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Marriage- initiative opponents raise more

Amendment foes get larger donations from fewer donors

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX — Foes of a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage are accumulating a larger war chest than proponents.

New financial disclosure forms show that Arizona Together, the group organized to fight the initiative, has collected more than \$523,000 so far. Even with expenses to set up two statewide offices, hire consultants and rent, it still had \$244,187 on hand at the end of May, the most recent figures available.

By contrast, donations to Protect Marriage Arizona as of that same May 31 date tallied \$377,155. But with expenses to gather signatures using paid circulators and other consultant fees, the group reports having only \$47,519 left.

Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Phoenix, who is chairing the campaign opposing the initiative, said the cash is needed to explain to voters the constitutional amendment also would ban civil unions and domestic partner benefits for public employees. Ultimately, she predicts her organization will spend about \$2.7 million.

The largest single source is the Human Rights Campaign, a national group which bills itself as "the largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality." It has kicked in \$130,055.

John Sperling, founder of Apollo Group, is the largest single contributor at \$91,000. His company owns the University of Phoenix and Western International University.

On the other side of the ledger, the largest single expense so far is \$53,135 for the group's Web site.

For the proponents of the initiative, the biggest donation comes from the Center for Arizona Policy, an organization that lobbies at the Capitol on behalf of "pro-family laws and values in Arizona," which gave \$75,000 to the effort. Another \$20,500 came from the Christian Family Care Agency, which does counseling and adoption services.

Sproul & Associates, which is handling media as well as contracting for circulators, has been paid \$242,087 so far.

An analysis by Capitol Media Services suggests that foes of the amendment are more efficient at raising money — or, at least, able to convince fewer people to give more. The average individual donation, even after Sperling's \$91,000 is discounted, exceeds \$850; the average donation for Protect Marriage Arizona is about \$110.

But the proponents have the endorsement of the state's three Catholic bishops. In a pastoral statement to parishioners, the bishops said marriage is "a personal relationship with enormous public significance" and a husband and wife provide "the best conditions" for raising children.

Sinema said funds will first go to try to knock the measure off the ballot. She contends it violates requirements limiting constitutional proposals to a single subject.

Aside from defining marriage as between one man and one woman, it also says "no legal status for unmarried persons shall be created or recognized by this state or its political subdivisions that is similar to that of marriage."

Initiative proponents acknowledge that not only bars the Legislature or courts from recognizing "civil unions," as some states have done but also would block public employers from offering insurance coverage and other benefits to the domestic partners of their employees, whether straight or gay.

Tucson, Scottsdale, Tempe and Pima County offer at least some benefits to partners.

Private employers would be unaffected.

Initiative backers say it complies with the constitution's "single subject" rule because it simply defines the scope of marriage, whether called that or not.

If knocking it off the ballot doesn't work, Sinema said publicizing the scope of the initiative will. Sinema said while people are willing to ban same-sex marriages, she believes they are not willing to constitutionally discriminate against unmarried couples.

But Cathi Herrod, interim president of the Center for Arizona Policy, noted that 11 other states adopted gay marriage bans in 2004, eight of them with similar provisions.

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