

of every other State.” Those who want to change the meaning of marriage will claim that this provision requires all States and cities to recognize same-sex marriages performed anywhere in America.

Congress attempted to address this problem in the Defense of Marriage Act by declaring that no State must accept another State’s definition of marriage. My administration will vigorously defend this act of Congress. Yet there is no assurance that the Defense of Marriage Act will not, itself, be struck down by activist courts. In that event, every State would be forced to recognize any relationship that judges in Boston or officials in San Francisco choose to call a marriage. Furthermore, even if the Defense of Marriage Act is upheld, the law does not protect marriage within any State or city.

For all these reasons, the defense of marriage requires a constitutional amendment. An amendment to the Constitution is never to be undertaken lightly. The amendment process has addressed many serious matters of national concern. And the preservation of marriage rises to this level of national importance.

The union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honoring—honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society.

Marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious, and natural roots without weakening the good influence of society. Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all.

Today I call upon the Congress to promptly pass and to send to the States for ratification an amendment to our Constitution defining and protecting marriage as a union of man and woman as husband and wife. The amendment should fully protect marriage while leaving the State legislatures free to make their own choices in defining legal arrangements other than marriage.

America is a free society which limits the role of government in the lives of our citizens. This commitment of freedom, however, does not require the redefinition of one of our most basic social institutions. Our Government should respect every person and protect the institution of marriage. There is no contradiction between these responsibilities.

We should also conduct this difficult debate in a manner worthy of our country, without bitterness or anger. In all that lies ahead, let us match strong convictions with kindness and good will and decency.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on Senate Action To Block Medical Liability Reform *February 24, 2004*

I am disappointed that a minority in the Senate has again decided to play politics and block our Nation’s ability to accomplish medical liability reform.

Today’s vote is a blow to America’s families, because pregnant women are losing

access to their obstetricians and gynecologists due to frivolous and abusive lawsuits. Pregnant women who need prenatal and obstetric health care services deserve access to doctors in their own communities. Without the passage of reasonable reforms,

the Nation's badly broken medical liability system will continue to drive physicians like obstetricians and gynecologists out of the practice of medicine and drive up the costs

of health care for all Americans. For the benefit of America's families and for the sake of our health care system, there needs to be medical liability reform this year.

Statement on the Parliamentary Elections in Iran
February 24, 2004

I am very disappointed in the recently disputed parliamentary elections in Iran. The disqualification of some 2,400 candidates by the unelected Guardian Council deprived many Iranians of the opportunity to freely choose their representatives. I join many in Iran and around the world in condemning the Iranian regime's efforts to stifle freedom of speech—including the clos-

ing of two leading reformist newspapers—in the runup to the election. Such measures undermine the rule of law and are clear attempts to deny the Iranian people's desire to freely choose their leaders.

The United States supports the Iranian people's aspirations to live in freedom, enjoy their God-given rights, and determine their own destiny.

Statement on Signing the NASA Flexibility Act of 2004
February 24, 2004

Today, I have signed into law S. 610, the "NASA Flexibility Act of 2004." The Act strengthens the ability of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to manage effectively the NASA personnel upon whom the future successes of America's civil space program depend.

Section 3 of the Act enacts new subsections 9802(g), (h), and (i) in title 5 of the United States Code, which purport to require or regulate the submission of certain plans, recommendations, and budget requests to the Congress. The executive branch shall construe these subsections in a manner consistent with the President's constitutional authority to supervise the

unitary executive branch, to withhold information the disclosure of which could impair the deliberative processes of the Executive, and to recommend for the consideration of the Congress such measures as the President judges necessary and expedient.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
February 24, 2004.

NOTE: S. 610, approved February 24, was assigned Public Law No. 108–201. An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.