

Prepare to Prevail: Why We Must Wait In Order to Win

A public statement on how to win back marriage equality in California

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Unlike Proposition 8 in 2008, any upcoming electoral campaign for marriage equality would be *one of choice*, not *one of necessity* in fending off an attack from religious-right foes. Timing is ours to determine. Going back to the ballot to remove the voter-imposed ban on same-sex marriage from the state constitution in 2010 would be rushed and risky. We should proceed with a costly, demanding, and high-stakes electoral campaign of this sort only when we are confident we can win. *We should choose to Prepare to Prevail.*

We have much work to do *before* we proceed to the ballot. Many of us, which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations and progressive allies, have been doing critical educational and organizing work for years, intensified it during the Prop. 8 campaign in 2008, and have continued to communicate with key constituencies after the election. We vow to intensify our efforts until we win back marriage equality in California. We invite all groups and individual leaders to sign on to this statement and join us in building a solid battle plan for equality. We must step up our work, collectively and in concert, as soon as possible.

***Prepare to Prevail* requires making progress on the following *before* proceeding to the ballot:**

1) **Winning requires full LGBT community support and a broad coalition of allies.** Only a few segments of the LGBT community have announced their intention to pursue a “vote-yes” campaign next year. Energy and passion are a necessary prerequisite for any effective campaign but are not a sufficient substitute for a broad coalition with a clear strategy backed by ample resources. For California to win back marriage equality, *broad segments of the LGBT and progressive community* including critically important people-of-color groups, LGBT families, and other allies need to pull together. We should proceed when we have a unified strategy and a massive coalition of progressive non-LGBT allies ready to act in unison. Anything short of a broad coalition of allies would place our campaign in a strategic disadvantage from the onset.

2) **We need to build strong majority support before placing the issue before voters.** Popular support for marriage equality for same-sex couples has not changed since the last election. Today, California voters’ opinions on a constitutional amendment to overturn the voter-imposed elimination of marriage equality remain evenly split, according to all recent polls. In order to seek major investments of time and money from key stakeholders and allies in an affirmative ballot-measure campaign seeking a “yes” vote from voters, seasoned campaign experts advise against proceeding to the ballot without evidence of a *strong* majority in favor of the measure. Failure to begin with a sizable majority puts sponsors in a more likely position to lose. More than two-thirds of *all* ballot initiatives fail to pass on

Election Day. Moreover, polls can overstate actual public support for LGBT rights because respondents may be reluctant to reveal their bias to pollsters. In 2008, some polls indicated majority support for marriage equality and against Proposition 8, which was not the result on Election Day. This was also true for Proposition 22, when opponents of the measure thought there was more support for marriage equality than the final vote demonstrated. In Washington State in 1997, some gay-rights activists pushed forward with a pro-active ballot measure aimed at outlawing antigay discrimination in the state. Despite having public opinion narrowly on their side, they lost 60 to 40 at the polls on the measure. It took nine more years for LGBT rights supporters to secure passage of a nondiscrimination law by the Washington state legislature. Proceeding with campaigns seeking a “yes” vote without support from a *strong* majority of voters holds foreseeable danger.

3) Campaign donors will be constrained given the current unprecedented economic downturn. Over \$81 million was raised and spent by both sides in the Proposition 8 campaign, more than in any previous anti-gay ballot initiative. Many of the LGBT nonprofit organizations doing critical work for our communities have suffered layoffs and cutbacks in services. The current economic downturn has also reduced the capacity of campaigns both educational and electoral to amass multi-million-dollar war chests from small, large, and institutional donors. The scope of anxiety and human need in California means that individual donors are making hard choices about charitable dollars. Major donors, including foundations that provided funding for critical educational campaigns, have endured hits to their portfolios, and many are exercising caution. Any successful “vote-yes” campaign will require generous support from pro-LGBT institutional donors. These donors give based on evidence of likely success, which for 2010 is filled with grave doubts. It is unlikely that we will be able to raise the necessary funds to undertake an effective electoral campaign until after 2010.

4) Educational, voter-ID (not electoral) campaigns with specific goals should begin immediately. To reach a threshold of support for marriage equality suitable to begin an electoral campaign, supporters need a voter-ID campaign aimed at moving an identifiable subset of California voters. Vote-no campaigns typically seek to plant doubts and promote confusion among voters about measures. Several arguments used to pass Proposition 8 have not been widely rebutted and thus retain their appeal as attack strategies with particular currency as part of a vote-no campaign. A campaign of changing hearts and minds of selected groups of voters requires time, diligent research, and targeting of specific communities. The worst time to attempt to educate voters is in the midst of a heated campaign, which makes it difficult to rebut lies and fear-mongering. The voter-ID campaign should precede the electoral campaign aimed at mobilizing support to remove from the state constitution the discriminatory language already approved by voters.

