

Elaine's Closing
The Status of Lesbians in California
July 26, 2007

In the world of politics polls matter. They are the barometer of how people have changed their thinking about what is important to them. Polls track trends, they pin point marketing targets, and they can reveal problems that often times we don't want to face. When you see a chart of just how little women are paid compared to what men are paid for doing the same work, it's a punch to the gut. It's been 44 years after Congress passed the Equal Pay Act but we still don't get equal pay, and 35 years of waiting for the men in office to allow the Equal Rights Amendment to come up for a vote again. Equal rights for women is still not in the Constitution. How those in power value women and others who are not in power can be seen quite clearly in a black and white graph after you take a survey.

In the current world of census and polling the largest sampling done of the gay and lesbian population was accomplished inadvertently during the U.S. Census 2000. For the first time on the Census they asked if you had an unmarried partner. Based on whether you checked male or female for your partner, the Census Bureau was able to extrapolate same-sex couple data. It had never been done before. It provides the clearest, most reliable national data on gays and lesbians to date.

The results were remarkable. Using the 2000 Census data, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the total number of gays and lesbians in the United States for 2006 is around 11,000,000. The same number as for all Asians in America. To put that in perspective, it's the population of the

states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho COMBINED! There are over 770,000 same-sex couples and well over 6,000,000 kids being raised by gay or lesbian parents. These figures are based on the *most conservative* estimate of 3.7% of the total population. AND keep in mind, single gay and lesbians have never actually been counted yet. Neither have those who do not identify as gay or lesbian but are in fact, bisexual or transgendered. They will often check the heterosexual box.

Gary Gates, a senior researcher at The Williams Institute, told me that they have done studies to try and figure out how best to ask questions about sexual identification since so many people are hesitant to say. "If you ask a guy by phone if he's gay while he's sitting in his mother's house, he'll say no. But if you ask him while he's sitting in a bar, he'll say yes. And both are true for him. It's a very delicate thing." Gates went on to say that many people will not respond to a direct question about their sexual orientation but they will respond to a question that asks if they have ever "desired someone of the same sex" before. Having desire is less threatening to people than having a certain label attached to them. After all, who can argue with the magical, mysterious feelings of desire?

It's amazing to me that there have not been more in-depth surveys done to find out the real social and spending data on lesbians and gays. There's a HUGE amount of people out there floating around unaccounted for. And rainbow dollars is a marketing pot of gold. Witeck and Combs Marketing Research reports that the National LGBT consumer buying power is a staggering, \$641 BILLION dollars for 2006, but what is even MORE staggering are the

estimates for 2011, \$835 billion dollars!!

It is foolish for this state to ignore such a resource of talent and wealth at a time when our state financial needs are so great. Beyond the moral error of catering to an archaic prejudice by supporting discrimination against lesbians and gays, this state is willfully neglecting a substantial source of sustainable income that could support the new infrastructure and social programs we so desperately need.

It is my intention that a designation for sexual orientation should be added to the 2020 U.S. Census. But since that takes an act of Congress, in the meantime, it seems only logical that, since California is the state with the largest gay and lesbian population, we could at least start counting *here*. It doesn't seem like a lot to ask for when lesbians and gays contribute so much to California's economy, entertainment, politics, and social diversity.

How are we going to keep ignoring almost a million and a half people, who are creating families, sacrificing their lives and limbs in war, and getting fed-up about being denied their legal and moral due as citizens? It's time to **Be Counted** so that we don't continue to **Be Discounted**.

Before I close, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the lesbian community who, in the 80's and 90's, were the caretakers of their gay brothers who were dying of AIDS. When the entire world ran away and thousands of healthy young men were dying from a mysterious, unknown disease, what most people don't know is that it was lesbians who

organized and were the nursemaids and chained themselves to City Hall doors screaming for justice when our government was silent. Lesbian women marched in the streets, made phone calls, wrote letters, sat beside hospital beds and went to funeral after funeral. Tens of thousands of young men died before the White House even took notice. "They're getting what they deserve. God hates queers," was commonly heard on the news, from ministers, and at the water cooler at work. We were emotional and physically battered not just by the disease but by the general population who stood by with smugly indifference.

My dear brother Henry was one of those queers who died AIDS. I have not known a kinder or more honorable man since. If ten thousand twenty-five year old housewives from New Jersey suddenly starting dieing horribly from a mysterious, deforming disease caused by having sex with their husbands or boyfriends, I doubt the government and the American public would be silent about it. Put yourself in our place. We are tired of confronting such vicious, heartless belief systems. We deserve better from our leadership. Thank you for hearing us today.

With that, I have some proposals for legislation I am asking for your support on, to be voted on at a later time.

1) All California funded veteran homes and services must be discrimination free, including toward gay and lesbian veterans.

2) California should adopt Articles 7 and 8 of the 2002 Uniform Parentage Act.

3) All state-funded data collection activities that include standard demographic characteristics of respondents like sex, age, and race/ethnicity, should also include sexual orientation. Data collection efforts that do not include sexual orientation must justify the rationale for this exclusion.