

## Religious Right Targets Maine & Marriage Equality with Money, Anti-Gay Swat Teams and Reprise of Prop-8's False Fearmongering Strategies

National Religious Right organizations that bankrolled the effort to put Proposition 1 on the ballot in Maine descended on the state this past weekend with a SWAT team of anti-gay leaders and veterans of last year's Prop 8 battle in California. The Religious Right's collective targeting of Maine's new marriage equality law demonstrates the huge importance right-wing leaders have placed on reversing gains by marriage equality advocates in the northeast. Religious Right activists must not be allowed to set back this achievement with another massively funded campaign of deception. People For the American Way urges its members and activists to lend support to the excellent Mainer-led campaign No on 1/Protect Maine Equality.

### Who's Calling the Shots?

Marc Mutty, on loan from the Roman Catholic diocese of Portland, where he serves as director of public affairs, chairs Stand for Marriage Maine's executive committee, which also includes and Bob Emrich, a pastor who heads the Maine Jeremiah Project, which actively opposes marriage equality while describing itself as a 501(c)(3) organization. In the summer, Mutty and Emrich pledged to run a "fact-filled" and "honest, civil and respectful campaign." But that's far from what they're doing.



Stand for Marriage  
MAINE

#### Executive Committee:



Marc Mutty,  
Roman Catholic  
Diocese of Portland



Bob Emrich,  
Maine Jeremiah  
Project



Brian Brown,  
National Organization  
for Marriage

In a September 11 column the Portland Press Herald's Bill Nimitz offered a devastating critique of a recent fundraising pitch by Marc Mutty, declaring it evidence that "Mutty's new gig has a lot more to do with fear than facts." Nimitz notes the letter's repeated claims that the marriage equality law will lead to "mandatory gay sex education" in the state's public schools, and reports that Mutty's colleague Emrich supports those claims:

...the Rev. Bob Emrich of the Emmanuel Bible Baptist Church in Plymouth, a member of Stand for Marriage Maine's executive committee, said the group stands by Mutty's claim that the same-sex marriage statute will require "explicit homosexual instruction in the classroom."

Nimitz thoroughly debunks Emrich's convoluted explanation of how a bill that has no language about schools could be interpreted this way, which rests on a claim that it would be required by a supposedly state-mandated family life curriculum. But Nimitz notes that there is no such thing in Maine, that any decisions about family life curricula are made by local elected school boards, and that state law requires an opportunity for parental opt-out of any such curricula, none of which include explicit sexual instruction.

Nimitz summarized his seeming disbelief at the raw falsity of the fundraising letter this way:

All of which raises an intriguing question: Who really wrote this – and what have they done with the old Marc Mutty?

That question, at least, isn't hard to answer.

### The Marriage Machiavelli

The letter that so enraged columnist Nimitz, like other statements from Prop 1 spokesmen, reflects the political strategy put in place by Frank Schubert, the California-based political consultant who ran the Prop 8 campaign and was brought to Maine by Religious Right groups to try to replicate his success. California-based journalist Karen Ocamb

A joint project of People For the American Way and People For the American Way Foundation

recently wrote an article describing Schubert's tactics in Prop 8 and concluding, "Maine voters should be aware of these swiftboating political false prophets."

No kidding. Schubert has promised a "pitched battle." And with the election less than two months away, Maine voters are already being told by campaign leader Marc Mutty that marriage equality will lead to schools where "children as young as 7 or 8 years old are being taught about gay sex in some detail."

That has Schubert written all over it. He abandoned his promise to run a positive campaign in California once he decided that anti-equality forces could only win by taking the low road. So he concocted a campaign strategy based on scaring enough people into believing that marriage equality would somehow turn public schools into gay indoctrination centers. Don't take our word for it. Schubert himself has done plenty of bragging about how his firm shifted gears and won the campaign by creating fear and uncertainty about the effects of marriage equality on children.

The claim that marriage equality will lead inevitably to schoolchildren getting taught about gay sex has been adopted by movement leaders nationwide. Here's an oft-repeated litany by Bishop Harry Jackson, for example. Jackson is the most prominent African American among Religious Right spokesmen and is leading anti-equality organizing in Washington, D.C.:

If you redefine marriage, you redefine the family. If you redefine the family, you redefine parenting. If you redefine parenting, you have to treat kids differently in school.

That's not the only lie Maine voters are hearing. Another favored strategy of Religious Right leaders has been to claim that gay-rights supporters are enemies of religious liberty and are in fact out to silence conservative Christians or even criminalize Christianity. This has become standard Religious Right rhetoric. Remember NOM's infamous "storm clouds" ad? False claims about threats to religious liberty were a major mobilizing tool among conservative Christians in California and the same is happening in Maine.

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*"[Marriage equality will lead to schools where] children as young as 7 or 8 years old are being taught about gay sex in some detail"*  
 -Marc Mutty, *Stand for Marriage Maine*

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Back in July, columnist Nemitz wrote about Marc Mutty's claims to be part of a minority that is being discriminated

against and treated as pariahs, noting that "victimization sells – especially in politics."

## The Anti-Gay A-List Comes to Augusta

State Sen. Deborah Plowman claimed this month that marriage equality would come "at the expense of people of faith," exhibiting anti-equality advocates' offensive dual habits of ignoring all the people of faith who support equality and smearing equality supporters as enemies of religious freedom.



