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Dodd, Brownback clash politically despite shared Catholic faith

By GLEN JOHNSON / AP Political Writer

BOSTON (AP) - Presidential contenders Chris Dodd and Sam Brownback, stepping beyond the traditional bounds of their respective parties, outlined a series of political differences Monday rooted in their varying interpretations of their shared Catholic faith.

The two, appearing jointly at a Boston College forum on faith and politics, differed on abortion rights, civil unions for gay couples and embryonic stem cell research.

Nonetheless, they used modest tones to suggest both Democrats and Republicans could bridge such gaps with more tolerance for their respective positions.



Presidential hopeful U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., left, and broadcast journalist Tim Russert, center, listen, as presidential hopeful U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kansas, right, speaks during a forum on the campus of Boston College, in Boston, Monday, April 23, 2007. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

In a moment of agreement, both Dodd, a Connecticut Democrat, and Brownback, a Kansas Republican, urged President Bush to work with Congress to devise a solution that will meet his demand for continued funding of U.S. troops in Iraq while promoting a diplomatic solution to quell insurgent violence and reduce the military death toll.

Brownback revealed he told Vice President Dick Cheney last week, during a White House meeting the senator requested, that the administration should consider a "three-state, one-country" solution in which Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis live independently but under the banner of a federal city in Baghdad.

The senator said his proposal, which he said he also shared with National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, was met with no reaction from either man.

"I'm frustrated that both parties have gotten to more in the way of fighting than trying to figure out what we can do," Brownback said afterward during an interview with The Associated Press.

At another point, the senator said he switched from being an evangelical Christian to a member of the Roman Catholic Church four years ago because of the latter faith's rich tradition.

"I love the depth of thought that's there," said Brownback, who was raised a Methodist. "Coming from the Protestant tradition, you don't build as much on past people's comments, with saints, and going into the Catholic church, you've got people thinking

about something for 2,000 years, and it's a great source of wisdom, and maybe I can appreciate it better than many who have been raised in the Catholic Church."

The session's moderator, Tim Russert, host of the NBC News program "Meet the Press," prompted the discussion of Iraq by asking each senator if he felt the war there was just.



Dodd, who like Brownback voted in 2002 to authorize military action in the nation, said he now felt the war was wrong and the justifications "fabricated."

Democratic presidential hopeful U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., center, greets people in the crowd. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Brownback said: "You make the call on what information and facts you have at the time, and I don't think it's fair to the troops on the ground to second-guess it four years later with the

information you have at this point in time."

While the two similarly agreed that marriage should be reserved for a man and a woman -- not gay couples -- they differed in talking about their views on homosexuality.

Dodd, the father of two young girls, said, "I think it's a good question to ask how you would like your children treated."

Brownback, however, called homosexual acts immoral -- as has the Catholic church -- and said sanctioning them threatens the stability of traditional marriage.

"The issue is when you take away the sacredness or the uniqueness of marriage and you start redefining it, a lot of people just say, 'Well, the institution doesn't have the meaning to me,'" the senator said.

"And you now see northern European countries where you have 80 percent of your first-born children born out of wedlock. You're driving down the number of children in a stable family setting."

Republican presidential hopeful U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kansas, right, and broadcast journalist Tim Russert, left, wave to the audience. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

