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Ref I and Amendment 43 results show challenges ahead

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In 1992, Colorado voters approved Amendment 2, prohibiting laws that barred discrimination against gays and lesbians such as those already adopted in Denver, Boulder and Aspen. Just prior to that election, polls showed Amendment 2 failing, but it passed 53 to 47 percent.

History repeated itself this year. On Tuesday, Colorado voters rejected Referendum I by 53 to 47 percent, a statutory change that recognized domestic partnerships for same-sex couples, and passed Amendment 43 by 56 to 44 percent, a constitutional amendment defining marriage.

Ref I, referred to the voters from the 2006 General Assembly, specified that same-sex partnerships are not equivalent to marriage. Coloradans for Fairness, the pro-Ref I campaign, stressed that the new law simply established basic legal rights, such as inheriting property, making medical decisions and sharing in parenting. As with Amendment 2, polls prior to the election looked promising, but the numbers began to erode a week prior to Election Day.

Amendment 43 took language already in state law defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman and placed it in the constitution. Unlike many of the marriage amendments across the country, Amendment 43 does not prohibit domestic partnerships. Had Ref I also passed, the two could have taken effect without legal conflict.

The Bell Policy Center supported Referendum I and opposed Amendment 43 because our core commitment to expanding opportunity for all Coloradans includes the basic legal rights for same sex couples. That opportunity would have been defined and reinforced under Ref I. As Coretta Scott King said in 2004, "Constitutional amendments should be used to expand freedom, not restrict it."

Focus on the Family and other conservative Christian groups supported A-43, and Family Action Inc., their advocacy branch, opposed Ref I.

Nationally, eight propositions defining marriage and in some cases banning domestic partnerships were on the ballot around the country; all passed except the Arizona measure. Twenty other states have already passed such measures.

Colorado voters could have faced four ballot questions on this issue instead of two. One proposed measure to outlaw domestic partnerships failed to make the signature threshold. Coloradans for Fairness collected enough signatures to place a response to this measure on the ballot, but withdrew it when the first measure didn't make it.

After the passage of Amendment 2 in 1992, Colorado was branded "the Hate State." Gay activists tossed Colorado products into the Hudson River in New York and the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Social Workers, for example, cancelled conventions here. This is unlikely to happen this time because, sadly, similar measures passed around the country no

longer make Colorado unique.

Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Amendment 2, heeding arguments made by Jean Dubofsky, a Bell board member and former state Supreme Court justice. The failure of Ref I will not offer us that kind of redemption. Instead, we must work to change our state, one person at a time.

Justice Dubofsky points out an important distinction between Amendment 2 and Ref. I. "Amendment 2 took away basic civil rights. Ref I would have added rights for same-sex couples we could not have anticipated in 1992." In addition, she suggests that the strong support shown by younger voters for Ref I allows hope that attitudes are changing, if gradually, in our state.

A letter from Coloradans for Fairness chairman Sean Duffy offered this challenge to supporters:

"Today, Colorado has a better understanding of the challenges these good couples face, which gives us a foundation upon which we can make future progress...Our disappointment must not turn into discouragement. The opponents of basic legal rights want to end this struggle here, today, and watch us walk away in frustration. You and I know that the strength of this effort won't be diminished by one setback at the polls. We have much work ahead of us in 2007!"

A New Year and a New Look for Freedom Watch

To our loyal FW readers,

The Freedom Watch Editorial Board and CP's Communication Committee met in the early Fall to discuss how to reach out to more people in our community who share our values. Because FW is our main method of communicating our work on key community issues, we realized we need to get the ideas and articles in FW out to the public more often. So for 2007, we will be trying out a new format for Freedom Watch. We will continue to publish four full editions of FW – one per quarter including our two candidate surveys. In addition, CP will be running a ½ page article in the Independent every other week. This will allow CP to make timelier responses to issues of importance of our readers. We will also continue to post all FW material on our website, www.citizensproject.org. Hopefully, this will raise the larger community's awareness of Citizens Project and rally more support to our call for equal rights, diversity, separation of church and state, and civic engagement in our community.

See you more often in the New Year,

Christina Student
Executive Director

REFLECTIONS ON THE TED HAGGARD STORY: THE CHOICE IS ALWAYS OURS

The Rev. Dr. Ellen Johnson-Fay, Minister Emerita,
All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, Colorado Springs

*Love is not concerned
with whom you pray
or where you slept
the night you ran away from home.
Love is concerned
That the beating of your heart
Should kill no one.*

- Alice Walker

The Ted Haggard saga has provided a great drama for the community and deep suffering for him, his family, and New Life Church as they all try to make sense of the contradictions between his life and his teaching. I have felt profound sadness, disappointment, and compassion for him and his family. I have also felt anger at the manner in which this personal and public tragedy is being exploited by the media and used by the extremists of the religious right.

It is unfortunate that Ted Haggard's conditioning has convinced him that same-sex attractions are evil and the work of the devil; it is also unfortunate that he continues to reject the part of himself which he considers "dark and repulsive." His aversion has created not only a sense of self-hatred that has harmed himself and his loved ones, but has also harmed the wider gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in Colorado Springs as he and his followers project their discrimination outward with harsh judgments and blame.

I am saddened because the excessive publicity given to this "scandal" may have deepened the fears of religious conservatives. This publicity might have helped lead to the passage of the restrictive definition of marriage in Amendment 43. It also may have influenced the failure of Referendum I which would have allowed committed same-sex couples access to health care and other legal benefits still reserved only for heterosexual couples.

There is an alternative choice that I wish for - his healing - and for the health and well being of his family, his congregation, and the wider community.

Ted Haggard could choose wholeness. He could choose to embrace that part of himself that he has rejected for so long that he may not even remember when that rejection began. As Pastor Haggard continues to look deeply within himself, he could come to recognize that feelings of attraction and love toward men are a part of the goodness within him. He could discover that feelings of attraction toward members of the same sex are a natural potential in many human beings. Sexuality is a natural expression of the infinite diversity of the universe. He could acknowledge that it is a cultural choice to judge such feelings as sinful, evil, or wrong; a choice that has caused great pain and suffering through the centuries. Such judgment is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. Pastor Haggard could come to realize that such natural feelings, when repressed, are likely to be expressed in unhealthy and harmful ways. Yet when such feelings are embraced, they can find expression in wholesome ways.

He could look to Pastor Benjamin Reynolds for spiritual guidance.

In coincidental timing, Pastor Benjamin Reynolds, much like Haggard, has had to resign from his position as Senior Pastor of Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church because some people in his congregation were not ready to accept his advocacy for gays and lesbians from the pulpit. However, being gay himself, Rev. Reynolds embraced his inner reality with compassion, pride and acceptance and sought to end discrimination against gays that sometimes occurs within black congregations. He has acted publicly with integrity and honesty about his true self, at a great personal cost and with deep regret at ending the pastoral relationship with people he has served with love, inspiration and courage.

Inter-racial marriage was illegal only half a century ago, and most of the population of the United States considered it to be sinful. I hope it doesn't take another half century for same-sex love to be accepted with justice, equity and compassion. I hope that we will be able to look back upon the "Ted Haggard Saga" and recognize it as a turning point in the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, the overcoming of societal prejudices, and the turning back of legislation restricting the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

Who says it is easy? But we have the power.

I watch the faces deepen all around me.

It is the time of change, the saving hour.

The word is not fear, the word we live,

But an old word suddenly made new,

As we learn it again, as we bring it alive:

Love. Love. Love. Love.

- May Sarton