

Religious right rails at high court rulings: The second Justice Sunday event

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Speakers at a rally designed to support socially conservative nominees to federal courts decried several decades of Supreme Court rulings on social issues, but made little direct mention of the current battle over a Supreme Court nominee.

Several conservative leaders spoke from the pulpit of Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville on August 14 as part of the second “Justice Sunday” event. Sponsored by major religious right organizations, the rally followed a similar one in April designed to push the Senate to approve President Bush’s nominees to the federal courts.

The second gathering focused attention on the Supreme Court, which has its first vacancy in 11 years. But few speakers mentioned Bush’s nominee, federal appellate judge John Roberts, choosing instead to criticize several high court rulings of recent years.

From a pulpit in front of a cross flanked by two American flags, speakers lamented court decisions such as June’s split ruling on government displays of the Ten Commandments.

“How do the judges get away with such outrageous decisions? By asserting that Supreme Court decisions are the supreme law of the land,” said Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative Catholic who founded the antiabortion Eagle Forum, according to the *New York Times*. “But you know that is not true. That is a terrible heresy.”

Zell Miller, a former Democratic senator from Georgia who has campaigned for Republicans since retiring from the Senate, reportedly said the high court has “removed prayer from our public schools . . . legalized the barbaric killing of unborn babies, and it is ready to discard like an outdated hula hoop the universal institution of marriage between a man and a woman.”

Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, appearing via video, delivered a scathing depiction of a court system that he said is “unaccountable, unelected and often arrogant.” He said Supreme Court rulings are more influenced by Western European ideas of secularism than by American moral values. “The American court system is tearing at the very fabric of our nation,” he said.

The telecast, in which House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R., Tex.) told 2,300 persons filling the pews that “we’re here to protect the court so it can keep protecting us,” was telecast live on the Internet by conservative churches around the country. Sky Angel, a Christian satellite network, later broadcasted the 90-minute service.

Church-state separation advocates issued statements protesting the rally’s blurring of First Amendment distinctions. Some two dozen protesters lined up outside the church with posters calling the gathering “Hypocrisy Sunday.” The “Justice Sunday II” event was subtitled “God Save the United States and This Honorable Court.”

Responding to a statement by one of the rally speakers, William Donohue of the Catholic League, who said that conservative Christians have become targets of a hostile high court, Holly Hollman of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty said that “these decisions to keep government out of religion are hardly hostile to Christians. . . . Although the [Supreme] Court does not always get it right, its enforcement of the [Constitution’s] religion clauses has ensured greater religious freedom in this country than anywhere in the world.” -*Associated Baptist Press, Religion News Service*