

G.P. phone home

Gay people urged to call family in states fighting marriage bans

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By ERIC ERVIN

THE TAGLINE OF A CAMPAIGN launched by more than a dozen gay and gay-supportive organizations would have a familiar ring to E.T., the extra-terrestrial hero of the beloved 1982 film.

The Phone Home 2006 campaign seeks to mobilize opponents of constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage that will appear on the ballot Nov. 7 in eight states, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin. The coalition asks gay men and lesbians to contact family members or friends in these states and urge them to vote against the measure.

“So many gay and lesbian people have moved away from home, but still have deep connections,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, which is spearheading the campaign. “What we found is that this is the most effective and efficient way in getting the word out. Hopefully we will encourage people.”

Foreman said the campaign adds a more personal touch to gay people’s fight for marriage equality. Teaming up with the other organizations will help spread the word about the measures, he said.

“The fight against these amendments is bigger than one organization,” Foreman said.

THE BATTLE IS EXPECTED to be close in Arizona, where voters will decide on Proposition 107, which bans same-sex marriage and granting unmarried couples any legal status similar to marriage.

Opponents believe the measure’s language will have an affect on everyone in Arizona, not only gay couples.

“In Arizona, same-sex marriage is illegal anyway — it has been for 10 years now — so it’s not needed, but what this does is it would prohibit local governments from providing domestic partner health benefits to same-sex couples,” said Kyrsten Sinema, chair of Arizona Together, which opposes the amendment.

Sinema is confident Proposition 107 will be defeated, pointing to a recent poll conducted by Arizona State University that shows 51 percent of registered voters in the state oppose it and 38 percent support.

Cathi Herrod, spokesperson for Protect Marriage Arizona, a conservative group based in Phoenix that supports the ban, declined a request for an interview on the Phone Home campaign.

But Herrod's group, which is backed by Focus on the Family, has launched a similar mobilization campaign in which supporters of the measure are asked to make 100 phone calls from their home or at a phone bank setup at the Center for Arizona Policy to encourage people to vote yes on the proposition. Herrod is president of the center.

"The only way to really protect marriage in this state is by a constitutional amendment," Herrod said in an Oct. 25 televised debate against Sinema on KTVK-Channel 3 in Phoenix.

FAMILY PRIDE, a national gay family advocacy group, joined in the Task Force's Phone Home 2006 campaign to educate others about the amendments, according to Jennifer Chrisler, Family Pride executive director. Chrisler said she recently met someone from Arizona who was unaware of the measure.

"It's amazing how many people don't know about it, or don't know what it involves," Chrisler said.

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation is proud to support the Task Force in its effort, and will encourage its members to participate in the campaign, said Rashad Robinson, GLAAD director of media field strategy.

"The Taskforce's Phone Home Campaign is an excellent way to encourage conversation about the importance of LGBT equality," Robinson said in an e-mail. "It's the type of person-to-person contact that can change hearts and minds."