

# STRONG START

No on 36 campaign kicks off to promising poll numbers

by Meg Daly

Aisling Coghlan thought she'd be swinging in her backyard hammock right about now.

Instead she's managing the newly formed and high-energy campaign to defeat Ballot Measure 36, which would amend the Oregon Constitution to define legal marriage as only between one man and one woman. Whether it's her Irish blood or her 10 years of experience as a campaign organizer, she's got the fiery, progressive know-how for the job.

"The state constitution is not a place where we should write unequal treatment for gays and lesbians," says Coghlan, who ran the 1998 Democratic statewide coordinated campaign as well as a successful 2000 campaign to defeat anti-tax measures by Bill Sizemore and Don McIntyre.

Though Coghlan does not believe unequal treatment of queers should be allowed anywhere, the campaign's strategy is appeal to a broad range of voters by focusing on the constitutionality issue. "Even if [Oregonians] disagree about same-sex marriage, we don't put it in our constitution," she says.

When Coghlan heard the news June 30 that the Defense of Marriage Coalition succeeded in placing the amendment on the November ballot, she told her boss, Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, that she had to go fight it, forgoing both her job and her planned summer sabbatical.

Now Saltzman is part of a growing number of community, religious and business leaders and organizations opposing the discriminatory amendment. Others include Basic Rights Oregon, Oregon Action, Planned Parenthood, Service Employees International Union Locals 49 and 503, Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, Gov. Ted Kulongoski and former Gov. Barbara Roberts.

"We believe it's winnable," Coghlan says.

She has the numbers to prove it. According to a recent survey commissioned by the campaign, 46 percent of those polled would vote no on the amendment, with 49 percent saying they would support it.

Coghlan is encouraged by these numbers.

"Undecideds are willing to listen to us on this," she says. "They are really thoughtful about this issue."

She says that of the 10 or more states with similar amendments on their ballots, Oregon has the best chance of defeating its anti-gay effort.

Polling results were even more encouraging when it came to nondiscriminatory attitudes of voters. About 78 percent favor protecting gays and lesbians from bias.

This bodes well for the 3,000-plus gay and lesbian couples who were married in Multnomah County earlier this year. The amendment



Supporters cheer at a campaign kickoff rally Aug. 3

would strip them of a number of key rights such as access to health care through a spouse's workplace, joint parenting rights and next-of-kin status for emergency medical decisions.

While the No on Constitutional Amendment 36 campaign will rely on principles of reason and justice in its efforts, the Defense of Marriage Coalition seems inured to the Chicken Little approach. A recent fund-raising letter claimed: "The truth is, once marriage extends beyond one man and one woman, it will become meaningless. Family relationships will be transient. Children will be raised with a revolving door of parents and stepparents."

Meanwhile, fair-minded heterosexual parents are standing up for their adult children's rights. "My husband and I never imagined that the state which we have lived in for 27 years would protect the rights and responsibilities of one of our children and deny them to our other child," said Elise Self, who has a lesbian daughter and a straight son.

No on 36 urgently needs volunteers and donations to get the word out about what's at stake and how citizens can help. The campaign intends to raise \$2 million to counter the Defense of Marriage Coalition's projected \$1.5 million.

According to No on 36 house party coordinator Bill Klein, house parties will be a key element of this grassroots campaign, helping it "reach a broad range of people. They're also an opportunity to educate voters on the issue and persuade them to vote no."

Klein says he has parties booked through August and is seeking party-holders for this fall. ☐

Two upcoming events will benefit the NO ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT 36 campaign. "An Intimate Conversation with Evan @ Equinox," featuring Freedom to Marry executive director Evan Wolfson, will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. Aug. 7 at 830 N. Shaver St. Brunch tickets are \$50. "The Official Wedding Reception for Equality in Oregon," in honor of the 3,000-plus same-sex couples married in Multnomah County this year, will be held from 7:30 to 11 p.m. Aug. 14 at 2119 N. Kerby St. General admission tickets are \$50 a person, \$80 for married couples. VIP tickets are \$75 a person, \$100 for married couples. Children younger than 18 are free. To buy tickets, make a donation or volunteer, call 971-244-1399 or visit [www.noon36.com](http://www.noon36.com).

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