

## California's Proposition 8 has stars, politicians, and advocates in battle over gay marriage rights

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**Jennie Talley and Inga Sarda-Sorensen. 'We love being married. There's just a level of depth to it,' Sarda-Sorensen said.**

LOS ANGELES - Their state may be safely in Barack Obama's pocket, but California voters are at ground zero for the national culture war over gay marriage.

The fierce battle centers on a ballot initiative called Proposition - or "Prop." - 8. The referendum would amend the state constitution to define marriage as strictly between a man and a woman.

Gay rights advocates, along with deep-pocketed Hollywood donors Steven Spielberg, Brad Pitt and Ellen DeGeneres are on one side, asking voters to safeguard the fledgling right of gay couples to exchange vows in the Golden State, legal since May of this year.

America Ferrera taped an anti-Prop. 8 ad with her "Ugly Betty" cast-mates and aimed at Latino voters.

Religious conservatives, including ex-House majority leader Newt Gingrich and Nixon lawyer-turned Evangelical icon Charles Colson are on the other side, warning of an apocalyptic ripple effect if the referendum fails.

"This vote on whether we stop the gay-marriage juggernaut in California is The Armageddon," Colson warns in one particularly dire video message. "If we lose this, we are going to lose in a lot of other ways."

Both sides are expected to spend a combined \$64 million - a record for a same-sex marriage ballot initiative - with about 40% of the \$27 million raised to overturn gay marriage coming from Mormon donors, many outside the state, according to Meg Waters with the "Yes on 8" campaign.

"This as a cornerstone issue," Waters told the Daily News. "People from all over are contributing to our position. They don't want to change the definition of marriage that people have recognized since the dawn of time."

If it passes, Prop. 8 would invalidate a May 2008 California Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage and ushered in thousands of nuptials for local and out-of-state gay couples.

The state's Attorney General has said he does not believe that if the referendum passes, it will invalidate the unions of gay couples who have gotten married in California since June. But other legal experts are not so sure - and fear thousands of spouses will suddenly find themselves unmarried.

**"We love being married. There's just a level of depth to it. It's a powerful experience, and it's something our friends and family can relate to," said Manhattan resident Inga Sarda-Sorensen, 44, who married partner Jennie Talley, 54, in Malibu on Sept. 20. "Prop. 8 would eliminate this fundamental right."**

Overturning the law could also affect the 12,000 gay couples expected to travel from New York for California weddings over the next three years, according to a UCLA study.

Supporters argue Prop. 8 is needed to protect churches from discrimination lawsuits and keep the topic of gay marriage out of public schools. Those against Prop. 8 say the measure denies gay people a fundamental civil right.

"I want to talk to you about an issue that is central not just to California, but to our very civilization," Newt Gingrich says in a commercial condemning the four California judges who legalized gay marriage. "Vote yes on Proposition 8 to defend and protect marriage."

Polls suggest the race is tight. Turnout will be key.

"I am crazy over it. I'm online reading every single story, trying to figure out the polls. I wish I had the funds to go back out to California and go door to door," said Jeff Friedman, 40, a Rockville Centre, N.Y., resident who married partner Andrew Zwerin, 40, in California on Oct. 12.

The couple has a 5-year-old son named Joshua.

"My son deserves the protections of marriage that other children's parents receive," Friedman, who's been with Zwerin since high school, said.

"I want my son to reap the benefits when we are able to file a joint federal tax return and save on taxes. I want my son to inherit more after his parents are gone," Friedman said. "It might make sense for us to back up our license in Massachusetts or Connecticut [if Prop. 8 passes]. But I don't really want to think about it."