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Republicans Admit Mailing Campaign Literature Saying Liberals Will Ban the Bible

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

The Republican Party acknowledged yesterday sending mass mailings to residents of two states warning that "liberals" seek to ban the Bible. It said the mailings were part of its effort to mobilize religious voters for [President Bush](#).

The mailings include images of the Bible labeled "banned" and of a gay marriage proposal labeled "allowed." A mailing to Arkansas residents warns: "This will be Arkansas if you don't vote." A similar mailing was sent to West Virginians.

A liberal religious group, the Interfaith Alliance, circulated a copy of the Arkansas mailing to reporters yesterday to publicize it. "What they are doing is despicable," said Don Parker, a spokesman for the alliance. "They are playing on people's fears and emotions."

In an e-mail message, Christine Iverson, a spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee, confirmed that the party had sent the mailings.

"When the Massachusetts Supreme Court sanctioned same-sex marriage and people in other states realized they could be compelled to recognize those laws, same-sex marriage became an issue," Ms. Iverson said. "These same activist judges also want to remove the words 'under God' from the Pledge of Allegiance."

The mailing is the latest evidence of the emphasis Republicans are putting on motivating conservative Christian voters to vote this fall. But as the appeals become public, they also risk alienating moderate and swing voters.

An editorial on Sept. 22 in The Charleston Gazette in West Virginia, for example, asked, "Holy Moley! Who concocts this gibberish?"

"Most Americans see morality more complexly," the editorial said. "Many think a higher morality is found in Christ's command to help the needy, prevent war and pursue other humanitarian goals. Churchgoers of this sort aren't likely to believe childish allegations that Democrats want to ban the Bible."

In statement, [Senator John Edwards](#), the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, said President Bush "should condemn the practice immediately and tell everyone associated with the campaign to never use tactics like this again."

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, called the mailings an

ugly contrast to Mr. Bush's public statements. Although the president has called for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, he often emphasizes the need for tolerance as well.

"The president takes more or less the high road and his henchman and allies on the right have been let loose to conduct these ugly, divisive smear campaigns," Mr. Foreman said. "It is wedge politics at its worst."

In any event, the Bush campaign appears confident about its religious appeal.

The mailing seeks to appeal to conservative evangelical Protestant pastors and political leaders who say they worry that legal rights for same-sex couples could lead to hate-crimes laws that could be applied against sermons of Bible passages criticizing homosexuality.

Conservative Christian political commentators often cite the case of Ake Green, a minister in Sweden who was jailed in June for a month for a sermon denouncing gays as sinful.

Mr. Parker, of the Interfaith Alliance, said, "I think it is laughable to think that someone could be arrested for reading out loud from the Bible."

But Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, argued, "We have the First Amendment in this country which should protect churches, but there is no question that this is where some people want to go, that reading from the Bible could be hate speech."

Still, Mr. Land questioned the assertion that Democrats might ban the whole Bible. "I wouldn't say it," he said. "I would think that is probably stretching it a bit far."