

McCain seeks support of GOP conservatives: At Council for National Policy

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Senator John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee for president despite opposition from Focus on the Family leader James Dobson and talk radio host Rush Limbaugh, traveled to New Orleans last month seeking support from conservative true believers.

“We’ve got to get our base moving again,” he told the Council for National Policy at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. The Arizona senator, who has earned conservatives’ enmity in the past, was trying to mend fences on March 7 with more than 400 influential social conservatives.

He sketched himself as one of them: an antiabortion candidate who would defend traditional marriage, curtail federal spending, support strict-constructionist Supreme Court justices, secure the country’s borders, make President Bush’s tax cuts permanent and continue to confront al-Qaeda.

“The transcendent challenge for the 21st century is radical Islam,” he declared.

But McCain did not back off his avowed determination to explore alternative energy sources, partly as a response to global warming—the existence of which he acknowledged was a controversial position with much of his audience.

“Suppose I’m wrong and climate change is not taking place,” he said. “All we’ve done and given our kids is a greener world.”

He also seemed to duck a direct request to discuss his belief in God. Instead, he repeated a story of a secret kindness shown him by a Christian North Vietnamese prison guard during a period of prolonged torture.

The Council for National Policy, formed in 1981, has an invitation-only membership whose names typically are not made public. It calls meetings a few times a year and

has met with other major Republican candidates for president during the primary race. Although the group takes no public political stands, its members are viewed as powerful in conservative circles—and are almost uniformly unavailable for on-the-record interviews.