

WASHINGTON

WHITE HOUSE **MASS PRAYER** EVENT SEEKS TO RECLAIM CHRISTIAN ROOTS

AFP PHOTOS

Top Trump administration officials were by press time set to address a mass prayer meeting in the heart of Washington yesterday – an event organisers bill as reclaiming the country's religious foundations, but critics say is a quasi-official rally for Christian nationalism.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Speaker of the House Mike Johnson are all listed as guest speakers. President Donald Trump is expected to address the crowd via video.



President Trump

AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY

The gathering has been organised by the White House as part of a programme of celebrations for America's 250th birthday and, in a video message inviting Americans to attend, Hegseth said it was an opportunity to "rededicate this republic to God and country."

Muscular Christian nationalism has enjoyed a prominent platform since Trump's return to power, and evangelicals form a core element of the president's support base.

Hegseth is a member of an ultra-conservative evangelical church and his briefings on the Iran war have been notable for their use of bellicose, Christian rhetoric.

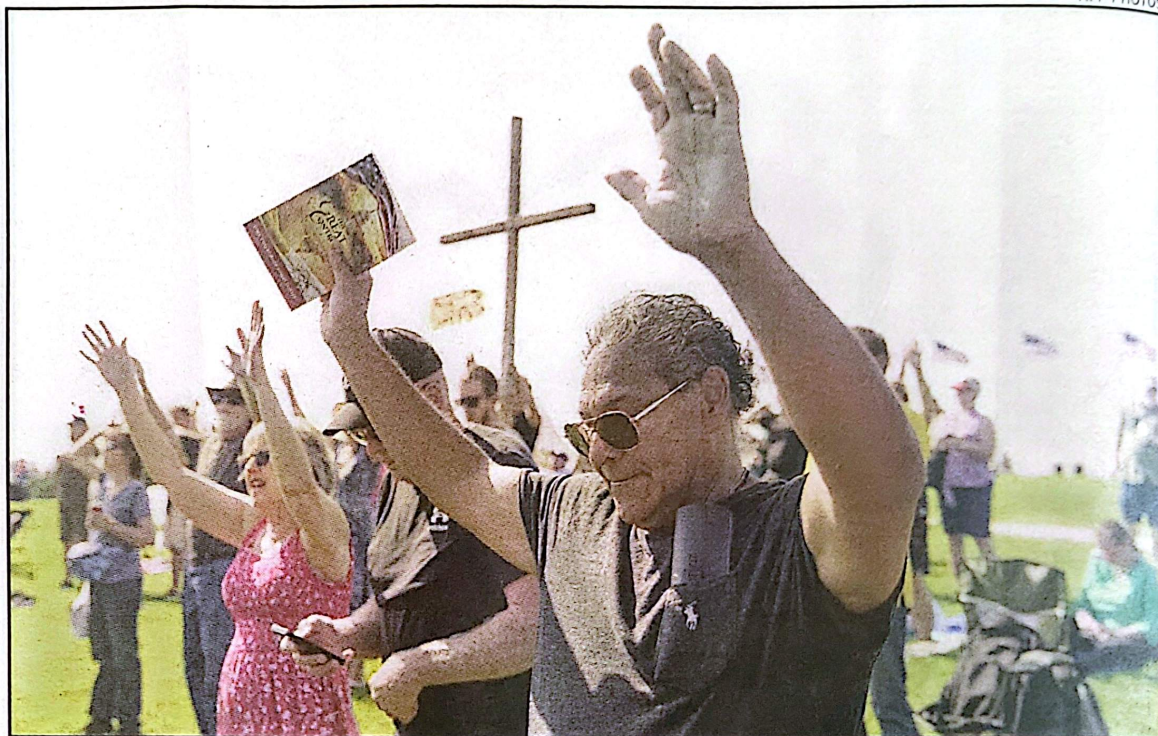
The US Constitution explicitly bars the establishment of any official religion, but the expression of any is also explicitly protected. While previous administrations and

presidents have regularly held and attended faith-based gatherings, Sunday's event is still unusual for its scale and the presence of top cabinet officials.

REDEDICATING AMERICA

And apart from a rabbi and a retired Catholic archbishop, almost all the 20 listed "faith leaders" who will speak are evangelical Protestants.

"It's not unprecedented to have a group of evangelical pastors or conservative clergy come together for something like this and blend a certain kind of nationalism with a certain kind of conservative Christianity," said Sam Perry, a professor at Baylor University, a Christian school in Texas.



The faithful in the a prayer moment. Christians have enjoyed a prominent platform since Trump's return to power

But "the Trump administration taking the lead on this celebration at this scale is different than previous events," Perry added.

Sunday's gathering was scheduled to last around nine hours. "It is about the history and the foundations of our nation, which was built on

Christian values, on the Bible," TV preacher Paula White, who is head of the White House's Faith Office and a so-called spiritual advisor to Trump,

said in a webinar last month. "This is really truly rededicating the country to God."

AFP