



Florida Primary Battleground Over Anti-Gay Marriage Amendment

January 29, 2008

A heavy voter turnout Tuesday for the Florida primary became an opportunity for supporters and opponents of a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage in the Sunshine State.

Backers of the proposed amendment have been scrambling to find 20,000 signatures by Thursday to get the measure on November's ballot after the Secretary of State announced earlier this month that a counting mistake put them well short of the required 611,000 signatures needed.

Members of Florida4Marriage fanned out at polling stations in Miami-Dade where the error occurred, urging people to sign the petitions.

The amendment says, "Inasmuch as marriage is the legal union of only one man and one woman, no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof shall be valid or recognized."

Florida already has a law restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples.

Opponents of the proposed amendment say it would bar civil unions and would be used to deny partner benefits not only to same-sex couples but also to unmarried couples who live together.

Fairness for All Families, which is opposed to the amendment, had volunteers outside polling stations across the state Tuesday to educate voters about the dangers the measure could have.

The organization is a coalition of over 200 groups that includes seniors, business leaders, consumer groups and social justice organizations.

Another opponent of the amendment is a straight ally, Florida Red & Blue which had 400 volunteers scattered around polling stations throughout the state.

The organization boasts both Democrats and Republicans among its members. It amassed more than \$1 million to battle the proposed amendment in its first 60 days.

"Our campaign has been successful in letting voters across the state know the real and dangerous impacts of the Marriage Protection Amendment, and today lets us reach out to this active and energized group," said Amy Rose, Field Director of Florida Red and Blue.

"When voters learn how this amendment lets government take an even larger role in their personal lives, they join our campaign."

Red & Blue is aided by the Human Rights Campaign, Safeguarding American Values for Everyone, **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, the Florida Young Democrats and the Florida Council of Log Cabin Republicans.

The error in tabulating signatures involved the state's electronic voter system and it was determined the system was miscounting petition signatures. Petition drives had been required to turn in signatures to counties which then verify, tabulate and send the totals electronically to Tallahassee.

They must now be directly submitted by the petition organizers to the Secretary of State's office.

Florida4Marriage attempted to have the measure placed on the 2006 ballot but fell short of the required number of signatures. Under Florida law Florida4Marriage, was allowed to continue to add names to the petition in a bid to get it on the 2008 ballot.

Last year it was discovered that the state GOP was bankrolling Florida4Marriage. ([story](#))

An investigation by the St. Petersburg Times into funding for the Florida4Marriage has found that of the \$193,000 that had been raised by the group \$150,000 came from a single donor - the Florida Republican Party.

Even if Florida4Marriage manages to make up the shortfall in signatures passing a constitutional amendment in Florida has a higher bar than in most states. It must be approved by 60 percent of voters.