybe the Illinois Supreme Court, to do away with the Illinois state law defining marriage? Are you going to say some judges know more than the people of the state of Illinois?

REP. JAN **SCHAKOWSKY** (D), ILLINOIS: You know, Bob, you and I both know this isn't about marriage. This is about politics.

The president himself said he wanted to kick off his campaign with a fresh issue. This is -- that's all that it's about. Why should we be amending the Constitution, this document that has always expanded human rights and human freedom, right now to enshrine discrimination? It's absolutely ridiculous.

(APPLAUSE)

SCHAKOWSKY: Most Americans think this should be left to the states.

NOVAK: Jan -- Jan, thanks very much for your unpaid political commercial. But I would like you to address my question. There is a state law in Illinois which bans gay marriage. I want to know if you are prepared to acquiesce in some unelected judges, or elected judges, for that matter, overriding the legislature, overriding the people of the state of Illinois?

SCHAKOWSKY: I'll tell you what, Bob. To me, this is a nonissue. This is like a magician who says the real act...

NOVAK: Why won't don't you answer the question

SCHAKOWSKY: Look over here.

(CROSSTALK)

NOVAK: Why won't you answer the question?

SCHAKOWSKY: You know what? This is not an issue in my life. And if my friends Roger and Michael want to enshrine their 21-year relationship, I'm for it.

NOVAK: You won't answer the question. I give up.

SCHAKOWSKY: I'm for it.

DEMINT: Thirty-eight states have laws just like that. And that's what we're trying to protect.

BEGALA: Now, Congressman, Congresswoman **Schakowsky** suggested this is politics.

SCHAKOWSKY: Yes.

BEGALA: I happen to believe that she is right.

(APPLAUSE)

BEGALA: Because -- and let me give you a few other examples. Our president, our president, he clearly loves our country. I disagree with him politically. But there's no doubt this man loves our country deeply.

There's equally no doubt this a man who hates our Constitution. He wants seven, seven, new amendments to Mr. Madison's masterpiece, seven, one on gay marriage, one on school prayer, one on flag burning, one on abortion, one on a line-item veto, one on crime victims bill of rights. And just to show us he has a sense of humor, he wants a constitutional amendment for a balanced budget.

(APPLAUSE)

BEGALA: Now, either he hates the Constitution or he's a posturing politician, isn't he? Come on, seven.

(CROSSTALK)

DEMINT: He's trying to take us beyond politics here.

BEGALA: Seven, sir?

(CROSSTALK)

DEMINT: When you have judges legislating from the bench, which is what's happening in Massachusetts and all over the country now, they're overturning laws that are made by the people in a Democratic process, and if the judges won't interpret the Constitution in a way that's obvious, then we're going to have to go back and clarify it for them.

NOVAK: I want to...

(CROSSTALK)

(APPLAUSE)

NOVAK: Congresswoman **Schakowsky**, I'd like you to listen to something that Senator Kerry, you prospective presidential nominee, said in the debate from Los Angeles last night. And he was asked about his vote, only one of 14 members of the Senate that voted against the Defense of Marriage bill. And let's see how he explained that vote last night.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. JOHN KERRY (D-MA), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I think, under the full faith and credit clause, that I was incorrect in that statement. I think, in fact, that no state has to recognize something that is against their public policy.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

NOVAK: Now, Congresswoman **Schakowsky**, I haven't found anybody who understands what he's talking about. But you're pretty smart. Do you have any idea what he's talking about?

(LAUGHTER)

SCHAKOWSKY: Well, I don't think the president understands his amendment either. He said he would leave the door open to civil unions. And, in fact, the way this constitutional amendment is written, it would actually eliminate partner benefits. It could just turn the clock back on couples.

But if you want to talk about marriage, Bob, let me quote my mayor of the city of Chicago, Mayor Daley, a straight shooter in every day. He says: "Marriage has been undermined by divorce. So don't tell me about marriage. Don't blame the gay and lesbian, transgender and transsexual community. People should look at their own life in their own mirror."

I think the mayor's right.

(APPLAUSE)

NOVAK: Jan, you're -- you're determined not to answer any question I give you. But you couldn't explain what John Kerry was talking about. And even -- and somebody else who doesn't understand is the governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney.

He said: "In the case of the Massachusetts Constitution, he, Kerry, agrees with me that we should have an amendment on the federal Constitution. He doesn't agree with me. And I think the American people are going to be just as confused as I am as to where he stands."

You have a wonderful opportunity on national television to explain what the hell John Kerry's talking about.

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

NOVAK: You want to take it?

(LAUGHTER)

(CROSSTALK)

SCHAKOWSKY: Well, I just -- go ahead.

BEGALA: Congressman DeMint, let me ask you again about our president here. It seems to me -- first off, being from Texas, I knew him a little bit when he was my governor. He's a very nice guy. I don't think he's got a bigoted bone in his body. And yet, when he gets in political trouble, what does he do? John McCain beats him in New Hampshire. He goes to your state of South Carolina and campaigns at Bob Johnson University, a place of vicious bigotry against my Catholic faith and Mr. Novak's Catholic faith.

DEMINT: That's absolutely wrong.

BEGALA: There are vicious bigots there, sir. And I know one because when I see it, because I'm a Catholic and they hate my faith.

DEMINT: You're absolutely wrong.

BEGALA: Now he's in trouble for his reelection. Now he's bashing the gays. This is what he does when he gets in trouble.

(CROSSTALK)

DEMINT: This has nothing to do with bashing the gays. Marriage predates our Constitution through all civilizations in history, has been esteemed as a corner building block of our society. Now you're trying to take it and apply it towards a behavior that all of these civilizations have been considered wrong. It has nothing to do with putting down a particular group of people.

(APPLAUSE)

NOVAK: We've got just one minute left and I want to get give Ms. **Schakowsky** a chance to answer one question. She hasn't any so far.

(CROSSTALK)

NOVAK: Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

SCHAKOWSKY: OK.

NOVAK: Emmett C. Burns Jr., who is a Democrat -- he's a member of the Maryland legislature -- he said -- this is a Democrat, Jan -- "The overwhelming majority of people don't agree with gay marriage. But the gay and lesbian lobby has scared the heck out of the Democrats."

Are you scared of lesbians, Ms. **Schakowsky**?

(LAUGHTER)

SCHAKOWSKY: Oh, I -- I'm not at all. I'm not at all.

And if my friend Jacki (ph) and Ann (ph) want to provide a two- parent family to their son, David, who they adopted, I'm all for it. But, Bob, I couldn't quite hear you. If you were offering me to explain Senator Kerry's vote on DOMA and his position, I think he was right to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act. Marriage doesn't need defending.

My marriage, your marriage, nobody's marriage is threatened by same-sex couples that want nothing more than to get into a very conservative institution, marriage.

(APPLAUSE)

SCHAKOWSKY: And I think John Kerry is opposed to a constitutional amendment because we don't want to mess with the Constitution to enshrine discrimination.

BEGALA: Congresswoman **Schakowsky**, I'm sorry to cut you off. Congresswoman Jan **Schakowsky** in Illinois, that will have to be the last word on this.

Congressman Jim DeMint from South Carolina, thank you as well. A terrific debate. I'm sorry we cut it short, but we had to go and cover the Colorado story at the beginning of the show. But thank you both very much. We'd like to have you back.

(APPLAUSE)