

Hundreds turn out for gay rights debate

Log Cabin GOP leader spars with local pastor over conservative Christian values

By Estelle Gwinn Daily News staff writer |

Hundreds of people filled the University of Idaho's Student Union Building ballroom Thursday night for a debate on whether gay rights are antithetical to conservative Christian values.

Collegiate Reformed Fellowship sponsored the nearly three-hour event where Douglas Wilson, controversial pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, debated R. Clark Cooper, executive director of Log Cabin Republicans in Washington, D.C.

Cooper, openly gay, Episcopalian and Republican, maintained that being gay and being conservative are not mutually exclusive entities, while Wilson held that the homosexual lifestyle is in direct conflict with conservative Christian views.

The debate was moderated by Gabriel Rench, a student at Greyfriars' Hall ministerial training program, where Wilson is an instructor. Rench said he resorted to moderating the debate after approaching others.

The debaters argued on two different platforms, one based in politics and one based in theology. Cooper clearly took the position that gay and lesbian couples should reserve the right to marry because of the legal implications that accompany marriage such as inheritance laws and insurance laws. However, he maintained that a couple's legal marriage does not need to encroach on those who do not believe in gay rights.

"The church can refuse to recognize a marriage," Cooper said. "A courthouse status by no means guarantees recognition from the church."

Wilson's main argument was based in the "slippery slope" argument, claiming if the government were to endorse gay marriage it would be inevitable that they would have to approve polygamous marriage.

"This will most certainly happen if we open the gates to gay rights," Wilson said. "If you leave the key under the mat, you're not the only one who can open the door."

Wilson accused Cooper of dodging the issue and not offering a clear argument against polygamous relationships if the time came to defend marriage against them.

Cooper's response did not offer an argument to defend the sanctity of marriage against polygamy because he said there is no support for polygamous marriage in government and he could not see there ever being any.

"There have been no bills sponsored for polygamy. Is that something that could happen? Sure, but there's no precedent for that," Cooper said.

On several topics the two agreed, including the ever-growing presence of government.

"We have layers of government that burden us," Cooper said, agreeing with Wilson that government made the issue of marriage too complicated. "Today, several layers of tax codes define what it means to be married by law."

Cooper called the mix of religious marriage with legal marriage a "tax grab" by the government.

Cooper concluded his side by pointing out the similarities in the two arguments: reduction of government, value of individual liberties and value of freedom. His reason for participating in the debate, he said, was to reach out to conservatives about gay rights from a more familiar, Republican perspective.

"I wanted to educate and remind people that just because someone is born gay does not mean they are against family values," Cooper said.

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