



DART to the *Deseret News* for dereliction of journalistic duty in its coverage of the Mormon Church and the Church's involvement in Proposition 8, the successful California ballot measure to ban same-sex marriage.

In March, new allegations surfaced about donations made by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to support the California legislation. Although the church reported that the sum of its donations was less than \$200,000, a California advocacy group asked the state to investigate the church's involvement with the National Organization for Marriage, which spent millions on the campaign. The inquiry into the Church's support is ongoing.

In its reporting, the *Deseret News* gave short shrift to the allegations, only quoting sources who defended the Church, whereas the competing *Salt Lake Tribune*, and other publications, published several articles on the topic that let both sides express their positions.

The Salt Lake City-based *News* has been owned by the Mormon Church since it was founded in 1850. The paper has long struggled to define its editorial sensibility vis-à-vis the Church. Under former editor John Hughes, the *News* tried to emulate *The Christian Science Monitor* model, in which the Church does not have a say editorially. But the arrival of current editor-in-chief Joe Cannon signaled a marked change in direction. In November 2007, Cannon sent a memo to his staff announcing that the *News* would begin to more closely serve the LDS community, both in Utah and around the world.

One of Cannon's most visible changes was the launch of Mormon Times, a new section in the paper, with a matching Web site, MormonTimes.com.

Over the past year, state-government editor Josh Loftin says, Cannon has made it clear that the paper should seek to boost its readership in the LDS community, and has used "more Mormon" to describe the direction of the *News*. At the end of February, Cannon reorganized the newsroom, moving assistant managing news editor Chuck Gates and business editor Julianne Basinger to less influential positions as a result of their reluctance to get with the program. In protest, about a dozen reporters withheld their bylines from their articles on February 25. Loftin was outspoken about the pressure from Cannon, telling the *Salt Lake Tribune* that stories had been killed or altered so that they do not offend Mormon "sensibilities or put the LDS church in a negative light."

The *News* can't have it both ways—either it's an unquestioning voice for the Mormon Church or it's a publication that serves its entire community with unflinching coverage that holds nothing sacred.

DART to *Eyewitness News* on KIRO7, Seattle's CBS affiliate, for failing to publicly address serious questions about the accuracy of two of its reports. In October and November 2008, investigative reporter Chris Halsne led a team that produced two segments about voter fraud in Washington's King County. The first claimed that state voter rolls contained hundreds of felons who were ineligible to vote. The second suggested that dead voters were on the rolls and casting ballots. As a result of the stories, the state election board received dozens of complaints.

But Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed, whose office oversees elections, filed a complaint with the Washington News Council, contending that the stories were fundamentally inaccurate. He cited one particularly egregious error in which the "deceased" voter featured in one of Halsne's stories was actually the son who shared his dead father's name. The widow of the alleged ghost voter told Reed's office that she had tried to explain this to the KIRO7 reporter. In the second story, the "felon voter" interviewed had actually been convicted of a misdemeanor, which would not disqualify her from voting.

Reed also criticized the analytical methodology used by Halsne and his team. By comparing data from the state's Department of Corrections with Voter Registration data, Reed's complaint claims, KIRO7 got an incomplete and erroneous picture that included numerous false-positive results. For example, while the DOC may have listed individuals as convicted felons, some may have had their voting rights restored by "completing all terms of the sentence, or, for felonies committed prior to 2000, by allowing 10 years to pass since conviction or release, whichever is later." Therefore, some convicted felons listed on the voting rolls were, in fact, legitimate voters.

After determining that Reed's complaint met the "serious and substantive" threshold, the news council delivered a formal complaint to KIRO7 inviting them to respond to Reed and offering informal mediation that could avoid a public-hearing process. The station's general manager Eric Lerner, joined by Halsne and two other staffers, finally agreed to meet with Reed and his aides on January 21, and Lerner said that at the meeting, the station stood by its stories. But several weeks later, the two stories in question were removed from KIRO7's Web site, without explanation; a KIRO7 spokeswoman—the only representative from the station who would discuss the matter with CJR—said only that the station stands by the stories. "We take stories down from the Web site every day," said Maria Lamarca Anderson.

What's disappointing isn't that KIRO7 made mistakes—journalists make mistakes all the time—but that it has refused to either own up to them or explain why it stands by the stories. **CJR**