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Defining Pornography Proves Tricky, Even in a Utah Town

By MICHAEL JANOFSKY

BOUNTIFUL, Utah, Jan. 29 — When recent budget cuts led Utah to get rid of its so-called pornography czar, an official charged with helping communities set standards against indecent material, no one was sadder than JoAnn Hamilton.

An author of self-published books about the family, a lecturer, former seminary teacher, Mormon, mother of 8, stepmother of 13 and foster mother of 16, Mrs. Hamilton, 64, has campaigned for years to shield children from pornography. She says that even magazine pictures of models in swimsuits can lead boys to sexual addiction and arrested emotional development.

"She did great work," Mrs. Hamilton said of the former czar, Paula Houston, a former prosecutor who had the only job of its kind in the country. Ms. Houston's official title was obscenity and pornography complaints ombudsman. "I did what I could to help her."

In recent weeks, Mrs. Hamilton has done even more, imploring store owners to hide suggestive magazine covers and getting hundreds of people in her neighborhood to post signs on their lawns that say "Protect Children: Remove Inappropriate Material

From View." Here in Bountiful, an upper-income, largely Mormon community of 42,000 north of Salt Lake City, those efforts have made Mrs. Hamilton a heroine to many friends and neighbors.

They include store managers who readily agreed to remove The National Enquirer and other tabloids from checkout counters and to wrap the covers of magazines like Cosmopolitan and Vogue to hide any hint of sexuality.

The manager of Dick's Market, who declined to give his name, said, "Anything that's lewd, like women's busts showing cleavage, or bad remarks, we cover up so only the name shows."

But Mrs. Hamilton's campaign hit a snag last week, showing that even in a state where 70 percent of residents belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a struggle over standards and sensitivities can be tricky.

One morning, Mrs. Hamilton awoke to find hundreds of her "Protect Children" signs on her lawn. Some had been defaced with a red "X." On one sign, tape hid her message and carried a new one: "Preserve Freedom." She learned later that more than 200 other signs had simply disappeared.

Paul Rapp, the police chief in Bountiful,

a town with one of the lowest crime rates in Utah, said he knew of no suspects.

Disagreements over standards are not uncommon in Utah, where traditions reflect the conservative nature of the Mormon church. Utah's liquor laws, for example, do not allow conventional bars, only private clubs, which patrons pay to join for the right to buy alcoholic drinks. State lawmakers are about to consider a bill to liberalize the drinking laws, lowering the cost of club membership to \$4 for eight people for three weeks, instead of \$5 for six people for two weeks.

This is monumental in Utah. Proponents call it the biggest overhaul of state liquor laws in more than a decade. It is so important that the bill's sponsors asked Mormon leaders to vet the proposal. They raised no objections, and Nicholas Hales, chairman of the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission, said he expected it to pass.

Mrs. Hamilton said the theft and vandalism of the signs had shaken her. She said she was not angry at the crime, but at the misunderstanding of the message.

"This is not a First Amendment issue," she said. "I'm not trying to take away anything from anybody. I just want to protect children."

She said that if she could meet the van-

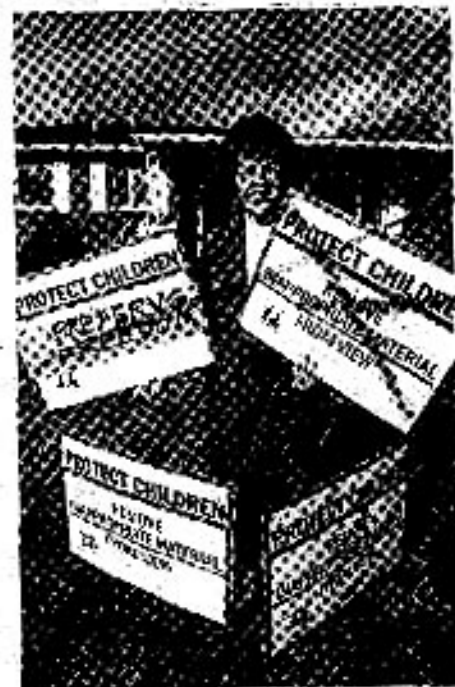
dals, she would try to make them understand the pernicious nature of pornography, as she describes it in her latest book, "To Strengthen the Family" (Positive Values Publishing, 2002). In one passage she recounts a typical encounter with someone who has seen the light after "porn has turned his life upside down."

"When I hear this, I always congratulate the person, then ask, 'How did it start?' she writes. "Invariably, he replies, 'Swimsuit pictures, stuff like that; sometimes the lingerie section of a catalogue.' For some it began with National Geographic."

Robert Weiss, clinical director of the Sexual Recovery Institute in Los Angeles, dismissed this view as "propaganda, not science." Pornography might contribute to a sex addiction, Dr. Weiss said, but only the way a glass of Champagne might lead to alcoholism or a round of poker might lead to a gambling addiction.

At least some in Bountiful agree with him. In a Walgreens drugstore on Bountiful's main business strip, not a single magazine was compromised. The cover of Glamour teased to an article called "His 240 Sexiest Secrets." Shape magazine had a cover picture of a woman in a bikini. So did Muscle and Fitness.

To Mrs. Hamilton, that just means more



Signs sewn for The New York Times

JoAnn Hamilton with signs returned to her in protest after she posted them.

work needs to be done. "I'm just trying to educate parents who are woefully ignorant about pornography," she said. "Good Christian parents want their kids to grow up healthy. They just don't realize the damage that's being done."