



Marriage factions ready for ballot battle in Arizona

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by Luige del Puerto

The Arizona gay and lesbian community is trying to enlist help from national groups for a battle to defeat a ballot measure seeking to define marriage as the union between a man and a woman in the state Constitution.

Sam Holdren of Equality Arizona said his group met earlier this month with representatives from national and local gay and lesbian advocacy groups to discuss strategy.

Equality Arizona met with national advocacy groups, including the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Family Equality Council, to ask for help raising money to mount a public campaign to defeat the measure, Holdren said.

"The campaign is going to go ask for some money from whoever opposes this (marriage amendment) issue," he said.

Officials of conservative groups that successfully lobbied the Legislature to pass the ballot measure did not return phone calls, but advocates already have created a Web site dedicated to the proposed constitutional amendment. The link is available on the Center for Arizona Policy home page.

Already, the two camps are framing arguments in support of or against the ballot proposal.

"A 'yes' vote prevents judges and politicians from redefining marriage and leaves marriage's essential meaning in the hands of the people of Arizona," supporters of the constitutional change wrote on www.azformarriage.com. "Marriage is about the next generation. Marriage builds up communities family by family and provides for the next generation. It is the bedrock foundation of our society."

Arizona does not recognize gay marriages, but a constitutional amendment would further restrict state courts from overturning the existing ban.

Supporters of the ballot measure have emphasized a ruling earlier this spring by the California Supreme Court to strike down that state's ban on same-sex marriage.

"The same thing can happen here," it warns. "Amending our Constitution ensures that the essential meaning of marriage will be preserved, and that no Arizona judge will be able to force us to adopt California's radical redefinition of marriage."

The gay and lesbian community likely will try to capitalize on their narrow victory over a similar ballot proposal two years ago. They have said Arizonans already decided the issue and shouldn't have to take it up repeatedly.

"Arizona voters feel insulted that they are having to vote on this a second time (and) that the Legislature ignored them," Holdren said.

The 2006 proposal failed by a margin of 48 percent to 52 percent, a difference of roughly 54,000 voters, according to the Arizona Secretary of State's official canvass of the 2006 election.

The amendment's supporters, however, have said this year's proposal is narrower, concentrating solely on the definition of marriage, unlike the former measure that included restrictions for people involved in domestic partnerships.

Equality Arizona, though, is planning to fight a battle on a different front. The group also will be targeting key races to help unseat certain lawmakers and replace them with "pro-equality" leaders, Holdren said.

"We must change the faces in the Legislature if we are ever going to secure equality in this state," the group wrote in an e-mail to supporters.