Hatch defends Bush's domestic surveillance

By STEVE KIGGINS
skiggins@thespectrum.com

CEDAR CITY - Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, boldly defended President Bush's warrantless surveillance program and the war in Iraq on Saturday at an invitation-only luncheon with Iron County political and business leaders.

While addressing a group of about 50 people, including Cedar City Mayor Gerald R. Sherratt, Enoch Mayor Bob Rasmussen and county commissioners Dennis Stowell and Wayne Smith, Hatch stressed that Bush was acting in the best interests of the country and doing so within the confines of the U.S. Constitution.

“This president is doing everything in his power to help us and everything he can to protect us,” said Hatch, who will seek to win his sixth term in the Senate later this year. “I have to tell you, this president has guts and he deserves your support.”

Hatch spent about an hour answering questions and sharing stories with the crowd gathered inside The Garden House restaurant. Earlier in the day, Hatch met with Washington County officials.

“I always appreciate the senator and his willingness to share with us,” Smith said. “It's a good thing when you can meet with him and you leave knowing you're being looked after.”

Hatch was joined in Cedar City by Rep. LaVar Christensen, R-Draper, who announced his candidacy for Utah's 2nd Congressional District this week.

The 52-year-old Christensen is the early Republican frontrunner in the race against Democratic incumbent Jim Matheson.

“It's such a privilege to serve the Utah House of Representatives, and this is just an offer to serve at a greater level,” Christensen said. “I'm passionate and I think the Republican difference matters. ... The Republican principles are the right vision for America. It's the map and compass that has guided us.

“Without this map and compass, we'd be wandering.”

Following his question-and-answer session, Hatch voiced strong support for Bush, who, in recent weeks, has been widely criticized by Democrats for his eavesdropping program in wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks.

By order of the president, the National Security Agency was allowed to eavesdrop - without court warrants - on Americans whose international calls and e-mails are believed could be linked to the al-Qaida terrorist network.

“They're moaning and groaning in Congress because he didn't abide by what's called the FISA Act, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. That act
is very important, but it was enacted in 1978 and it is not applicable to today's world," Hatch said. "The president is using every methodology that we know ... to try to track down those al-Qaida people or people affiliated with al-Qaida."

In addition, Hatch said Bush is abiding by the fourth amendment of the Constitution, which decries unreasonable search and seizure.

Of the war, Hatch said the U.S. must "hang in there and do what's right." He also praised the Utah soldiers who are fighting for freedom.

"It's about bringing effective changes and establishing principles of democracy," Hatch said following his speech. "If we can be successful (in Iraq), that will put pressure on all of the Arab states. It will be a rise in freedom and a demand for liberty that has never existed in some of those states.

"And, more importantly, we've stopped a mass murderer in Saddam Hussein. Nobody denies that he was supporting al-Qaida."

In a clear attack on Democrats, Hatch added, "Well, I shouldn't say nobody. Nobody with brains."

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