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Rallies protest Bush, gay marriage ban

Tom Musbach

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*Additional reporting from Christopher Lisotta*

Crowds rallied in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York on Tuesday evening to protest President George Bush's support for a constitutional amendment that forbids same-sex couples from marrying.

In San Francisco, approximately 200 protestors gathered under dark storm clouds and a giant, flapping rainbow flag at Harvey Milk Plaza. The speakers included newly married couples and their children, one of whom was a 15-year-old girl who said she and the others "deserve nothing less than equality."

Rev. Mark Wilson, a Baptist pastor from Berkeley, charged the Bush administration with blurring the separation of church and state.

"This is not a matter of religion," he told the crowd, "but a matter of what's right."

He also spoke of the complications of trying to "define" marriage, a purpose Bush cited in his support for the amendment. Wilson noted that the definition of marriage in the Old Testament, for example, appears to include polygamy and incest.

"If we're going to create a definition [of marriage]," Wilson shouted, "let's bring on all the definitions!"

The rally ended with the crowd singing "What the World Needs Now Is Love," by Burt Bacharach.

The New York rally attracted 350 people, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), which organized the event. The crowd assembled at the city's GLBT community centre, and attendees carried signs displaying messages such as, "Bush: Our families are not political footballs."

Speakers included New York State Sen. Tom Duane, NGLTF leader Matt Foreman, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah and a couple recently married in British Columbia, Roberta Sklar and Sondra Segal.

In the Los Angeles area, more than 400 people attended a rally in West Hollywood, stopping traffic on Santa Monica Blvd., the city's main thoroughfare. The rally attracted many local GLBT rights activists, including Lambda Legal's Jon Davidson, Sheri Lunn of the NGLTF, Metropolitan Community Church Founder Rev. Troy Perry, and Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Centre Executive Director Lorri Jean.

"We have gathered here today because we are outraged," Jean said to the crowd. "We are outraged that the president of the United States wants to tarnish the most sacred document in our democracy."

Los Angeles City Council member Eric Garcetti also spoke, informing the crowd the next day he would be introducing a resolution to the city council opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment or any amendment that "would enshrine in the United States Constitution discrimination against people based on their sexuality or choice of life partner."

West Hollywood City Council member Abbe Land also announced her city would be taking legislative steps to address the issue by enhancing its own Equal Benefits Ordinance. The resolution would require West Hollywood to recognize same-sex marriage licenses from San Francisco or Massachusetts.

"If President Bush thought his re-election was on shaky ground before today," Land warned, "he should know that now he is standing on quicksand."

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