

Coachella Valley Marriage Equality Coalition

June 5, 2009

The Coachella Valley Marriage Equality Coalition was formed to coordinate political action in the Coachella Valley to achieve marriage equality and civil rights for the LGBT community in California and across the country. Formed immediately after the tragic loss of Proposition 8, we have been watching statewide LGBT leadership respond to the election loss, argue the case to overturn the amendment with the Supreme Court, message our loss with the Court, and debate the wisdom of a ballot initiative in 2010. This week, we reviewed the outcomes of the Fresno Meet in the Middle Rally and the Leadership Summit that followed.

We are troubled by the process, events, and lack of an organized and coordinated plan of action that has emerged since last November. We see multiple areas of concern that portend disaster for any ballot initiative. For example:

- Polling that shows that the state has not moved significantly on marriage equality, yet various groups and leaders continue to position for a 2010 campaign with little insight on how we can move 5- 10 points in less than 15 months.
- Fundraising requests from multiple groups who claim to have a unique stake and expertise to run/support a ballot campaign coupled with donor fatigue from 2008.
- Lots of “momentum” from different groups but little support from major donors who funded most of 2008.
- A deep complacency – beyond the LGBT activists – in our community which translates to low financial support and medium sized crowds for our events.
- Confusion throughout the state about who’s running what, who’s laying claim to leading the charge, lack of collaboration and alignment between “leading” LGBT groups.

We cannot lose again. Nor can we stand by and relive the mistakes of 2008. As a result, we respectfully insist on the following:

Effective Leadership

1. All interested parties must meet immediately to form a unified campaign that can speak with one voice. We are not concerned so much about the future organizational name or banner, but rather the quality and energy of the new organizational structure.
2. We need a campaign office with clearly defined lines of authority – who will be empowered to make decisions and who will manage the campaign managers.
3. If the plan by leaders is to run a campaign in 2010, we demand that key players in this fight meet immediately to address our issues and return with a plan by July 1st. The process should include representatives of major donors to ensure that we will have the financial support for whatever plan is developed.

Winning Campaign Strategy & Plan

We demand that LGBT leadership create and commit to a “road map to victory” strategy that applies the lessons from 2008 to a plan that will drive victory in 2010 or 2012. This plan should include the following:

1. A world class campaign strategy with professional campaign managers who will run the ballot initiative. We want a plan that will drive a win by substantial margin - i.e. 60%, not by a slim majority.
2. A solid grass roots educational and outreach plan with enough lead time to move support by 5-10 points. We need to have a multi-lingual, multi-cultural educational campaign in place before launching a ballot measure.
3. A fundraising strategy that directs the efforts of LGBT organizations (including coalitions like CVMEC) and will ensure sufficient resources to overwhelm our opponents.
4. A consistent messaging strategy that can be adopted by LGBT groups and coalitions across California.

Until the above issues are addressed and delivered, we have advised our members (and will aggressively advocate to others) to *not raise or contribute one penny* to any organization in California that is jockeying for control and financial support. We will not support any effort to drive a ballot initiative in 2010 or 2012 until we have an organized strategy with clearly defined leadership so that we can win.

We acknowledge that coordinating the efforts of our very diverse community is a challenge. While we appreciate the value of inclusion, group process and ensuring that all are heard, etc., we also want to win. It's time to transcend the failures of the past. We need leadership and a plan that will win.

Signed by the Following Members of the CVMEC Steering Committee

Terry Applegate

George Zander, Desert Stonewall Democrats Chair

Jack Newby, Desert Pride Center Executive Director

Kevin J. Corcoran

Keith Wisot, Desert Pride Center Board member

Ruth Debra, Old Lesbians Organized for Change National Steering Committee and Desert Stonewall Democrats Board member

Joe Falkner, Coachella Valley Couples Co-Chairs

Art Healey, Coachella Valley Couples Co-Chairs

Bob Thomas, Marriage Equality Index Co-Chair

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