

Marine Dad Not Done Fighting Picketing Church

Albert Snyder says he is not done fighting the Westboro Baptist Church and the emotional strain its anti-gay, anti-military protests cause families at private funerals. The Maryland man who lost his 20-year-old Marine son Matthew in Iraq in 2006 has fought the church in the court system after Westboro members picketed the fallen lance corporal's funeral five years ago. The case ended early this month in the U.S. Supreme Court.

"It's been a long battle, but I'm not about to give up just because some people on the Supreme Court said (the church) could do it," Snyder told hundreds of American Legion members gathered Tuesday for the 51st Annual Washington Conference at the Downtown Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center in the nation's capital. "I will continue to press for legislation to make the picketing and protesting at funerals a little bit harder for members of the Westboro Baptist Church."

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-1 on March 2 that the church is constitutionally protected when it demonstrates at military funerals. Church members typically hold up signs with slogans like "God Hates You" and "Fags Doom Nations" to impart its belief that military deaths are God's punishment for America's tolerance of homosexuality.

Snyder's case included a lower-court verdict in his favor that included \$5 million in damages, but the case was later thrown out in a federal appeals court. The case drew national attention, pitting the First Amendment against a family's right to grieve in private.

Snyder's legal team has worked on a pro-bono basis, but costs mounted. "Adding insult to injury, Mr. Snyder is responsible

for paying Westboro Church's court cost and legal fees," American Legion National Commander Jimmie Foster told the crowd in Washington. "This is simply an outrage."

To a standing ovation, Foster presented Snyder a check for \$26, onstage at the conference to help cover his costs throughout the process. The majority of that money was raised online through The American Legion's Burn Pit blog site.

"Veterans have probably been my biggest supporters over the past four and a half years," Snyder explained. "I don't think I could have done what I have done without the support of all of you and all of our active-duty soldiers and Marines. I know one person who has been with me through this whole time; Matt was a very loyal son; he was a very loyal friend and brother. And I know Matt would be supporting this 100 percent because he wouldn't want to see another family go through what we went through."

Snyder asked Legionnaires to contact their lawmakers and ask them to introduce legislation that would legally restrict the church from disrupting funerals. American Legion Riders and members of the Patriot Guard commonly provide security at funerals the church plans to picket.