

Pro-life activist opposes photo of SC women lawmakers

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COLUMBIA, SC

A request to hang a group photo of the General Assembly's female lawmakers in the State House led to an uncomfortable debate Tuesday in which a pro-life activist urged lawmakers not to endorse such symbols of "destructive and evil" feminism.

The 10-member State House Committee, made up of nine men and one woman, rebuked Columbia Christians for Life director

Steve Lefemine, shutting down his testimony after three minutes.

By then, Lefemine had passed out packets of anti-feminist literature, expressed his view that the Bible says women are not fit for public office, and read aloud from an article titled, "The Feminism of the Mothers is the Destruction of the Daughters."

Lefemine frequently is in the State House lobby, greeting lawmakers with anti-abortion posters and pamphlets. However, his activism has drawn scorn from fellow evangelicals

who say it crosses the line.

Just as Lefemine began to explain Tuesday why the "Biblical doctrine of the headship of man disqualifies a woman from civil office," state Rep. Russell Ott interrupted.

The Calhoun Democrat said he also is a Christian but has found nothing in the Bible that "backs up anything that you are saying."

"I don't think this committee or the people behind you deserve to have to sit there and listen to that," Ott said, moving to put a one-minute cap on Lefemine's remaining testimony.

Rep. Ann Thayer, R-Anderson, the only woman on the committee, told Lefemine that female legislators feel called to their positions, and that some pray before taking them.

"We are heirs to the kingdom, and being heirs

to the kingdom, that makes us all equal," she said.

"Ladies, we can't let things like this stand in our way."

The debate was over a moot point.

There is a decade-old moratorium on placing additional monuments on the State House grounds or in the State House, meaning the composite photo of the General Assembly's Women's Caucus will need either an exception to that law or an alternate home.

State Sen. Katrina Shealy, R-Lexington, had hoped to hang the photo in the State House library, a private break room that connects the Senate and House chambers.

Women's rights groups say the photo should be on display in a State House that lags behind national averages for the number of female legislators.

Women make up about 16 percent of the General Assembly, according to the Women's Rights and Empowerment Network. The four women currently in the 46-member state Senate are the most ever in the State House's upper chamber.

"At the very least, we should honor the few but fierce women who have served at the State House with a composite photograph, and hope that this visual representation will inspire a new generation of girls to see themselves in these women and run for political office," WREN chief executive Ann Warner said in a statement.

In response to Lefemine, state Sen. Vincent Sheheen, D-Kershaw, asked the committee to find a creative way around the moratorium.

"I sure would like to find a way to hang this portrait up, even if it was just on a temporary basis in the chambers this year, on a tripod," Sheheen said, adding that would "show the state of South Carolina how much we value the women members of this body."

Shealy told The State she would work to pass a resolution to hang the composite photo in the State House's Blatt and Gressette buildings, where legislators' offices are housed. The Women's Caucus also might create a "Women of the S.C. General Assembly" calendar, she said.

"The picture will be on the cover."

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