

Ads Promote Gay Marriage

Largest ad buy ever by LGBT organizations

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By Kerry Eleveld

A pro-LGBT ad titled "Marriage Matters" reaffirmed the commitment of gay leaders and their allies to achieving marriage equality when it ran in 50 newspapers across the country last Wednesday, just one day before the decision from the Washington State Supreme Court upholding the state's ban on same-sex marriages.

The ads included pictures of five LGBT couples across the top of the page and below them, the words, "Marriage Matters. They're committed. So are we." They ran in gay weeklies as well as mainstream publications from The New York Times to the Fresno Bee (CA) to the Raleigh News & Observer (NC).

Neil Giuliano, executive director of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), said the group purposely targeted the ads to diverse regions nationwide.

"The marriage equality conversation is happening around millions of kitchen tables coast to coast, and is certainly not confined to large cities," Giuliano said. "We specifically wanted to reach people well beyond the big urban areas."

About 60 civic, religious, labor and civil rights leaders signed on to the ad, two-thirds of whom were non-gay allies.

"We want the nation to know that we are united in fighting to end discrimination against gay and lesbian families, including their exclusion from marriage, with all its protections, responsibilities and human significance," said Alice Huffman, president of the California Conference of the NAACP.

The mayors of six cities, including Los Angeles, Seattle and San Francisco, were also signatories of the ads. Mayor Michael Bloomberg did not sign on, though he has publicly stated his support for legalizing gay marriage.

"We asked Mayor Bloomberg through his office to sign on, and we were disappointed that his office declined to do so," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Sources inside Mayor Bloomberg's office said the mayor believes in marriage equality, but he wants to work with LGBT organizations to have a greater hand in shaping the messages for that struggle.

In particular, the ad quoted an excerpt from the dissenting opinion of the New York marriage ruling — cases in which lawyers from Mayor Bloomberg's administration argued against the right of same-sex couples to marry and ultimately prevailed.

As quoted in the ad, Chief Judge Judith Kaye wrote, "Indeed, the true nature and extent of the discrimination suffered by gays and lesbians is perhaps best illustrated by the simple truth that each one of the plaintiffs could

lawfully enter into a marriage of convenience with a complete stranger of the opposite sex tomorrow, and thereby immediately obtain all of the myriad benefits and protections incident to marriage. Plaintiffs are, however, denied these rights because they each desire instead to marry the person they love and with whom they have created their family.”

Matt Foreman said the group tried to address Mayor Bloomberg’s concerns, but they couldn’t reach an agreement. He said LGBT leaders who originated the ad and about 30–40 other signatories had already signed off on the message.

“There was consensus among the organizations that the quote from Judge Kaye was powerful and we wanted to use it,” Foreman said.

Despite recent anti-marriage rulings from the highest courts in both Washington and New York, leaders said this was a civil rights issue that would be won over the course of time.

“As in every other struggle for social justice, there will be advances and setbacks along the way,” said Evan Wolfson, executive director of Freedom to Marry. “History is not defined by what happens over a few weeks or months — positive or negative — but by progress over many years.”

The Task Force’s Foreman added that public opinion is moving in favor of marriage, in spite of a well-funded campaign against it.

“Even our opponents understand it is not a question of whether we will win dignity and equality for our families, but when,” he said.

Nationally, polls have found that a majority of Americans support some form of legal recognition for LGBT couples. Opposition to “marriage” has also declined since 2004.

A Pew Research Center poll of 1,405 adults conducted in March 2006 found that 51 percent of Americans opposed same-sex marriage and 39 percent supported it. Two years earlier, a February 2004 Pew poll found 63 percent opposed gay marriage and 30 percent supported it.

The “Marriage Matters” ad campaign cost about \$250,000 and was funded by the Arcus Foundation.