

June 2006

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Short of the Finish Line

...the political arena is an arena in which one will struggles against another, in which one belief contests another.
--Stephen V. Monsma, "American Politics" (1969)

A radical new law adding the all-inclusive term "sexual orientation" to the state's civil rights code became effective on June 7, following by one day, a failed effort to block its implementation through the referendum process (a referring to the people). A coalition of para-church ministries had hoped to gather signatures from 112,440 supporters during the statutory 90-day waiting period between the end of the 2006 legislative session and the law's effective date—an effort observers pro and con assumed would succeed.

Asked by KVI radio host John Carlson why the referendum (R-65) attempt failed, Rev. Ken Hutcherson answered, "We didn't get enough signatures."

Hutcherson, senior pastor at Antioch Bible Church in Kirkland well understands the intended force and effect of the new "sexual orientation" law. His church rents space for Sunday services from the Lake Washington School District and has been subject to attempts to force his church from school property because of his views on homosexuality.

Adding insult to injury, Governor Gregoire chose the signature deadline-day to proclaim June as LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER PRIDE MONTH (LGBT) in Washington State. In an agency-wide memo dated June 6, Bill White, Deputy Secretary at the Washington State Department of Health announced that various LGBT displays will be in place at the agency's Tumwater and Kent campuses.

Another radio host also surprised by the failure to get enough qualifying signatures for R-65 noted that only four people per every 100 that voted in the last gubernatorial election needed to "show up." (Organizers had anticipated success if but 500 churches of nearly 5,400 identified would produce 200-plus signatures each).

Is it unlikely that at least one in every 25 voters finds the new "sexual orientation" law offensive and morally reprehensible? Do at least ten percent of the churches agree that sexual perversion is a moral issue requiring an unambiguous stand?

SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

By telephone, we surveyed more than a dozen key activists around the state who worked tirelessly during the 90-day campaign to gather signatures for Referendum 65. Without exception, all had praise reports and found no fault in others. Even so, the body of evidence suspected of contributing to the failure of R-65 leads to a closed door—the Church door. Following are general observations of some of the volunteers:

FIRST—the Church is not as well informed on current issues as presumed. Although the gate keepers (pastors) of most small to medium size churches seemed up to speed on the R-65 issue, their colleagues in many of the larger churches were not.

A pastor of a mega-church confessed that he had never heard of HB 2661, the new “sexual orientation” law, or the referendum effort to overturn the law. He was not alone.

SECOND—many gate keepers send a mixed message. A church of 4,000 took a modest stand on R-65. The bulletin mentioned an R-65 information table in the foyer. However, a volunteer was only permitted to collect names and addresses of those seeking information. No petitions could be displayed. Petitions and “talking points” were mailed from the volunteer’s home at her own expense. Net number of signatures? Not known.

In another large church, volunteers could approach congregants in the foyer following services, but no tables or signs were permitted. Following weeks of sermons on the *Da Vinci Code*, Referendum 65 was passionately and rather effectively promoted from the pulpit on the final Sunday before the deadline—resulting in hundreds of signatures—but likely below the potential considering the size of the church.

THIRD—some pastors are persuaded that now that “sexual orientation” has been codified, it’s a political rather than moral issue. Concern for tax-exempt status was frequently expressed.

FOURTH—many leaders, including the state’s Catholic bishops are under the notion that R-65 was about taking rights from certain groups of people. In a letter issued in May, the bishops said, “We are concerned that the signature-gathering campaign for Referendum 65 may have the effect of encouraging unjust discrimination against homosexual persons.”

AND FINALLY—the “seeker-friendly” or “happy church.” A “happy church” serves “happy meals.” Some topics are problematic in a “happy church.” R-65 was not welcome in “happy churches.”

Rev. Alex Rowlands, senior pastor at Westgate Chapel in Edmonds and President of *Sound the Alarm*, producer of a widely distributed six-minute video explaining the ramifications of the new “sexual orientation” law, had this to say about R-65’s failure:

“It would be easy to blame others at this time when the blame should fall squarely on us. I’m not talking about political missteps or lack of organization that brought us to where we are today. I’m talking about the condition of the Church of Jesus Christ in Washington State.

Please allow me to point to three attitudes that we are battling:

Apathy: The Church has operated so long asleep in the light that when issues of moral urgency arise we are not stirred to prayer or action.

Pride and Self Sufficiency: We have underestimated the enemy and by this I do not mean the homosexual community or liberal politicians. I am referring to the enemy of our souls.

Intimidation: The result of our spiritual bankruptcy has us retreating in appeasement and humiliation when issues of righteousness come up in public debate.”

Pastor Rowlands adds that his analysis may appear severe, but that he is not discouraged. “These conditions,” says Rowlands, “are what called us into this fight.”

A fight indeed! The Christian Coalition remains committed to its mission to inform and activate the Church. We are currently developing important voter education materials for use this fall that we believe will be critical to the overturning of the “sexual orientation” law and the preservation of marriage between one man and one woman. Can we count on your help?

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

PS Final signature count for R-65—110,871. Needed—112,440.