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Russian Orthodox Church Spokesman Lashes Out Over U.S. Gay Marriage Ruling

By Jennifer Monaghan

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People gather in Lafayette Park to witness the White House being lit up in rainbow colors in commemoration of the Supreme Court's ruling to legalize same-sex marriage, Jun. 26, in Washington.

A spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church has called on all those who idolize the American democratic model to take a hard look at themselves after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to legalize same-sex marriage, Interfax reported Sunday.

The United States' highest court ruled Saturday that same-sex marriage should be legalized across the entire country, meaning that the 14 states with bans on gay marriage will no longer be able to enforce them.

But Vsevolod Chaplin, a Russian Orthodox Church spokesman, decried the decision to legalize such a "godless and sinful thing" and warned his compatriots to be wary of the values that

the current U.S. leadership is trying to impose on other countries, Interfax reported.

"In reality they want to take away your right to live by faith ... to take away the possibility of building the life of your society and your state based on the eternal and unchanging moral laws dictated by God," the priest was quoted as saying.

Homosexuality is not illegal in Russia, but a law passed in June 2013 bans the promotion of "nontraditional" sexual relations to minors. A survey by independent pollster Levada Center last month found 37 percent of Russians think homosexuality is a disease that needs to be cured.

In light of the Supreme Court's decision, Facebook created an application that allows users to cover their profile pictures with a transparent filter in the colors of the LGBT rainbow flag. Rishat Shigapov, a Facebook user who heads a digital marketing agency, responded to the rainbow-flag app by creating a separate program allowing users to cover their profile photos with the colors of the Russian flag. Revealing his new tricolor profile photo, Shigapov wrote on his Facebook page: "I'm Russian and I'm proud."

The Facebook app likewise provoked the wrath of conservative politician Vitaly Milonov, a deputy in St. Petersburg's legislative assembly.

Milonov, an architect of Russia's "gay propaganda" law, told the Russian News Service on Saturday that he had asked the country's media watchdog to block Facebook because the application was in "flagrant violation" of the country's law given that the social media site has no age limit.

The reaction to the Supreme Court's decision has not been entirely negative in Russia. Senator Konstantin Dobrynin, deputy head of the Federation Council's constitutional law committee, used the ruling to urge his country to adopt a more balanced approach in its own dealings with the LGBT community.

"It is important not to turn away from the present-day realities and not to lapse into the same old battle against homosexuals, but to try to find a legal way of ensuring a public balance between the conservative section of society and everyone else on this subject," Dobrynin was quoted as saying.

The senator has spoken out on the topic of LGBT rights before, telling newspaper Moskovsky Komsomolets in September 2013 that he was tired of Russia's preoccupation with anti-gay lawmaking — though he did not vote against a draft law banning gay propaganda to minors. The bill was passed by 137 votes, with one abstention.

Dobrynin also suggested to Interfax on Sunday that the introduction of a law based upon the principles of "don't ask, don't tell" could help the country move toward a greater acceptance of the LGBT community by giving gay Russians greater privacy in their personal lives.

The Kremlin has yet to publicly comment on the decision of the United States to legalize gay marriage.

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