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Same-sex marriage already an election hot button

Opposition to gay partnerships goes past religious beliefs

By Mike Yuen
Star-Bulletin



On a recent Sunday, worshippers who seemed to prefer sundresses, shorts and even "Soldier of Christ" T-shirts were packed into Farrington High School's 1,200-seat auditorium for a New Hope Christian Fellowship service.

The Rev. Wayne Cordeiro urged them to open their hearts to Jesus and develop loving relationships.

Outside, Joseph Ledbetter and three others had another message. It was on their T-shirts: "Please vote." They were manning New Hope's voter registration booth.

"It's one thing to pray. We should also take a stand for those who share our values and morals, and the teachings of Jesus Christ," said Ledbetter, a former Honolulu police lieutenant who opposes same-sex marriage.

Two weeks ago, a crowd of about 150 Windward-area residents, mostly Catholics, attended the third in a series of "family celebration" dinners organized by foes of gay marriages that had been publicized in their church newsletters. The gathering ended with about 35 signing up to be foot soldiers in two planned statewide door-to-door walks. The goal: to distribute brochures urging a yes vote on the proposed constitutional amendment that would give legislators the authority to ban same-sex marriage.



Proponents of traditional marriage have launched an intensive voter registration and volunteer recruitment drive, and they're mining what they believe is a mother lode of like-minded voters at Catholic, Mormon, Pentecostal, evangelical Christian and new nondenominational churches like New Hope.



Mobilizing those voters is crucial, said Marc Alexander, a Catholic priest and one of the spearheads against legalized same-sex marriage. With the ballot measure tantamount to Hawaii's first referendum on the issue, Alexander and other leading advocates of traditional marriage want the proposal to not just win -- but win big.

If statewide public-opinion polls, including the Star-Bulletin's, are any indication, their effort should strike a sympathetic cord beyond churches and religious conservatives, because those surveys have found that 70 percent of voters oppose gay marriages, Alexander said.

But proponents of same-sex marriage have organized their own effort to defeat the proposed constitutional amendment, seeing the proposal as part of a nationwide trend to limit gay rights.

Veteran political strategists and social activists said the voter drive by foes of gay partnerships has significant implications for the elections. The effort could also influence which candidates win or lose, they said. Their conclusions:

- The turn-out-the-vote effort is likely to benefit Republicans more than Democrats since the modern-day isle GOP on its own has historically not been very effective at getting out the vote.
- The timing of the drive means it could have less impact on the primary, even though there will be contested GOP races involving three candidates in high-profile races -- gubernatorial hopeful Frank Fasi, lieutenant governor candidate Stan Koki and congressional hopeful Gene Ward -- who all oppose same-sex marriage and who have strong ties to conservative religious groups.

Star-Bulletin interviews with ministers and at churches and pro-family meetings also revealed that many of the religious faithful will be politically pragmatic. They will consider, they said, who can best win when candidates in the same race have the same views on hot-button social issues.

Like many others, Rick Frasure, the senior pastor at Windward Worship Center, a charismatic Pentecostal church in Kaneohe, said he is leaning toward Maui Mayor Linda Lingle, who is battling former Honolulu Mayor Fasi for the GOP gubernatorial nomination. Frasure fears that Fasi can't win the primary, much less beat Democratic Gov. Ben Cayetano.

It would be difficult to abandon Fasi, Frasure said. "I've heard Frank publicly speak to my values," said Frasure, who supports Koki for lieutenant governor.



Don Clegg, who was Fasi's pollster during Fasi's 1994 gubernatorial run as a third-party candidate, said candidates this year should "certainly be more to the right than last time."

But, he added, religious conservatives by themselves are not a large voting bloc in Hawaii. Only half of them voted for Fasi in 1994, despite Fasi's concerted courtship of that group, said Clegg, who is now polling for Cayetano.

Clegg said the vote of the state's religious conservatives also comes with a downside. Clegg said he told Fasi that religious conservatives would only produce a jump of 4 percent to 6 percent in support, but they could also cause a similar number to back away, seeing Fasi as embracing extremist positions. "He didn't believe me and he lost," Clegg added.

"My advice is: 'Don't get spooked by this group.' Like labor, it is not as cohesive as a voting bloc."

