

# NGLTF Surveys Voters on Gay Issues

Washington, D.C. - (March 16, 1994) - The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) last week released a survey of national and local polls, focus group research, and other articles measuring voters' opinions about gay-related issues. The document, "The Right Response: A Survey of Voters' Attitudes About Gay-Related Questions," was issued by the NGLTF Fight the Right project to assist activists battling state and local anti-gay ballot measures.

Information was gathered from dozens of polling organizations including the Election and Survey Unit of CBS News, NBC, the Gallup Organization, Princeton Survey Research Associates, EDK Associates, Mason-Dixon Political/Media Research, Inc., and the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, as well as

numerous articles from both national and local newspapers that covered public opinion studies and/or initiative and referenda campaigns.

In assessing the relationship between public attitudes towards lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and the community's political strategies, the survey's author, Susan Hibbard, NGLTF Campaign Specialist with the Fight the Right Project, offered the following recommendations to organizers battling anti-gay measures:

"Discrimination" and "equal rights." These are the terms in which gay organizers must cast the debate. Overwhelmingly, voters opposition to discrimination has driven them to oppose anti-gay measures. The public most strongly objects to housing and job discrimination. Three-quarters of the U.S. public supports equal rights in employment opportunities for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

Organizers must clarify and quantify the real nature and extent of discrimination against gay people--only then can voters

understand the need for legal remedy. People abhor discrimination, but it appears that the public, at least when relating to groups about whom they hold negative opinions, constructs a narrow definition of discrimination that warrants remedy. Discrimination is redefined only as unequal treatment in housing and employment. Although many people believe gay people are discriminated against in some way, they do not feel that gay people face discrimination of a kind that needs remedy. A New York State focus group leader read participants three newspaper stories about job and housing discrimination. Participants were surprised that such overt discrimination exists and that, absent protective legislation, it is legal.

Short-term victories will more likely result from reinforcing the public's opposition to discrimination than from trying to change the majority's lack of acceptance. Conversely, long-term victories will not be won without increasing public acceptance. Anti-gay violence, either physical or emotional, will not be eradicated

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