

THE VOTE AGAINST PROJECT

Elon responds to NC amendment

Caitlin O'Donnell
Editor-in-Chief

The message is simple enough — vote against.

"This project will give you a voice — what are you going to vote against?" the welcome video for the movement asks. "Discrimination, government intrusion, hate, bullying, religion-based discrimination, the destruction of families."

Liv Dubendorf, a senior studying media arts and entertainment, recently became involved with the Vote Against project that launched last year in response to a constitutional amendment banning legal recognition for all unmarried couples.

"America is at a crossroads right now — the issue of sexual orientation equality is our generation's hot button issue," Dubendorf said. "We must decide as a nation if this is an issue of humanism or of morality. I'm very interested to see what happens in this vote, as I think it will affect how we view rights issues in the future."

Leaders of the movement, impressed

with her work on other documentaries and short films, approached Dubendorf. As videographer for the project, she has filmed personal testimonials and created a welcome video for Vote Against. She is also working on a longer documentary scheduled for completion in May about the amendment and movement with senior Dan Koehler.

"The reason I took this project on was, most importantly, to educate the public," Dubendorf said. "I feel it is our responsibility to show people what the issues really consist of. Regardless of one's political leanings, I wanted to show people the real North Carolina and the facts of what they're voting for or against."

Last September, after the bill cleared both the state House and Senate, the North Carolina state legislature moved to put the amendment on the upcoming May 8 ballot. While same-sex marriage is already illegal in the state of North Carolina, the amendment would make the definition of marriage stricter by prohibiting civil unions and rights for domestic partnerships and voiding the benefits domestic partners in the state



Senior Liv Dubendorf is a videographer for the Vote Against movement, which aims to educate state voters about a proposed amendment banning legal recognition of all unmarried couples.

currently receive.

Often framed as a gay-rights issue, the amendment also affects all people in North Carolina, particularly unmarried, heterosexual couples, Dubendorf said.

According to results from the Elon Poll, opposition to a ban on same-sex marriage has remained relatively steady since 2009, while state opinion on the definition of marriage has remained more varied.

In September 2011, 56 percent of respondents to the Elon poll indicated they oppose the amendment, an increase of 5 percent from March 2009. Thirty-four percent indicated they oppose any legal recognition of same-sex couples, while the remaining responses were generally split in what rights same-sex couples should be provided — 29 percent indicated support for civil unions or partnerships and 33 percent showed support for full rights.

Based on her research, Dubendorf said there are parallels between the arguments of both those for and against the amendment, all of whom want legal recognition for their relationship.

"People on the side to support the amendment of this magnitude view it as a moral issue — they are trying to protect the values they hold dear and they are reluctant to change because they are worried about the sanctity of their family," she said. "Ironically, people against the amendment are equally concerned for their families — this amendment would proclaim an unmarried couple's union not protected by law and not afforded the same legal privileges as a married couple."

North Carolina is the last state in the South to pass a constitutional amendment of this nature, which dictates marriage between a man and a woman as the only legally protected relationship. As same-sex marriage is already illegal, passage of the amendment represents a step backward in civil rights and social justice, according to Kirstin Ringelberg, associate professor of art history and inaugural coordinator of Elon's LGBTQ office.

"I think we're at a point in our culture where the gradual gain in some areas of a sense of freedom and equality among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people has caused a more dramatic reaction against us from those who feel fear about what that signifies," Ringelberg said. "For a lot of people, recognizing that sex, gender and sexuality aren't inherently binaristic (founded in clear opposites) requires a radical rethinking of their worldview, and such changes are always painful and

come with a lot of resistance."

It's comparable to inequality faced by blacks during the Civil Rights movement, she said.

"Just as many white Southerners felt that segregation of water fountains, movie theaters, sandwich counters and denial of equal voting access were not just normal but required laws and violence to maintain," she said, "so many people feel that non-heteronormative couples should not have the same rights as they think they deserve."

Currently, Elon is one of many private institutions that offer domestic partner benefits regardless of sexual or gender identity, which could be impacted by passage of the amendment. The university could potentially be forced to change insurance companies if the current insurance provider is prohibited from providing benefits, Ringelberg said.

"Certainly, other non-married couples, queer or straight, who work for other companies in the state might face total loss of rights they currently have, with no hope of achieving them in the future," Ringelberg said.

But the impact of the amendment would also be felt by businesses, which would not only lose their ability to offer competitive benefits to the best-qualified applicants, but also to afford to cover current employees, she said.

"Imagine if you own a business that is forced through this law to stop offering those benefits," Ringelberg said. "You thereby lose valued, long-time employees who can no longer afford to work for you because they are not getting health care at a reasonable cost."

Ringelberg said she is excited about the energy surrounding the Vote Against movement. More than 500 people have already shown up at events held around the state, according to Dubendorf.

"We have to get people to the polls," she said. "If people don't vote, it doesn't matter what they actually believe in, because they haven't made their voices heard."

Want to learn more?

Various campus organizations are sponsoring Race to the Ballot from 7-9 p.m. Feb. 15 in McKinnon to educate the community about the amendment and encourage voter registration.

THURSDAYS
9:50 AM
WHITLEY
AUDITORIUM

College Chapel
TRUITT CENTER | ELON UNIVERSITY

CHANGE

MAKERS

PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE
IN OUR LIVES AND IN THE WORLD