

N E W S

AS GAY COUPLES MARRY, LDS LEADERS DECRY EFFORTS TO DESTROY THE FAMILY

AS THE MASSACHUSETTS Supreme Court declared that state's ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional and the city of San Francisco began to issue marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples, several LDS leaders and prominent Mormons predicted the "self-destruction" of the world and deemed the fight against same-sex marriage "the pivotal battle of our age."

In some of the most extreme LDS rhetoric to date, former General Relief Society presidency counselor and current Deseret Book CEO Sheri Dew compared the gay rights movement with the rise of Hitler, and *Deseret News* columnist Lee Benson likened San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom to communist leader Nikita Khrushchev.

In a 10 January worldwide priesthood leadership broadcast, President Gordon B. Hinckley declared, "The traditional family is under attack" and added that "the world is marching toward self-destruction."

Echoing similar sentiments, Apostle Boyd K. Packer stated, "Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah which exceeds the wickedness and depravity which surrounds us now." In a speech broadcast worldwide to members of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society, Packer continued, "The sacred relationship between a man and a woman, husband and wife, through which mortal bodies are conceived and life is passed to the next generation, is being showered with filth." President Packer then urged LDS lawyers to "give of your time and of your means to the building up of the church and the kingdom of God and the establishment of Zion, which we are under covenant to do, not just to the church as an institution, but to



President Gordon B. Hinckley



Apostle Boyd K. Packer



Governor Mitt Romney

members and ordinary people who need your professional protection."

Prominent Latter-day Saint and Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney declared opposition to his state's Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriages. "Amending the Constitution may be the best and most reliable way to prevent . . . confusion and preserve the institution of marriage," Romney wrote for *Meridian* magazine. "The people have the exclusive right to protect the nation and Constitution from judicial overreaching."

On 8 February, LDS author Orson Scott Card denounced the "systematic destruction of the institution of marriage." "No law in any state in the United States now or ever has forbidden homosexuals to marry," wrote Card in the *Rhino Times*. "Any homosexual man who can persuade a woman to take him as her husband can avail himself of all the

rights of husbandhood under the law."

THE PROCLAMATION IN ACTION

IN 1995, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and Quorum of the Twelve issued *A Proclamation to the World*, a document warning that "the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets." Although it has not been canonized, the *Proclamation* gives philosophical foundation to many of the current teachings, actions, and lobbying efforts carried out by the Church. Since 1995, LDS leaders have joined a number of conservative coalitions to lobby against same-sex marriage in California, Nevada, Hawaii, Alaska, and other states.

The Church also established the conservative World Family Policy Center at Brigham Young

University "to provide balanced, pro-family input and effectively educate the United Nations System on moral, religious and other value-based issues."

In July 2003, the World Family Center sponsored an international World Family Policy Forum in Salt Lake City. With more than one hundred delegates from thirty-eight countries, the forum was the largest gathering of high-level diplomatic corps outside of an official U.N. venue.

"We do believe that this effort to destroy the family is motivated by evil designs [that] are unalterably opposed to [the family]," Elder Richard G. Scott told the delegates during the forum.

The World Family Policy Center and the LDS Relief Society each sent representatives to the Third World Congress of Families, held 29–31 March in Mexico City. Co-sponsored by conservative groups from the U.S., Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, and Australia, the purpose of the Congress is to "orchestrate a common strategy to affirm and defend the natural family."

"THE PIVOTAL BATTLE OF OUR AGE"

ON 24 FEBRUARY, PRESIDENT George W. Bush announced a proposed amendment to declare same-sex marriages unconstitutional—a development that World Family Policy Center manager Richard Wilkins has been promoting for years.

"The President issued a call to arms," Wilkins wrote shortly after the announcement. "The pivotal battle of our age has been joined." Wilkins deems the amendment "the only sure way to restore order to this venerable and surpassingly important social institution."



Richard Wilkins

Despite Wilkins's endorsement, the Church has not issued an official statement regarding the proposed amendment, and LDS leaders and politicians remain divided on the matter. LDS Senator Orrin Hatch, who last August had been quoted saying that he favored the amendment, now says he is not convinced the amendment is necessary because the federal Defense of Marriage Act already defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Some conservative groups oppose the amendment because they believe that defining marriage is the prerogative of the individual states and therefore it should not fall under federal jurisdiction. "Be conservative with the Constitution—don't amend

"We have a right to declare what's in the nature of God's law."

—DAVID URE, *Utah State Legislature*

it," reads a *Deseret Morning News* ad run by Citizen Outreach, a right-wing national group.

A bill defining marriage as the union of "a man and a woman" was recently passed by both houses of the Utah legislature. States traditionally recognize marriages performed in other states, and the recent Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling has led Utah lawmakers to fear that they'll have to recognize same-sex marriages. "Marriage is between a man and a woman legally married," said Sen. Chris Butters, R-West Jordan. "Anything other than that is sexual perversion."

Utah Republicans rejected a proposed amendment that would have changed the language of the bill to define mar-

riage as between "one man and one woman." Democrats argued that the change would clarify that the ban also extends to polygamous marriages, but GOP members deemed the clarification unnecessary because the state constitution already outlaws polygamy.

A second measure, similarly amending the state constitution, passed in both legislative bodies and will go to Utah voters for ratification in November.

"Let America run from Utah if they want," said amendment proponent Rep. LaVar Christensen, R-Draper. "This is a moral question, and we make no apologies for that." Rep. David Ure, R-Kamas, defended the amendment saying, "We have a right to declare what's in the nature of God's law."

EVENT IN WASHINGTON DC

A COALITION OF MORMON and non-Mormon leaders gathered 28 February at the Washington D.C. Temple Visitors Center to reaffirm the "continuing importance of a stable family based on the marriage of a husband and a wife" and to denounce same-sex marriage as "an attack on the family."

In the course of the conference, Deseret Book CEO Sheri Dew compared those who do not oppose same-sex marriage to those who did nothing to oppose Hitler. "At first it may seem a bit extreme to imply a comparison between the atrocities of Hitler and what is happening in terms of contemporary threats against the family—but maybe not," Dew wrote in a version of the speech posted by *Meridian* magazine <www.meridianmagazine.com>.

Dew also described a photo of a gay couple getting legally married—a picture she had seen in



Deseret Book CEO Sheri Dew (below) stated that not opposing gay marriage is like not opposing the rise of Hitler. Referring to this picture of LDS returned missionary, Eric Ethington (above left), his partner, and their two daughters, Dew said, "This is hard for me to stomach."



Newsweek. "What distressed me most was the fact that they were both holding an infant 'daughter'—twin girls they had adopted. I was, frankly, heartsick. What kind of chance do those

"When we see LDS leaders provoke disgust at our families, . . . we arrive at a different conclusion about who is the aggressor and who are the victims."

—AFFIRMATION: GAY AND LESBIAN MORMONS

girls have being raised in that kind of setting?" Witnesses to the presentation say Dew's language was stronger than that printed in *Meridian*, with Dew saying of the picture of the gay men and their children "It's hard for me to stomach."

In an ironic twist, and unknown to Dew, one of the grooms

in the photo in question turns out to be Eric Ethington, a Mormon man who served an LDS mission in Korea.

Leaders of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, issued a statement expressing "outrage" over Dew's statements. "We agree with LDS Church president Gordon B. Hinckley when he says that families are under attack," the Affirmation statement reads. "But when we see LDS leaders provoke disgust at our families, spend millions of dollars so that we will never be able to marry, and lobby so that our children will never have two legal parents, we arrive at a different conclusion about who is the aggressor and who are the victims."

Affirmation's complete statement is available at <www.affirmation.org>.