

# OUT WITH ELLEN

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and grandparents must insure that series advertisers understand that the majority of Americans do not want their children and grandchildren being told that 'gay is OK' from television executives and producers with an anti-family agenda."

Falwell noted he personally wrote to General Motors, Chrysler and Johnson & Johnson—the show's leading advertisers—"appealing to them as parents and caring business leaders to withdraw financial support of the *Ellen* series."

All three, along with J.C. Penney, have in fact selected not to tout their wares during the April 30 show. Wendy's also recently jumped on the anti-*Ellen* bandwagon and announced it will pull its ads from future shows.

Meanwhile, WBMA, an ABC affiliate in Birmingham, Ala., has flat out refused to air the program. Officials at the station, which reaches approximately half of the state's population, claim the episode is not appropriate "family viewing."

Some call that censorship.

"The station should not try to dictate to Alabama viewers what is appropriate to watch," says Kerry Lobel, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, "especially when all the other affiliates apparently are airing the program."

"This is a black eye for Birmingham. The people of Alabama are fully capable of making their own decision about whether or not to tune in to this episode," adds David White of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Alabama. "Thousands of gay and lesbian people live, breathe, eat and work in Alabama. Taking an episode of *Ellen* off the air doesn't change that fact."

WBMA is the only affiliate to date that has determined the episode is not appropriate for viewers.

As we went to press, reports from Birmingham say thousands of people in that area are expected to watch *Ellen* via satellite feed: Birmingham Pride has rented a 5,000-seat auditorium, while local bars, clubs and individuals are also having viewing parties.

Alabama was also the site of a "Save the Commandments Rally" on April 12, where thousands gathered to support Judge Roy Moore's legal battle to keep the Ten Commandments on the wall of his courtroom. The *Ellen* controversy found its way into the protest via a demonstrator's placard, which called for DeGeneres, along with civil rights attorney Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the president of the Alabama chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, to Burn In Hell.

A similar sentiment was apparently expressed from more unexpected quarters. Oprah Winfrey, who has a role as a therapist in the coming out episode, has reportedly received "bins" of mail blasting her for "promoting lesbianism." Other critics questioned the popular talk show host's professed Christianity.

While that's not a shock, Winfrey says members of her own staff have warned her she would "burn in hell" for her involvement in the program.

Winfrey, who disclosed that information during her April 15 broadcast, said there would be no repercussions because she respects the right of her staff members to express their beliefs.

**B**ack on the advertising front, the national ABC network turned down HRC's request to make a single nationwide purchase of air time, citing its policy against "controversial issue advertising."

HRC's ad aims to increase awareness about the problem of job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Though it's more costly, HRC is asking selected ABC local affiliates to air the spot, which features a woman who has just been fired from her job because of her sexual orientation. A conversation between her co-workers reveals that the firing,

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PHOTO BY MIKE ANSELL

Above: Ellen with gay pal Peter (Patrick Bristow) and his lover Barrett (Jack Plotnick)

Left: Ellen and her on-screen object of desire in the coming out episode, Susan, played by Laura Dern

