



Same-sex marriage backers go to TV

New ads ask viewers to 'open hearts and minds' on the issue.

By Jim Sanders - Bee Capitol Bureau
October 8, 2007

Frustrated in efforts to legalize same-sex marriage through legislation or litigation, proponents will launch a multimillion-dollar advertising campaign this week to "open hearts and minds" in Sacramento and other major cities.

The 60-second ads will run in the capital, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Palm Springs as part of a monthslong campaign to prod families to openly discuss same-sex marriage.

"The long-term goal is to have the majority of Californians support the freedom to marry -- to change the climate here," said Geoff Kors, executive director of Equality California, which is coordinating the campaign.

Benjamin Lopez, spokesman for the Traditional Values Coalition, which opposes same-sex marriage, called the effort "grasping at straws."

"This notion of a redefined marriage goes against the laws of God and against nature," he said.

The same TV spot will run in all five cities, beginning Thursday.

The ad depicts a traditional wedding, with an excited crowd, a flower girl tossing petals and a tuxedoed groom. As the bride walks down the aisle, she is tripped by a spectator and sprawls onto the floor. These words fill the screen:

"What if you couldn't marry the person you loved?"

Supplementing the TV campaign, thousands of volunteers are expected to participate in the multifaceted promotional push -- called "Let California Ring" -- by conducting house parties, knocking on voters' doors, giving speeches or assisting in e-mail or Web activities.

Legislation to permit same-sex marriage sits on the desk of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has vowed to veto it as he did a similar measure two years ago.

Schwarzenegger, in his previous veto message, cited a ballot initiative passed by voters in 2000 to limit marriage to a man and a woman.

"I do not believe the Legislature can reverse an initiative approved by the people," wrote Schwarzenegger, who added that he supports equal protection and equal rights for gays and lesbians.

The constitutionality of California's ban on same-sex marriage is being challenged in the state Supreme Court.

Same-sex couples who register as domestic partners are entitled to virtually every right and responsibility granted by the state to spouses.

But California's domestic partnerships are not necessarily recognized in other states, nor do they qualify for Social Security, veterans and other federal spousal benefits.

Even if marriage and domestic partnerships were separate but equal, such a dual system would be unfair, according to Assemblyman Mark Leno, who proposed this year's same-sex marriage legislation, Assembly Bill 43.

"To deny any citizen the fundamental right to marry the person that he or she loves is wrong, and in my opinion, un-American," said Leno, D-San Francisco.

Kors said it is crucial for society to recognize same-sex couples as married.

"Marriage is the universally recognized way that loving, committed couples celebrate their relationships," Kors said. "And that's not about rights and benefits -- it's about love."

But Randy Thomasson, president of the Campaign for Children and Families, said, "Most people know deep in their hearts that marriage is a very special relationship between a man and woman.

"In the big picture, these house parties and events are only for these loosey-goosey liberals who already support the notion of homosexual marriages," Thomasson said.

Kors said millions of dollars already have been raised for the multifaceted campaign, but he declined to comment on details of the TV spots, including how long or how often they will run.

The campaign's goal is to spark more than a million conversations about same-sex marriage and to prod an additional 500,000 Californians to support legalization.

The logo for "Let California Ring" features a wedding band as the "O" in the state's name. Supporters will be urged to purchase a ring through the campaign and wear it to show support and spark conversation.

Financial backers include the David Bohnett Foundation, Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, Proteus Fund, Columbia Foundation, Gill Foundation and the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program, according to the campaign's Web site.

Support for same-sex marriage has been growing statewide. Forty-three percent of Californians supported it in 2006, compared with 30 percent in 1985, according to Field Polls.

Garry South, a Democratic political strategist, said he wishes the new campaign well but doubts that opponents of same-sex marriage will change their minds through advertising or door-knocking.

"It's like trying to change people's minds about abortion by putting ads on the air -- I don't think it works," South said.

Sheila Kuehl, a Santa Monica Democrat who is openly gay, countered that many people have read about same-sex marriage without forming intractable opinions. Frank discussions could alter their view, she said.

"It's just like when you come out to your parents," she said. "They suddenly have to figure out how the heck they feel about gay people."