The Religious Right brought Frank Schubert and others to Maine to fight against marriage equality

Schubert is not the only major import for this campaign. The National Organization for Marriage, Family Research Council and Focus on the Family brought a national A-list of anti-gay activists to town for a no-press-allowed rally on Sunday and a closed-door "pastors briefing" on Monday. (NOM's Maggie Gallagher was in Maine earlier this month to speak privately to Catholic clergy.) Among the Religious Right celebrities were Harry Jackson and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, as well as San Diego preacher Chris Clark. San Diego was the center of church-based anti-gay organizing in California.

If the message delivered at those briefings was anything like the pastors' briefings that Perkins and Jackson hosted in California last fall, they would have included these themes: marriage is the Armageddon of the culture war; anti-equality activists are God's warriors engaged in spiritual warfare against marriage equality supporters, who are doing the work of Satan; and the effort to keep marriage restricted to one man and one woman is essential to religious freedom and civilization itself. In California, pastors were urged to provide volunteers and make church membership databases available to campaign organizers.

Indeed, although Sunday's rally in August was closed to the press, one of the speakers, Rev. Chris Clark of San Diego, told Baptist Press:

"I told them God won the battle in California, and the same God that won the battle in California can and will win the battle in Maine."

And they no doubt included a briefing on Schubert's strategy of sowing fear about children.

Not appearing on Sunday's speaker list was Mike Heath of

the Maine Family Policy Council, which is affiliated with Dobson's Focus on the Family. At one level, Heath's absence is surprising. As a longtime leader of anti-gay forces in Maine, Heath helped headline a similar event earlier in the year. It may be that some Prop 1 strategists were wary of Heath's recent claims that everything from bad weather to the financial crisis to trash in the streets of Portland could be blamed on gays. Heath's Maine Policy Council is still intimately involved in the campaign, even if Heath was kicked off the podium for Sunday's event.

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 -Rev. Chris Clark

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## Follow the money – if you can

It's no surprise that the Right is waging this line of attack – The anti-equality campaign in Maine has been initially funded almost entirely by the National Organization for Marriage, Focus on the Family, the conservative Catholic Knights of Columbus, and the Roman Catholic diocese of Portland. In fact, July's campaign finance reports showed those four organizations were responsible for more than 99 percent of the contributions to Stand for Maine Marriage:

Four groups account for \$341,000 of the \$343,000 anti-gay marriage funds: the New Jersey-based National Organization for Marriage contributed \$160,000; the Catholic diocese of Portland anted up \$100,000; the Knights of Columbus chipped in \$50,000, and Focus on the Family Maine added \$31,000.

Contributions from Maine individuals amounted to \$400, less than one percent of the amount raised.

Some donations from Maine were likely funneled through the National Organization for Marriage, which has this year been enthusiastically encouraging its supporters to launder their contributions to anti-gay initiatives through NOM in order to thwart state campaign finance laws designed to let the public know who is paying for campaigns:

Brian Brown, president of NOM, emailed donors repeatedly in the spring that they would remain anonymous.

"And unlike in California, every dollar you give to

NOM's Northeast Action Plan today is private, with no risk of harassment from gay marriage protesters," he wrote in one email. Another plea included, "Your gift is confidential: no public disclosure!"

That strategy has not been limited to Maine. In an August 24 letter about NOM's decision to make a massive ad buy in a state legislative special election (their candidate lost), Brown wrote,

Best of all, as a 501(c)(4), NOM has the ability to protect donor identities, ensuring that you, your family, and your business are not targeted by gay marriage advocates for harassment.

Maine election laws require donors of \$50 or more to political campaigns be listed on campaign finance reports. In August, activist Fred Karger, founder of Californians Against Hate, complained about NOM's strategy of hiding campaign donors to the Maine Commission on Government Ethics and Election Practices. The Commission has since sent NOM a letter inviting it to respond to the allegations. Karger recently noted that in one recent email to activists, NOM's Brian Brown did urge people to give directly to Stand for Marriage Maine, but that the link provided still directed people to a contribution page for NOM itself.

One local funding boost for anti-equality activists came this past Sunday, courtesy of Bishop Richard Malone, who asked Catholic churches across the state to pass the collection plate a second time to raise money for the campaign, another tactic Prop 8 organizers had urged ministers in California to employ.

## We must defeat the Religious Right's attack on equality in Maine

Earlier this year, after hard work by local organizers, Maine legislators passed, and the governor signed, marriage equality legislation. Religious Right leaders responded by pouring money into the state to help gather signatures for a veto initiative, and they have imported the strategist and strategies that fueled the dishonorable Prop 8 campaign in California. It's urgently important to prevent the Religious Right from turning the milestone in Maine into yet another victory in a nationwide war against equality. Equality in Maine must stand. Non-Maine residents can support the No on 1/Protect Maine Equality campaign with donations, participation in phone banking, or even by spending a week in October volunteering for the campaign.



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We believe a society that reflects these constitutional principles and progressive values is worth fighting for, and we take seriously our responsibility to cultivate new generations of leaders and activists who will sustain these values for the life of this nation.

Our operational mission is to promote the American Way and defend it from attack, to build and nurture communities of support for our values, and to equip those communities to promote progressive policies, elect progressive candidates, and hold public officials accountable.

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