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Bachmann, stepsister hold opposing views

The lesbian stepsister of Minnesota's leading champion of the marriage amendment begs to differ.

Dane Smith, Star Tribune

Seated just a few feet away from state Sen. Michele Bachmann as she testified for the same-sex marriage amendment Tuesday was Bachmann's stepsister, Helen LaFave.

But she was not there as an ally. LaFave is a lesbian who marked the occasion by coming out publicly for the first time with a statement about her sexual orientation and views contradicting her stepsister's.

LaFave said she disagrees strongly with Bachmann, R-Stillwater, the state's most visible champion of the amendment, which would ban same-sex marriage, civil unions and other legal equivalents.

"We've heard a lot of discussion about what this is all about," said LaFave, 46, of Minneapolis. "What this really is about is insurance coverage, inheritance rights and medical decision-making" for same-sex couples.

LaFave's father married Bachmann's mother when the women were teenagers, resulting in a blended family of nine children. LaFave said she and Bachmann spent some summers together but that Bachmann, who is a few years older, was away at college much of the time after their families came together.

Bachmann has "never spoken to me about this disagreement" and has not responded to LaFave's letters about the subject, LaFave said. LaFave said she last saw Bachmann about a year ago, at LaFave's father's 80th birthday party.

LaFave attended the hearing with her partner, Nia Wronski, and LaFave's sister and nephew.

"This issue has been very hurtful to me personally, and divisive for our family," LaFave said.

But Bachmann insisted that she has talked to LaFave about the issue and that "Helen has in no way been ostracized from our family."

"I love my stepsister, love her deeply and her partner as well," Bachmann said. "That fact does not change the fact that we live in a form of representative government where people have the right to make the laws that they live under," Bachmann said.

The amendment would not take away many contractual benefits for same-sex couples that now exist, Bachmann said, including joint purchases of real estate and vehicles, creation of wills and legal agreements that allow couples to make medical decisions for each other. Same-sex couples also can get religious recognition of their unions from some churches.

Bachmann said some of the nine children in her blended family agree with her and others with LaFave. Her count of the current family vote is about 6-3 in favor of the amendment, Bachmann said.

Dane Smith • 651-292-0164

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