



Gay Groups Applaud New York Assembly for Vote on Marriage Equality

June 22, 2007

This week, the New York State Assembly passed a bill (by a vote of 85 to 61) to extend to same-sex couples the freedom to marry. Only two other legislative chambers—both houses of the California Legislature—have passed similar legislation in the past. The bill now moves to the state Senate, where Republicans hold a narrow majority. The leader of the Senate, Joseph Bruno (R/C-Rensselaer-Saratoga) has said he personally would not support the bill, and said it was “not a priority in the Senate.”

Regardless of how the state Senate deals with the bill, its passage by the New York State Assembly garnered plenty of positive attention from gay and lesbian groups across the U.S. **For instance, Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, proclaimed in a release: “This great day for New York and the nation shows that when the courts fail us—as they did so appallingly in New York last summer—we can and will press on to win marriage equality through the state legislatures.**

“We thank Governor (Eliot) Spitzer for introducing this bill, Assemblymember Danny O’Donnell, its sponsor, for leading the charge and compelling his colleagues to have the courage to act, and most of all, Alan Van Capelle and the Empire State Pride Agenda for their dogged organizing and lobbying from Buffalo to Montauk. If anyone thinks this was an easy job because New York is so ‘liberal,’ they don’t know a thing about Albany.

“Now, the focus shifts to the state Senate and its majority leader, Joe Bruno. I know from personal experience that Senator Bruno is a thoughtful and decent man who is moved by injustice. We urge him to allow the bill, sponsored by our own Tom Duane, to come to the floor and allow all members to vote their consciences.

“Finally, we call upon the State Assembly to pass the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act, which would ban discrimination based upon gender identity and expression. It’s a disgrace that the bill has languished for four years while so many other states have taken action.”

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese also called for continued forward movement in New York as well as the rest of the nation. “We congratulate the New York Assembly for passing this important, fair-minded bill, and we also congratulate Empire State Pride Agenda and Marriage Equality New York for their hard work,” Solmonese said in a release. “We also thank Governor Spitzer for his leadership—this bill got its start when the governor followed through on his unequivocal promise to fight for marriage equality.

“As I have been pleased to observe on more than one occasion recently, there is a steadily building wave of support for equality in more and more states, and we hope New York will add to that momentum by recognizing that all loving and committed couples deserve full equality under the law,” he added. “This is about basic fairness for same-sex couples and their families.”

Solmonese suggested that this week's progress in New York is just the tip of the iceberg as far as equality for same-sex couples and their families is concerned. Last week, the Massachusetts Legislature rejected, by a 151-45 vote, a discriminatory proposed constitutional amendment that would have rolled back marriage equality in the Bay State. Earlier this month, California's Assembly passed a marriage equality bill; that bill is pending in the state Senate. Earlier this year, civil unions legislation was signed into law in New Hampshire, while domestic partnership bills were signed into law in Oregon and Washington.

Last year, New York's high court ruled against marriage equality in a 4-2 decision. The majority opinion in *Hernandez v. Robles* concluded that whether same-sex marriages deserve equal recognition "is a question to be addressed by the Legislature." The court's chief judge predicted in dissent that "future generations will look back on today's decision as an unfortunate misstep."

If the New York marriage equality bill is signed into law, New York would join Massachusetts as the second state to provide marriage equality for same-sex couples under state law. Ten states, plus Washington, D.C., now have laws providing at least some form of state-level relationship recognition for same-sex couples.