

Momentum grows in fight against S.C.'s family discrimination amendment

Proposed amendment attacks all unmarried domestic partnerships

by Manju Rajendran

COLUMBIA — In 2004, Georgia passed a state constitutional amendment with 76 percent support and Arkansas passed one with 75 percent.

However, it is possible that the citizens of South Carolina, traditionally seen as another conservative voting base, will cast a higher percentage of "no" votes on the "Family

The amendment, part of the Nov. 7 ballot, would limit legal rights of all unmarried domestic partnerships, including rights in domestic violence cases, hospital visitations, common law marriage and parental rights. Despite a law already on the books recognizing only heterosexual married partnerships, the amendment states "a marriage between one man and one woman is the only lawful domestic union that shall be valid or recognized."

Volunteers and staff people of the South Carolina Equality Coalition (SCEC) have seen growing support to defeat the amendment over the last year. A privately commissioned poll done in summer of 2005 estimated that 22 percent of South Carolina voters planned to vote against the amendment, but a statewide grassroots educational campaign appears to have shifted public sentiment.

"We're getting a lot of good feedback," says Melissa Harmon, volunteer coordinator for SCEC. "We have had volunteers at the state fair every day for the last two weeks. At first they were nervous about what kind of reception they might get. But they've been pleasantly surprised to find that over 80 percent of people talked to expressed opposition to the amendment."

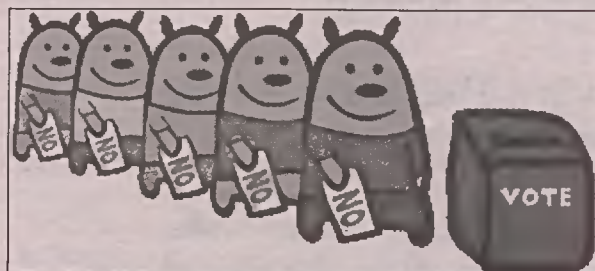
SCEC has been collecting pledges to vote "no" on the issue and has counted over 7,000 "no" commitments and their website has been getting over 10,000 hits a day. The Alliance for Full Acceptance, another organization opposing the amendment, is also collecting pledges. Palmetto Family Council, which supports the amendment, reports about 2400 online signatures since May 17, 2006 in its own pledge campaign.

A recent tour of African-American activists and performers around the state found significant support from African-American communities. Dot Scott, president of the Charleston chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People stated, "We are the civil rights organization and I think we would be remiss if we didn't have a face to show support."

Poet A.J. Taylor, an African-American lesbian from Sumter featured on the tour explained, "I think that the 'All Families Matter Tour' will speak to the residents of South Carolina long after the election is over."

"We really feel the tide turning," says field organizer Robert-John Hinojosa. "We're crossing our fingers for a historic advance for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights movement." ▀

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Discrimination Amendment" to the state constitution than these other states.

"I know we have a challenge on our hands in South Carolina, but we are very pleased by the support we have received," says Fairness for all Families Campaign Manager Asha Leong. "This is not about a single election. It is about building political power for the long term."

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