

Not a Member? [Login/Register](#) | [Subscription Services](#)

34°

Feels like 27°

10:10 am on Friday, March 20, 2009

[Home](#) [News](#) [Opinion](#) [Sports](#) [Outdoors](#) [Entertainment](#) [Food & Dining](#) [Home & Style](#) [Multimedia](#) [Obituaries](#) [Celebrations](#)
[Classifieds](#) [Cars](#) [Jobs](#) [Homes](#) [Personals](#)

News

March 19, 2009

Religious group targets delegates 'standing in the way' of gay-marriage ban Webster questions who's funding telephone campaign

By [Alison Knezevich](#)

Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A religious group is targeting House Judiciary Chairwoman Carrie Webster and Monongalia County Delegate Barbara Fleischauer in a phone campaign on gay marriage, and Webster says callers are harassing her staff.

This week, some West Virginians have received telemarketer-type calls from people representing the Family Policy Council of West Virginia.

The caller tells them the two women are blocking a ban on gay marriage, according to people who have gotten the calls. If recipients choose, the caller patches them through to Webster's or Fleischauer's office to express their views on gay marriage.

Council President Jeremiah Dys said his group hired a firm to begin making the calls in the past few days "as part of our educational effort."

"We've been encouraging people to make calls to Delegate Webster and Delegate Fleischauer," Dys said. "They are the two people standing in the way of 1.8 million West Virginians deciding the definition of marriage."

A resolution (HJR5) to amend the state's Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman has been referred to the House Committee on Constitutional Revision, which Fleischauer heads. If approved there, the resolution would go to Webster's committee.

"What's really troubling about it is that the bill is not even pending in my committee," Webster said.

She said the callers are trying to "intimidate" her and Fleischauer.

"They call my staff idiots. They call my staff God-haters," the Kanawha County Democrat said. "I believe people should be able to exercise their free speech, but I do think it's a manipulation."

Fleischauer did not return a message seeking comment.

Last week, state senators passed a bill (SB238) that would add sexual orientation to West Virginia's civil rights laws. Webster believes the phone campaign is related to that bill, which was sent to the House.

"I think the objective has been to make sure that we don't protect gays in employment and in housing," Webster said.

She and others question who is paying for the phone calls, saying that such

campaigns are often funded by out-of-state special-interest groups.

"That particular type of campaign is not cheap," said Seth DiStefano, a lobbyist with the ACLU of West Virginia, which has pushed for the civil rights bill.

However, Dys said funding for the calls "has come out of our bank account."

He said the Family Policy Council of West Virginia is not part of a national group, although it is affiliated with Family Policy Councils across the country. The councils are not legally connected, he said.

Last month, Dys' group ran online ads that garnered national attention. The ad compared people who support gay marriage to snipers targeting families.

Reach Alison Knezevich at alis...@wvgazette.com or 304-348-1240.