

Some vow fight for gay marriage: Religious leaders voice support in print ads

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A small coalition of religious leaders voiced their support for same-sex marriage in a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, saying they intend to continue fighting for same-sex marriage despite a string of recent court setbacks.

The ads are part of a larger campaign organized by three gay-rights groups that spent \$250,000 to print the ads in 51 newspapers nationwide in late July. Organizers call it the largest print space purchase made by supporters of gay rights.

The ad campaign was organized by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Freedom to Marry. The 11 signers of the ad, which appeared in the July 25 *Times*, include James A. Forbes Jr., senior minister at Riverside Church in New York City; John H. Thomas, president of the United Church of Christ; and Jack Rogers, a former moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

“We believe that marriage is a civil right, and we will continue to advocate for full legal and civic equality for all loving couples,” said William G. Sinkford, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, in a statement. Sinkford officiated at the first legal same-sex wedding in Massachusetts.

After several recent setbacks for gay-rights activists in New York and other states, the state of Washington’s Supreme Court narrowly voted to uphold that state’s ban on same-sex marriage July 26. In a 5-4 decision, the court ruled against two groups of gay couples that had sued, claiming that a state law defining marriage in heterosexual-only terms violated Washington’s constitution.

The complicated Washington ruling produced six separate opinions totaling more than 200 pages. It surprised both sides of the gay-marriage debate; Washington’s

high court was one of the nation's likeliest to uphold marriage rights for same-sex couples, said some experts.

The court's plurality said the gay couples who sued had "not established that they are members of a [constitutionally] suspect class [that deserves protection] or that they have a fundamental right to marriage that includes the right to marry a person of the same sex."

Nineteen couples, including a UCC clergy couple, were challenging the constitutionality of the state's ban on same-sex marriage. Peter Ilgenfritz, a pastor at University Congregational UCC in Seattle since 1994, and Dave Shull, a former member of the church's pastoral staff, have been in a committed same-sex relationship for more than 20 years.

Gay-marriage opponents in Washington rejoiced at the ruling. "This was a God moment. I don't want anyone to think otherwise," Ken Hutcherson, pastor at Antioch Bible Church in suburban Seattle, told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. "No one expected this court to rule this way."