

## IN THIS ISSUE

### WEDGE ISSUES

Same-Sex Marriage

Immigrant Rights

Reproductive Choice

### VOTER MOBILIZATION

VOTE Project

Tribal Latino Caucus

Oregon Action

Candidate Forums

### PLUS

Get WILD

Leaders for a Changing World



**“A typical family.”** That’s the headline *The Asian Reporter* used in its front-page coverage of the wedding of longtime community activist Mary Li (right) to her partner Becky Kennedy. As the first same-sex couple legally married in Oregon, their March 3rd wedding was conducted by retired Oregon Supreme Court Justice Betty Roberts and witnessed by their 9-month-old daughter Ava Jean, along with family, friends, and the national press corps.

Credit: Fredrick D. Joe/The Oregonian

## “Wedge” starts with “W”

**W**hen the Supreme Court installed George W. Bush as President, he made a sweeping pledge to the people of America, the majority of whom had not voted for him. “I will be a uniter, not a divider,” he declared. Three years later, one has to wonder if the famous “Dubya” in the middle of his name stands for “Wedge.”

Wedge issues — crime, abortion, gay rights — play to voters’ fears. In millions of direct mail letters and narrow-cast speeches, the right-wing’s use of wedge issues escalates in direct proportion to their desperation to retain political control. Liberal and moderate Democrats dismiss what they see as “distractions” from their issues. John Kerry, who himself opposes equal rights for same sex couples, says of Bush’s position on gay marriage: “the president is trying to drive a wedge again in America.”

What happens when one person’s “wedge issue” is another person’s struggle for equality? The rights of people of color, sexual minorities, and women may be the bait that hooks a voter for the right-wing, but these are hardly side issues for those fighting for justice. Progressive organizers need to refuse to allow peoples’ rights to be marginalized as wedge issues, while reframing them to connect with voters’ best democratic impulses.

The Rural Organizing Project’s “Democracy Grid” fosters grassroots discussion about how an issue measures up to four basic values: promotes inclusion; balances majority rule with minority rights; supports a well-informed and well-educated populace; and contributes to a reasonable standard of living for all.

Progressive groups around the region are turning wedge issues into organizing opportunities. Turn the page to read about the organizing tactics and the issues being used to build power during this election season in the West.

— Holly Prueett, *Views* editor

## CONTENTS

- 1 Wedge Issues
- 2 Director's Column
- 3 Same-Sex Marriage
- 6 Blue Mountain Clinic
- 8 Immigration and the Sierra Club
- 9 Tacoma Detention Center
- 10 VOTE Project
- 12 Oregon Action
- 13 Tribal Latino Caucus
- 14 Toolkit: Candidate Forums
- 16 WILD Profiled
- 18 Nightstand: Black-Brown Alliances
- 26 Center Allies Honored
- 26 Organizers Index
- 27 Who We Are



**WESTERN STATES CENTER**  
POST OFFICE BOX 40305  
PORTLAND, OREGON  
97240

TEL: (503) 228.8866  
FAX: (503) 228.1965

[www.westernstatescenter.org](http://www.westernstatescenter.org)

## What exactly does the right wing fear from gay marriage?

*"There will be problems in the Western world, because then we've broken down the family, we're no longer producing children, and yet in other countries, where there's an agenda to affect America, they are going to be producing children with an agenda to hurt the United States. And so there's a concern, there's a fear there."*

That's how Pam Flannery of Colorado Springs, inspired by President Bush's speech on terrorism and international security at the recent National Association of Evangelicals convention, summed up the ultimate dangers of same-sex marriage. Allowing gays and lesbians to wed isn't just a dagger aimed at the heart of traditional marriage; it's a matter of national security.

Similar — and more explicitly racist — fears underlie statements from well-respected academics and political commentators like Harvard University Professor Samuel Huntington:

"In this new era, the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives."

Alongside war and the economy, "population control" lurks behind a range of wedge issues sure to get ever hotter as the November elections draw closer.

- Last year President Bush signed the first federal anti-abortion legislation in 30 years.
- Virulent anti-immigrant activists have used the issue of "overpopulation" to drive an inflamed debate on immigration policy within the Sierra Club.
- Immigrant communities within the U.S. are caught between heightened post-9/11 fears of terrorists operating within our borders and our nation's high dependency on immigrant labor.
- The current debate over same-sex marriage evokes intense feelings about gender-roles, reproduction and child-raising in our society.

Questions of who is or isn't having or raising how many children, under what circumstances, and why underlie a host of hot-button issues.

by **Dan Petegorsky**  
Executive Director  
Western States Center



Religious doctrine, social custom, national security policies and complex systems of white male supremacy have become thickly intertwined — and ripe for manipulation and fear-mongering.

Playing on fear is what wedge issues are all about, and this Administration has been playing it to the hilt. Meanwhile, the "presumptive Democratic nominee," together with many other party leaders and strategists, is hoping to avoid controversy by adopting what polls show may have become the preferred "middle ground": opposition to same-sex marriage, opposition to a constitutional amendment outlawing same-sex marriage, and support for "civil unions."

One of the key assumptions of campaign strategists is that progressives will win based on an economically focused message, but that we're on dangerous ground if we have to fight on "social" issues such as gay rights. But I'm not so sure. Consider the following:

- Across our region, we've defeated almost all of the statewide anti-gay or anti-abortion ballot initiatives we've faced over the last decade.
- By contrast, we've lost most of the anti-tax initiatives, the key ground on which statewide battles have been fought on economic issues (other than votes on minimum wage, which we've mostly won.)
- Youth, a key constituency with traditionally low turn-out rates, does not have a problem with same-sex marriage, but does strongly oppose right-wing attempts to outlaw it.

Consider as well that conservatives can get equally tripped up by their own wedge issues — for example, trying to court Latino voters while pandering both to post-9/11 fears and to the anti-immigrant factions among the Republican base.

Values-based issues will play a strong role in this election. But the culture warriors on the right may have some surprises in store. Alongside — even consistent with — strongly held religious beliefs, Americans cherish fundamental values of freedom and dignity. We should be confident that we can successfully mobilize those beliefs to prevent writing bigotry and white supremacy back into the constitution. 