5) We need time to build a coordinated data infrastructure that can support a winning campaign. We need time to establish robust get-out-the-vote (GOTV) data systems and a statewide online voter contact database to make and measure contacts with California voters in a coordinated fashion with participation from the many pro-marriage stakeholder groups across the state. Unlike narrow special interests, our cause is a broad-based movement that will require coordinated data collection among multiple groups working in concert. Many individual groups have started this work, but winning will require buy-in and participation in a singular statewide and coordinated data system. Agreements and accountabilities need to be worked out and trust needs to be rebuilt. Time and true collaboration are vital to developing organizational partnerships and the data systems needed to tap and deploy our grassroots network and measure our progress toward specific voter-contacts goals.

6) Time and greater effort is needed to build trust and relationships in communities that represent the full diversity of California voters, including limited-English-speaking voters and voters of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The 2008 campaign against Prop 8 did not adequately reach non-English-speaking voters and failed to engage or empower allied groups poised to communicate with millions of such voters. The Yes-on-8 campaign, in taking its victory laps, bragged about the many tongues into which it translated its materials and the diverse congregations whom it mobilized. This lapse must be overcome in a future campaign to win back marriage equality. We must learn from our mistakes made during the last campaign and not repeat them. Doing so will require deepened relationships with partner organizations and leaders who can reach diverse racial, ethnic, and non-English-speaking communities. It will require working to increase the ability of LGBT parents and caregivers with children across these communities to effectively communicate the impact of marriage equality on their children. We must establish the communications capacity needed to achieve cultural competency as well as fluency in persuading immigrant, people-of-color, and non-English-speaking communities to support marriage equality. Most of all, it requires time to build trust and relationships in targeted communities in order to succeed.

7) Labor, religious allies and communities of color are indispensable to winning. More time is needed to convert general support into full organizational backing to secure increased grassroots engagement, resources, and votes. Coordinated outreach with labor and religious institutions remains crucial to building a strong majority for marriage equality in California. Forging lasting collaboration with and among these organizations must be a top priority for both the education and electoral campaigns. In addition to traditional civil-rights and community groups, as well as entertainment and sports celebrities, the same labor and religious organizations already highlighted will be critical in mobilizing people of color voters to support marriage equality. Rather than simply asking for support from allies, a winning campaign must be prepared to welcome these entities to the planning table and demonstrate reciprocity with them in the course of the long campaign to regain marriage equality. Winning a majority of “yes” votes on a future ballot measure will not be easy. But it will be impossible if we work in isolation or avoid competent and fluent communication with California’s diverse voters.

8) More time means more “yes” votes for marriage equality. The demographics of opinion on marriage equality indicate that natural changes in the state electorate, with new and younger voters replacing older voters, contributes over time to increased support for marriage equality. In weighing the options of presenting a ballot measure on statewide ballots either next year, in 2010, or in a future year, the *latter* portends a much greater capacity by marriage equality supporters to leverage and benefit from the natural shift in voter opinion.

THE UNDERSIGNED COMMIT to PREPARE to PREVAIL. Evidence and data should guide political strategy. Running and winning a statewide ballot-measure for a “yes” vote on marriage equality depends not on haste, but on preparation. Expanding public support and developing the infrastructure to mobilize our communities should be our top priorities. We commit to continuing the hard work of identifying the partnerships, commitments, and resources to launch necessary public education campaigns and setting the foundation for a solid and winning campaign. We call on all interested organizations to join in a collective body to coordinate the critical educational work that we must do. When we go back to the ballot, we intend to be active players to ensure its success just as we have always participated in the fight for marriage equality. Please join us in winning back marriage equality in California.

WE CHOOSE to PREPARE to PREVAIL

ACLU of Northern California
ACLU of San Diego and Imperial County
ACLU of Southern California
API Equality-LA
API Equality-Northern California
Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
Asian Pacific Islander Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (API PFLAG)
Asian/Pacific Islander Queer Women/Transgender Activists (AQWA)
Ballot Initiative Strategy Center Foundation
Chinese Rainbow Association
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Elections Committee of the County of Orange (ECCO-PAC)
Equality Action Project (Santa Cruz)
FAIR
Family Equality Council
Gamba Adisa Quilombo
Gay-Straight Alliance Network
Harvey Milk Stonewall Democrats of Orange County
HONOR PAC
Imperial Court of Los Angeles and Hollywood
Inland Counties Stonewall Democrats
Jordan Rustin Coalition
Martin-Lyon Leadership Institute
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF)
Office & Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU), AFL-CIO
Our Family Coalition
SATRANG, South Asian LGBT Organization
Service Employees International Union Local 1000
Tongues

Transgender Law Center

Robert Chacanaca, President, Monterey Bay Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO*

Kerry Chaplin, Interfaith Organizing Director, California Faith For Equality*

Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong, Interfaith Organizer, California Faith For Equality *

Nicole Murray Ramirez, City Commissioner and Chair, San Diego Human Relations Commission*

Mario Ceballos, Commissioner, Los Angeles Human Relations Commission*

Jerry Sloan, President Emeritus, Lambda Community Fund, Sacramento*

-list in formation-

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