

S. Carolina votes in November

By Kirsten Singleton | *Morris News Service*

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COLUMBIA - It was, Ken Hubbard says, a slap across his mother's face.

Mr. Hubbard said his mother worked two jobs to raise five kids on her own and managed to put them all through college. So when the president and executive director of the Palmetto Family Council spoke up last year at a legislative committee meeting, Mr. Hubbard said he was insulted.

"When I heard Oran Smith say that the 'gold standard' for family was one man, one woman, 2.5 kids, a dog and a white picket fence ... I realized that he just slapped my mother," said Mr. Hubbard, who lives in Charleston.

Mr. Smith doesn't see it that way. Most of South Carolina's single parents deserve to be proud of what they accomplish, Mr. Smith said Thursday. He maintains that the best family unit is one headed by a father and a mother, and he believes single parents would prefer having someone else around to help.

Mr. Hubbard and Mr. Smith represent two fronts of a storm brewing in South Carolina.

As the Georgia Supreme Court prepares to hear a lawsuit later this month over that state's gay-marriage amendment, the debate over South Carolina's is heating up.

Since being approved by the Legislature in 2005, South Carolina's proposed constitutional amendment stating, in part, that only marriages between a man and a woman should be recognized has taken a back seat to other legislative issues such as property taxes and eminent domain laws.

With the 2006 legislative session over, however, attention is shifting to November, when voters will be asked to approve what supporters call the "gay marriage" and opponents call the "family discrimination" amendment.

South Carolina is among 45 states that already ban same-sex marriages by statute or constitution. Under federal law, states cannot be required to recognize same-sex marriages formed in other states. South Carolina banned same-sex marriage by state law back in 1996.

However, Massachusetts began marrying same-sex couples in 2004, and other states might follow suit, either allowing same-sex marriages or civil unions. Mr. Smith believes the best way to protect South Carolina is to put a ban in the state constitution.

"We're not breaking any new ground," he said. "We are just solidifying our laws."

Opponents argue, however, that South Carolina's amendment would, indeed, break new ground. They say the effects could reach far beyond the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community - from limiting who could be prosecuted under domestic violence laws to complicating the dispersal of estate assets.

"The people who are voting for (similar proposals in other states) don't understand the ins and outs of what they're voting for," said Lisa Hall, who, like Mr. Hubbard, is working with the South Carolina Equality Coalition to defeat the amendment.

"You always have that segment of the population that wants to make it a religious issue, when it's really a civil rights issue," Ms. Hall said.

Coalition members say they are starting to organize their efforts with door-to-door campaigns, mailings and advertisements.

The Coalition also plans to approach groups for support, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, churches and domestic violence organizations.

THE BALLOT QUESTION

Must Article XVII of the Constitution of this State be amended by adding Section 15 so as to provide that in this State and its political subdivisions, a marriage between one man and one woman is the only lawful domestic union that shall be valid or recognized; that this State and its political subdivisions shall not create, recognize or give effect to a legal status, right or claim created by another jurisdiction respecting any other domestic union, however denominated; that this amendment shall not impair any right or benefit extended by the state or its political subdivisions other than a right or benefit arising from a domestic union that is not valid or recognized in this State; and that this amendment shall not prohibit or limit the

ability of parties other than the state or its political subdivisions from entering into contracts or other legal instruments?

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