

Gay marriage battle endangering religious voices, LDS leader says

By Jamshid Askar

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SALT LAKE CITY — As the battle over same-sex marriage winds its way through the federal courts, the fundamental right to voice religious beliefs in political debates is seriously endangered, said Elder Lance B. Wickman.

Elder Wickman, an attorney for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a member of the Quorum of the Seventy, made the remarks Thursday as part of the 2010 J. Reuben Clark Law Society Conference at the University of Utah.

"I believe that the greatest challenge faced by the church," Elder Wickman said, "is the challenge to religious liberty that is growing worldwide. ... A battle is looming over the effort to acquire civil social rights at the expense of civil religious rights. This battle, I believe, represents the acceleration of a disturbing slide downward in the law regarding the place of religion in the public square."

He spoke specifically regarding the court case of *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*. Presently at the trial level in federal court, the case challenges the Proposition 8 initiative passed by California voters in 2008 that limits marriage to being between a man and a woman. Elder Wickman said *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* portends to define not just marriage per se but the ground rules for all future political debate as well.

"Perry seeks a court declaration that, as a matter of law, religious views may not be used to justify the denial of a social civil right," he said. "Stated differently, they essentially claim that the voters, from whom all authority in a democracy flows, may not consider religious views and values when deciding these alleged social and cultural civil rights."

"These are serious allegations and represent an arrow directly at the heart not only of traditional marriage but at the place of religion and religious views in the political dialogue of this country."

Elder Wickman quoted extensively from the speech Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve delivered at BYU-Idaho in 2009 about the legal ramifications of the same-sex marriage debate.

"That address, I think, promises to become a classic, even a benchmark in our day," he said.

e-mail: jaskar@desnews.com