

Mormon paper irks readers on migrant stance

by [John Dart](#) in the [October 19, 2010](#) issue

The Mormon-owned *Deseret News* has been taking a relatively liberal stance toward undocumented Latino immigrants whose cause is supported heavily by citizens of Hispanic origin.

The international church body based in Salt Lake City has had a longstanding mission presence in Latin America. In recent months, the church and Deseret Media have improved contacts with U.S. Hispanic groups, including establishing a free Spanish-language newspaper sympathetic to immigration reform.

The effort to side with the growing minority in this country may have religious compassion at its root. But Mormons—like many evangelical Christians—also appear to recognize that family-value Latinos, a naturally conservative constituency, find more religious and political allies among liberal churches and Democrats than among conservative Republicans.

But the newspaper's more liberal approach to the issues "has led to a collision between its editorial mission and its conservative, mostly Mormon, readers," according to the *New York Times* in its September 20 edition.

Former editor Joseph A. Cannon, who has chaired the Utah Republican Party, has published generally accepted editorials in the *Deseret News* criticizing government deficit spending and same-sex marriage, but the newspaper has received heavy criticism for its stance on illegal immigrants.

"The church's practice is to say, 'Look, we're not immigration agents. We care for the soul,'" Cannon told the *New York Times*.

Both Cannon and Deseret Media's chief executive, Mark H. Willes, said they have never sought approval from church officials on any editorial or article they have run. They also said the church has never asked to see an article before it was printed, though former editors said the practice has been to fax drafts of editorials to church

headquarters, according to the *Times*.

Over many decades, the Mormon hierarchy has been reluctant to take public positions on political issues, although the church strongly backed the antigay marriage Proposition 8 in California. So far, the top authorities have appealed only for "careful reflection and civil discourse" on the immigration issue. In the heavily Mormon Utah legislature, lawmakers are debating a zero-tolerance illegal immigration law similar to the one passed in Arizona this year.

In August, Willes wrote a front-page editorial in the *News* next to an image of the Statue of Liberty—a combination that harked back to the Mormon church's early history of seeking refuge from persecution in westward migrations. "We, of all people, should be sensitive to the desire of others to provide more opportunities for themselves and their families," Willes wrote.

Cannon said the *Deseret News* is not going to offend its owners, but expressed willingness to remind fellow Mormons of biblical admonitions they share with Christian churches: "What are the two commandments? Love God and love your neighbor," he said. "These people are our neighbors—incontestably, by any definition, they are our neighbors."