Clegg said gay marriage is more likely to be an issue in a race lower on the ballot when voters may not know much about a candidate. A single issue may then influence whom a voter chooses, he explained.

State Rep. Gene Ward, however, sees religious conservatives as the key to beating state House Minority Leader Quentin Kawananakoa in the GOP primary, and advancing to face Democratic incumbent Neil Abercrombie.

His media consultant, Keith Rollman, said: "Motivated voter blocs who can organize their grass roots the best are crucial."

Ward was Hawaii co-chairman for the 1988 presidential campaign of Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson.

For Koki, a former state senator who supported Robertson's presidential bid, being seen as a single-issue candidate is the last thing he wants.

"I have never hidden the fact that I'm a Christian," said Koki, who attends the conservative evangelical Church of the Nazarene in Kaneohe and who faces a primary battle with former state Senate Minority Leader Michael Liu for the GOP nomination for lieutenant governor.

Koki prefers to stress his 20-year experience heading the state's largest carpet retail outlet and his involvement with the Okinawan community.

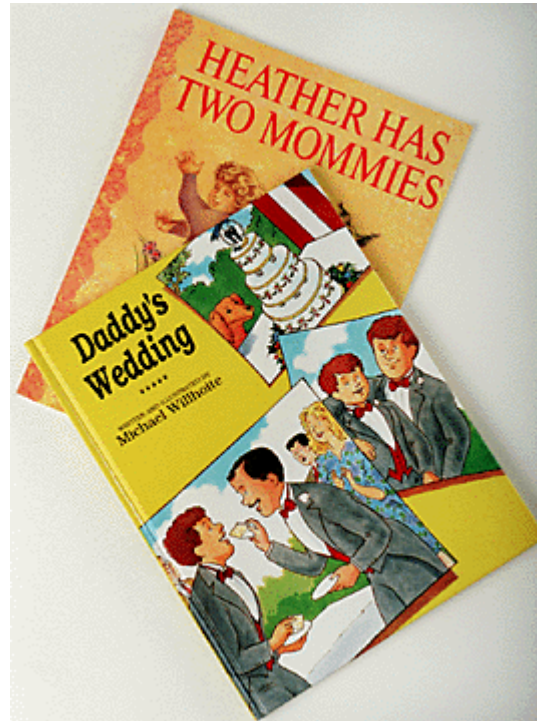
Intertwining business experience and opposition to same-sex marriage was a winning combination for a friend of Koki's, building contractor Norman Sakamoto, who in 1996 managed to unseat then-Senate Judiciary Chairman Rey Graulty in the Democratic primary. "Had (gay marriage) not been an issue, I would have had a harder time," Sakamoto said.

State House Assistant Minority Leader Sam Aiona, Republican state Rep. Galen Fox and Franklin Kometani, who headed the Reagan and Bush presidential campaigns in Hawaii, all moderates, are backing Koki. They believe his support from religious conservatives would give a ticket headed by Lingle a broader voter base than what Liu could offer.

Mike Gabbard, one of Hawaii's leading opponents of gay marriage, said there's a simple

way to find out how strongly candidates feel about same-sex unions: Will they be willing to distribute literature urging a yes vote on the proposed constitutional amendment with their own?

"I want candidates to call for our literature," Gabbard said.



Mike Gabbard shocked the audience at an anti-gay marriage fund-raiser by displaying these children's books on same-sex marriage

Kids' books on same-sex marriage shock audience

By Mike Yuen
Star-Bulletin



Same-sex marriage foe Mike Gabbard waved a children's book at the 150 people who had gathered.

The book is "Daddy's Wedding," and its target audience is kids 2 to 6 years old. The picture

book shows Nick looking on as his father -- divorced from Nick's mom -- slips a wedding ring onto the finger of his gay lover.

On the next page, the two men are kissing on the lips as they embrace with their eyes closed.

"The day after the wedding, Daddy and Frank went to San Francisco for their honeymoon," Nick states in a subsequent picture caption. "I hope they had as much fun as I did that week ... I went to baseball camp!"

Gabbard also displayed another book, "Heather Has Two Mommies," published by Alyson Wonderland, the Los Angeles company that specializes in children's books with gay-acceptance themes. The firm's books, like "Heather Has Two Mommies," are carried by major isle bookstores.

