

President Bush addresses NAE

More than 300 church and parachurch leaders attending this year's annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in Colorado Springs, Colo., rose and applauded the gathering's first speaker, President George W. Bush, when he addressed the crowd March 11 via satellite from Washington, D.C.

Receiving standing ovations at the beginning and end of his 15-minute address, the president never mentioned Democratic rival John Kerry, who was the subject of a series of attack ads Republicans released the same day. Nor did he even acknowledge that a campaign for the presidency was well under way.

Instead he recited his administration's major accomplishments, the loudest applause coming when he declared his support of family values. "I will defend the sanctity of marriage against activist courts and local officials who want to redefine marriage," he said.

Bush also drew cheers for referring to America as "freedom's home and freedom's defender," but he added that liberty is the possession of no government. "Liberty and freedom are God's gifts to every man and woman," he said.

Bush also reminded evangelicals of his efforts to send AIDS medicine to Africa, slow the sex traffic in Asia, reduce taxes, create new jobs, reform public education, promote faith-based charities, support abstinence education, and oppose abortion, stem-cell research and human cloning.

In his introductory comments, NAE President Ted Haggard said the only issue he and the president disagree on is trucks. Haggard prefers Chevrolets, while Bush is typically seen driving a Ford at his Texas ranch.

But not everyone was as excited about the president's address. The Rev. Cheryle Hanna, a convention participant, is an assistant to the pastor at Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit and a member of the national board of American Baptist Churches of the United States.

"It's interesting how a president who wants to portray himself as a Christian being guided by God would take young American men and women into a war under false pretenses," said Hanna, who also wishes some of the billions being spent in Iraq were applied to more pressing social issues at home.

Bush was the first of three administration speakers who got top billing at this year's NAE gathering. The others were Timothy Goeglein, a special assistant to the president, and John Hanford, U. S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.

Steve Rabey in Colorado Springs, Colo.