

Gay-marriage ruling brings flood of donations to groups on both sides

By Mike Swift
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Last week's California Supreme Court decision backing gay marriage has galvanized both sides of the issue, with groups working to either pass or defeat a constitutional prohibition reporting numerous new volunteers and waves of fresh cash donations.

In a measure of the issue's national import, anti-gay marriage - pro-amendment - forces have landed the pre-eminent Catholic fraternal organization's largest-ever donation on the gay-marriage issue. Meanwhile gay-marriage - anti-amendment - support groups have won large donations from national gay-rights groups, including a \$500,000 pledge from the Human Rights Campaign.

Both sides say they are also receiving large numbers of much smaller, individual donations.

County officials are still confirming the validity of more than 1.1 million petition signatures that both sides expect will force a November initiative vote to amend the constitution to prohibit gay marriage in California.

A Los Angeles Times poll on Friday showed a narrow majority of registered voters would back a constitutional amendment to prohibit gay marriage. But the poll also noted a generational chasm between younger voters, who tend to oppose it, and older voters likely to be in favor. The flow of dollars since the May 15 decision signals an intense campaign to win votes from those constituencies, with both sides expected to jam the airwaves this fall with political ads and dispatch volunteer armies crisscrossing the state.

"In the last week, we've definitely seen the highest quantity number of individual donations coming in of any week," said Brian Brown, executive director of the National Organization for Marriage-California, the group spearheading the anti-gay marriage initiative effort. The group hopes to raise at least \$10 million for radio, print and television advertising.

Groups that support gay marriage also say the state Supreme Court decision has sparked their base, because backers realize a hard-fought political campaign with national repercussions for same-sex marriage lies ahead.

"We've been overwhelmed with donations from the grass roots," said Lorri L. Jean, CEO of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center and a member of the executive committee of Equality for All, an umbrella group representing a number of organizations that support the rights of gays and lesbians to marry. "We feel like we have to raise dollar-for-dollar - more than dollar-for-dollar - what they bring in."

Outpouring of support

The 36 hours after the court ruling were "overwhelming" in terms of donations and new volunteers, said Steve Smith, the lead campaign consultant for Equality for All. "I have not seen a level of volunteerism, just coming out of the woodwork, like this."

With so many organizations raising money on both sides of the issue, it's difficult to peg the exact amount raised.

According to its latest finance report filed with the Secretary of State's Office, the anti-gay marriage group, NOM-California, raised about \$776,000 during the first quarter of 2008, although Brown said that number has now eclipsed \$1 million.

About 66 percent of the group's donations came from California donors, many in the San Diego area, and the median donation was \$500, the group's latest finance report shows. The group's largest donation was \$250,000 from the Knights of Columbus, the international Catholic fraternal organization based in Connecticut.

"This is a position we share with the Catholic Church and Pope Benedict, and to the degree we have the opportunity to help the really broad coalition of groups trying to accomplish the protection of marriage, we're happy to do that," said Pat Korten, a spokesman for the Knights. "This is the largest donation because it's the largest state and there is so much at stake."

Similar result on other side

Equality for All, meanwhile, raised about \$577,000 during the first quarter of 2008, fundraising that got a major boost with the \$500,000 HRC pledge in the wake of the Supreme Court decision. The median donation was \$100, and about 70 percent came from California donors. **The campaign also received sizable donations from the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force and the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Service Center.**

Equality for All is a coalition including regional chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union, the California NAACP and the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and smaller organizations like the Billy DeFrank Lesbian & Gay Community Center in San Jose.

Smith said Equality for All will spend the bulk of its money on electronic media, but that the volunteer force it has amassed through the Internet since the court decision will allow phone bank operations and door-to-door campaigning beyond the big cities.

"I think with a volunteer crew as large as this one appears to be, we'll be pretty much everywhere" in the state, he said.