

March 2006

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Should a Vote On “Gay-Rights” Be Allowed?

“...real love—true love—grieves over the inevitable results of wrong behavior.”
--Josh McDowell

The Washington State Legislature has fulfilled its obligation for 2006 according to the state constitution. But just because lawmakers are now back at home doesn't mean that the law-making process is on hold until January—at least not according to the Elections Division of the Secretary of State. So far, more than 30 initiatives have been filed by private parties that, if approved by voters, would add, amend or suspend state laws, even while the Legislature is officially adjourned.

One of those measures, arguably the most controversial, is Referendum 65. It challenges the new “gay-rights law.” If enough signatures are gathered between now and June 7 to qualify Referendum 65 for the November ballot, voters will be asked to approve or reject the addition of the term “sexual orientation” to the state's civil rights code. Sponsors of Referendum 65 believe that given the opportunity, voters will want to reject the new law.

Recipients of our bi-monthly reports are familiar with our view of laws that attempt to force public acceptance of fornication, sodomy and other erotic or deviant sexual behaviors or lifestyles. We have compiled a lengthy list of vicious threats and lawsuits that have been filed against schools, businesses, military recruiters and charitable organizations in communities where “gay-rights laws” have been enacted. But there will be other arguments put forth during the debate on Referendum 65 that speak to a decidedly non-religious audience. Following are two; one supporting the new “sexual orientation law,” the other raising important concerns:

Opinion 1 “...You probably have heard by now that the proponents of repealing our state's civil rights protections include the watch salesman and his friends the Fagan brothers. What you may not know is that they have already been joined by the Christian Coalition. On Saturday, the Christian Coalition announced their support of the Referendum and their intention to gather signatures and raise money for the effort. They too are spouting the message that this is all about special rights, quotas, preferential treatment and marriage. The proponents know that if they say that this is really about prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, just as we have prohibited it based on gender, age, disability, race, religion and so on for decades now, that the vast majority of Washingtonians will tell them to go back to selling watches.

Eyman, the Fagan brothers and the Christian Coalition have until June 7th to gather 112,440 valid signatures of registered voter[s] to qualify R-65 for the November ballot. If that happens, voters will be asked to “approve” or “reject” the law. Our job is [to] make sure people know what these signature petitions are really all about before they sign, and then to explain to voters that if this is on the ballot, a vote to APPROVE Referendum 65 is a vote to KEEP our state's civil rights law and to PROTECT our friends, our neighbors and our families from discrimination.

...Talk to the people in your life - your family, co-workers, neighbors. Let them know that they might be asked to sign a petition, and that the signatures are being collected to repeal our state's updated law against discrimination. Encourage them to ‘think before they ink.’ Not signing is step one!”
--Washington Won't Discriminate Coalition ¹

Opinion 2 “Everyone agrees that House Bill 2661 is a significant...public policy decision. It takes a term that most of us are somewhat familiar with, “sexual orientation,” and defines it in a very unique way. Here’s the definition as written in the bill: “Sexual orientation” means heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender expression or identity. As used in this definition, “gender expression or identity” means having or being perceived as having a gender identity, self-image, appearance, behavior, or expression, whether or not that gender identity, self-image, appearance, behavior, or expression is different from that traditionally associated with the sex assigned to that person at birth.

During floor debate on the bill, Colfax representative Don Cox said it well, describing the bill as “ill-defined” and open to many interpretations. ‘We limit liberty when we ask citizens to interpret one another’s sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity,’ Cox said. ‘In the push and pull of life, sexual orientation is not apparent and is difficult to determine. Please consider the possibilities for misinterpretation in the daily exercise of commerce, housing, employment, public accommodation, real estate, credit, or insurance.’ He said the bill creates the possibility that responsible citizens could put themselves at risk of ‘accusation, investigation, findings of discrimination and penalties without intentional wrong-doing.’ Laws that put citizens on the defensive against accusations could be ‘an incubator for an atmosphere of protectiveness rather than openness,’ he said.

We’ve called our campaign *Let the Voters Decide*. In recent weeks, supporters of HB 2661 have said that having a public vote on this topic is inappropriate. Their view is not consistent. In 1997, these same folks pushed this same policy as an initiative, I-677. Back then, they felt it perfectly appropriate for the voters to have the final say. They raised and spent big bucks trying to convince voters to support I-677. But the voters overwhelmingly rejected it. So their recent objections to a public vote only materialized after they learned that the voters were against their agenda. Hypocrisy is not unique in politics but it should be recognized and identified.

If we’re successful at getting enough signatures to put this policy before the voters this fall, we’ll debate whether this policy is counter-productive. To me, it is. Government-imposed preferential treatment will only enhance suspicion and conflict between our citizens...Better for the government to stay out of it.

[Also]...our citizenry doesn’t support same-sex marriage, something the courts will impose if HB 2661 stands. It’s exactly what’s happening in other states, most recently Maryland and Massachusetts. For this reason and others explained above, this bill is a Pandora’s box that Olympia opened but voters should have the chance to close...”
--Tim Eyman, *Let the Voters Decide* ²

Both Eyman and Rep. Cox are concerned that “sexual orientation police” could be empowered to monitor our schools, businesses and other community establishments. They believe, as we do, that most voters, religious and secular, do not want to see such things take place in our state.

For that reason, we look to our core-supporters to reach across the aisle and across the street to gather signatures to qualify Referendum 65 for the November ballot. Although Tim Eyman has committed his expertise and many of his supporters to the effort, we too must show up and suit up since no paid signature-gatherers will be used. Also, Eyman has spent money to print tens-of-thousands of petitions. Hopefully, we can show him that with one exception, Christians are not freeloaders—accepting sacrifices that cost us nothing. His address is on the back of the petitions.

The Church will either boldly challenge this belligerent goliath before us, or shrink back, accepting the consequences that will be visited upon us and our posterity. There ARE no other options.

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ Complete text available at Washington Won’t Discriminate Coalition, PO Box 21971, Seattle, 98111

² Permission received to edit for space. Full text in Seattle Times, 3/15/2006