

## **Bis: Invisible in amendment fight**

July 10, 2008

Several bisexuals silently protested a community meeting held to discuss Proposition 8, the anti-gay marriage amendment, and expressed their displeasure at some of the language used by LGBT leaders that they said excludes them.

A standing room only crowd of about 100 people attended the meeting, held July 3 at the LGBT Community Center. When people arrived in the ceremonial room, they found copies of an open letter headlined "Words Still Matter" on their seats.

That letter, distributed by bisexual activists, was critical of groups like Equality California and the National Center for Lesbian Rights that "have decided to speak only of 'gay and lesbian couples.'"

"Their rationale is that undecided moderate voters in focus groups for the Let California Ring education campaign found the language more acceptable than 'same-sex couples.' It has continued despite the fact that many bisexuals have told the organizations' leaders that they feel marginalized and attacked by the non-inclusive language."

Kate Kendell, executive director of NCLR, was one of those who spoke from the stage at the meeting. She addressed the issue even before about a half-dozen bis entered the room wearing white bridal veils to symbolize how the marriage equality movement has rendered them invisible.

"I'll admit our language around the ruling was not as inclusive as it should have been," Kendell said. "We mean all same-sex couples."

Later on during a question and answer session, Michael Petrelis also brought up the issue of wording, stating that Equality for All, which is the coalition of LGBT and allied organizations against Prop 8, should use the word "gay" in campaign signage. He pointed to one of the signs on the wall that read, "Vow to vote No on the marriage amendment." Those signs were also handed out at last month's Pride festivities, along with stickers bearing the same wording.

"Are we going to take the campaign out of the closet?" Petrelis asked. "I don't like the sign. I'm fighting for 'gay marriage' on the sign."

But longtime bisexual activist Maggi Rubenstein countered that the campaign should "push for same-sex and LGBT, rather than gay, with all due respect" to Petrelis.

Kendell was blunt in her response to the issue. "There's no doubt that it will be very clear to everybody – it's a big ol' homo thing. You will see yourself reflected in what we're doing."

Kendell also said that the language issue "wasn't intentional or calculated."

"The campaign messaging is one of those things that's a moving target. This is feedback we will certainly feed into that," she said.

Emily Drennen, a bisexual woman who is in a same-sex relationship with and plans to marry her partner Lindasusan Ulrich, said she was heartened by Kendell's responses.

"It was heartfelt and I think they got it. We can jump in with both feet with no reservations," Drennen said about helping fight Prop 8.

The campaign

Proposition 8 contains the same words as Prop 22, and would "provide that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." Unlike Prop 22, which was inserted into the family code when it was approved by voters eight years ago, Prop 8 would amend the state constitution.

Kendell was joined at the meeting by Geoff Kors, executive director of EQCA; Maya Harris, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union Northern California; Rebecca Rolfe, executive director of the LGBT center; and **Sarah Reece, who is on loan to the No on 8 campaign from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Reece is the field director for the campaign. All are also members of Equality for All.**

**Reece emphasized the need for volunteers, and said that hundreds are needed to reach undecided voters and to help raise funds.** Millions of dollars are needed to fight what is expected to be a costly campaign on both sides. Reece said that \$17,000 was raised at San Francisco Pride events in one weekend, and in the last six weeks, \$65,000 has been raised by folks in the field, including \$22,000 from the Bay Area. It was also announced that EQCA has donated a total of \$1 million to the campaign so far.

**"If we don't start now, we will lose," Reece said, adding that much of the get out the vote effort isn't slated to begin until after Labor Day.** But workers are needed this summer to help begin that process.

**With the anticipated increase in young and first time voters attracted to Barack Obama's presidential race, Reece also noted that these new voters would need to be informed of the importance of voting on down-ballot measures like Prop 8.**

Kors said that the campaign against Prop 8 "will be waged in every part of the state." Reece said the campaign is working with Marriage Equality USA, which has chapters in several smaller counties. And Kors pointed out that the campaign is developing messages for religious leaders who oppose the ban.

But the team acknowledged some shortcomings, namely that the campaign's Web presence isn't up to speed, and of course, the need for money, especially for television ads that will air in the fall.

And while protectmarriage.com, the backers of Prop 8, has convenient talking points in favor of the same-sex marriage ban on its Web site, Kendell and others indicated that the No on 8 campaign would likely not follow suit. She also hinted at one strategy that opponents probably would not use.

"Anything you say about the courts is not good," Kendell said. "Their message is that the court took away the rights of voters."

Assemblyman Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) dropped by, extolling those present to continue speaking out against Prop 8. In response to a question, Leno said he would speak out against Prop 8 with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is also on record opposing the ban, if such a situation presented itself.

"I don't think fear is going to sell this November," Leno said to cheers, referencing the Prop 22 campaign. He said many families and state residents already are living in fear of losing their homes or their jobs.

Andrea Shorter, an African American lesbian who is a member of the Commission on the Status of Women, spoke of the need to include families and people of color in the campaign. Another speaker mentioned the importance of including straight allies to speak in opposition to the amendment.