"This is the story of two lesbian mothers who have a daughter by artificial insemination!" Gabbard said. "This is the reality if homosexual marriages are legalized."

For the Rev. Marc Alexander, who with Gabbard recently addressed a predominantly Catholic crowd that had gathered for a \$5-per-person, chicken-and-rice dinner sponsored by two political action committees opposed to gay marriage, "the books do have a certain shock value."

After Gabbard's shock talk, Alexander took the floor for a 15-minute, hand-pumping plea to urge listeners to register to vote if they haven't already, and to vote yes on the proposed constitutional amendment specifying that the Legislature shall have the power to limit marriage to opposite-sex couples.

Voting yes on the ballot measure is a rejection of same-sex marriage in what amounts to the state's first referendum on the issue, Alexander said. "Voting no or leaving the ballot blank is tantamount to saying, 'We want homosexual marriage,'" he added.

Alexander added: "It's not a matter of religion. It's not a question of the Religious Right. There are more non-Christians in Hawaii than there are Christians. Seventy percent of the people in Hawaii are in favor of traditional marriage."

Last year, the Star-Bulletin Poll found that 70 percent of Hawaii voters were opposed to legalizing same-sex marriage.



A page from one of the same-sex books.

How they stand

Here's how leading candidates for governor, lieutenant governor and U.S. representative say they will vote on the ballot measure that asks: "Shall the Constitution of the state of Hawaii be amended to specify that the Legislature shall have the power to reserve marriage to opposite-sex couples?"

YES

- Democratic Gov. Ben **Cayetano**, and Republican challengers Frank **Fasi** and Linda **Lingle**.
- Stan **Koki** and Michael **Liu**, Republican candidates for lieutenant governor.
- Democratic U.S. Rep. Neil **Abercrombie**, and Republican challengers Quentin **Kawanakoa** and Gene **Ward**.

NO

- None

BLANK VOTE

- Through a campaign spokeswoman, Democratic Lt. Gov. Mazie **Hirono** says she is undecided as to how she'll vote. That means if Hirono leaves her ballot blank on this issue, it counts as a no vote.

CON CON

Many people against legalizing same-sex marriage favor having a constitutional convention. However, many who support gay marriage oppose having a constitutional gathering.

Here's how leading candidates for governor, lieutenant governor and U.S. representative say they will vote -- and their vote may not be directly influenced by the same-sex marriage question -- on the measure that asks: "Shall there be a convention to propose a revision of or amendments to the Constitution?"

YES

- **Cayetano, Fasi and Lingle.**
- **Koki and Liu.**
- **Kawananakoa and Ward.**

NO

- **Hirono.**
- **Abercrombie.**

People behind 'save traditional marriage' effort

Here are people who feel deeply about same-sex marriage:

■ **Frank Baker**, 64, and his wife, **Susan Baker**, 55, both of whom have volunteered to be part of a statewide door-to-door campaign to seek additional supporters of the ballot measure affirming traditional marriage.

"This is something we feel very strongly about," said Susan Baker. She said she has never been involved in politics other than voting.

Susan Baker said she has always voted for former Honolulu Mayor Frank Fasi but is now favoring the gubernatorial candidacy of Maui Mayor Linda Lingle, who faces Fasi in the Republican primary.

Frank Baker said he is anti-Cayetano and anti-incumbent.

■ **Andrew Gerakas**, 70, former deputy director of the territorial and state Department of Planning and Economic Development and a lay deacon at Star of the Sea, a Catholic church, who established a political action

committee, Pro-Family Hawaii.

"I'm a Democrat, have always been for the underdog, have always voted for people who are supportive of unions. How can anyone call me Far Right? I believe in the family," said Gerakas, who's been married for 48 years.

He has spoken from the pulpit against gay marriage. "What I've done from the pulpit is reflect the teachings of the church regarding marriage. The church supports traditional marriage, which is under siege."

■**Barbara Leong**, an alto in the choir at St. Anthony's Catholic Church, who believes same-sex marriage goes against human nature. Books that try to teach acceptance of gay marriage will leave children confused, she said. "Our state is going to the dogs," she added.

Leong declined to say whom she favors for governor. "I'm old-fashioned. I think a woman's place is at home, but I'm also glad women are doing men's work," she said.

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