

Published: 10.28.2006

## Debate: Wide divide on marriage initiative

**By Daniel Scarpinato**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Competing interests in the argument over a ballot initiative that would define marriage between a man and a woman ventured into uncharted territory at a Thursday debate.

In a campaign that has almost always remained on strict talking points, the speakers representing both sides engaged in a cordial dialogue, journeying into the culture divide at the root of the discussion surrounding gay marriage.

Held at the University of Arizona College of Law, there was still talk of "activist judges" and assertions that the initiative "isn't about gay marriage," but the speakers — not official representatives of the campaigns involved in passing and defeating Proposition 107 — also went beyond the surface.

Often disagreeing, they discussed controversial issues such as whether gays should raise children, the role of religion in determining the concept of marriage and whether gay marriage would open the door to bigamy.

Cindy Jordan, a local marketing agent who is involved in a group called "No on Prop 107," said that if the initiative passes — amending the state constitution and knocking out domestic-partnership benefits that local governments provide to employees — voters would "smear the state constitution with bigotry."

As the representatives of Arizona Together, the official campaign against Proposition 107, have pointed out, the Arizona Court of Appeals ruled that marriage in Arizona already is between a man and woman, making the initiative unnecessary, they say.

But Jordan Lorence, a senior vice president with the Scottsdale-based Alliance Defense Fund, said that doesn't mean the ruling couldn't be overturned.

"To say 'don't worry about it; there won't be any judicial activism here,' is wrong. We've seen it" elsewhere, Lorence said.

Lorence and Monte Stewart, president of the Utah-based Marriage Law Foundation, described marriage as "a common good," saying it bridges the divide between men and women.

Jordan shot back with: "Equality will bridge the divide between men and women."

Stewart said it's not a matter of having both straight and gay marriage. It's a matter of having tradition or "genderless marriage," he said.

"Jim and John marry — the only way you can do that is with a regime of genderless marriage," he said.

The campaign against Proposition 107 has mounted its strategy in focusing on the effects it says the initiative would have on straight couples, sidestepping the impact on gays and not answering questions about whether they support gay marriage.

Research the Nov. 7 midterm election; watch videos from Star Editorial Board meetings with candidates and supporters and opponents of ballot initiatives. Also, read past Star articles and endorsements.

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Opponents say many straight couples who choose not to marry would lose health benefits if they work for a government employer.

"The gay community has something very significant to lose," Jordan said in an interview after the event.

"But it's all about domestic partnerships," she said, saying that gay marriage is not going to be a reality whether or not the initiative passes.

Likewise, Lorence addressed the impact on domestic-partnership benefits, something the proponents of the proposition have not answered questions about.

He said that if the initiative passes, governments like the city of Tucson could still offer each employee the opportunity to receive coverage for an additional adult, rather than just a partner.

That would also allow people to buy coverage for elderly parents for whom they may provide care, he said.

"They're not going to probe into that relationship," he said.

### **What the measure would do**

- **The Measure:** Proposition 107 — Protect Marriage Arizona. Amends the state constitution to define marriage as being between a man and woman. Prohibits the state and its political subdivisions from creating or recognizing legal status for unmarried persons that is similar to marriage.

- **Core Facts:** Would make it impossible for gay couples to enter into any kind of legal union authorized by the state. Domestic-partner benefits now offered by some governments would be prohibited. Tucson's domestic-partnership registry would be voided. If the amendment fails, the state's existing law prohibiting gay marriage will still stand.

- **For and Against:** Supporters include The Center for Arizona Policy, a group of conservative family-values lobbyists, United Families International, Christian Family Care Agency, all three of the state's Catholic bishops, and Republican Sens. John McCain and Jon Kyl.

Opponents include Tucson Republican Mayor Bob Walkup, the Arizona Democratic Party, Wingspan, the Human Rights Campaign, Republican Congressman Jim Kolbe, Democratic Congressman Raúl Grijalva, University of Phoenix owner John Sperling, Tucsonan Stephen Quinlan, and a number of union groups, medical associations and churches.

- **Real-World Impact:** The amendment would block "activist judges" or the Legislature from changing the law to redefine marriage, which backers say must be preserved as a traditional institution. Critics say same-sex marriage already is illegal in Arizona, and the move mostly punishes straight couples by denying them domestic-partner benefits. Gay and lesbian activists also say it would be a blow to them.

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