

Former aide says Southern Baptists had clout in Bush White House

by [Bob Allen](#)

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) – Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention wielded significant influence on the White House during the presidency of George W. Bush, according to a former White House aide promoting a new memoir.

“The Bush administration had a superb relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention, and in fact, it was important to President Bush that we were a regular presence at all the summer conventions while he was in the White House,” Timothy Goeglein, who worked as deputy director of the White House Office of Public Liaison until he resigned in a plagiarism scandal in 2008, [told](#) the SBC news service Baptist Press.

Discussing his new book [The Man in the Middle](#) from B&H Publishing Group, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, Goeglein said during his eight years as the president’s point man for evangelical relations that he came to know well Southern Baptist leaders including James Merritt, Jack Graham, Bobby Welch and Frank Page, four men who served as SBC president during Bush’s two terms in office. Page, now president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, went on to serve in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships under President Obama.

“We had a great working relationship, and those relationships became friendships,” Goeglein said. “The SBC was instrumental in a host of ways and always found time to be in touch on important issues of the day, but none more so than the banning of partial-birth abortion, the crucial stem-cell decision ... and on questions of war and peace that were so

central in the Bush years.”

Goeglein said Southern Baptists meant a lot to President Bush, and he welcomed the opportunity to send greetings by video to SBC annual meetings.

“There is no church body in America that more regularly or routinely let President and Mrs. Bush know how much they were prayed for,” Goeglein said. “I cannot overstate how much this meant to the president; in fact, he told members of the convention routinely that there was nothing more important or meaningful to him and the First Lady than to know those prayers were being offered routinely and out of love and respect.”

In 1999 Goeglein was a spokesman for presidential candidate Gary Bauer. When Bauer dropped out of the race, he was recruited by the Bush campaign.

Beginning in 2001, Goeglein ran day-to-day operations of the Office of Public Liaison, a White House department under Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove. In that role Goeglein helped establish the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the centerpiece of Bush’s domestic policy. Termed “compassionate conservatism,” the initiative was aimed at making it easier for faith-based and community organizations to obtain federal funds to provide social services.

Goeglein wrote unpaid guest columns that appeared on the editorial page of a newspaper in his hometown of Fort Wayne, Ind. In 2008 a curious journalist did an Internet search for an unusual name in one of Goeglein’s columns and found an almost word-for-word identical piece that had appeared a decade earlier in the *Dartmouth Review*. An investigation found that more than half of the articles written by Goeglein between 2000 and 2008 contained instances of plagiarism.

The White House called Goeglein’s actions unacceptable and accepted his resignation in February 2008. A [statement](#) said President Bush “long appreciated Tim’s service” and “knows him to be a good person who is committed to his country.”

In the book, Goeglein said he expected a “much-deserved woodshed moment” when told the president wanted to see him after the scandal broke. Instead, he [writes](#), Bush said, “Tim, you are forgiven and mercy is real.”

Goeglein now serves as vice president of external relations for Focus on the Family, a Christian ministry founded by broadcaster James Dobson and now led by Jim Daly, who joined the organization in 1989 and became president and CEO in 2005.