

# BAY AREA REPORTER

## Breaking News: Anti-gay marriage amendment defeated in legislature

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by Lisa Keen

When Massachusetts Senate Press Therese Murray gaveled the joint session to order and then moved immediately to a proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, gay marriage supporters knew victory was near. Murray and others had vowed to delay the vote if it looked like the measure had the 50 votes it needed to advance to the ballot.

But when the vote was taken, just minutes after 1 p.m. Thursday, June 14, proponents of the anti-gay ballot measure had only 45 votes. A loud cheer erupted on the floor of the Statehouse, and many legislators hugged each other and patted each other on the back in a celebration that flowed out into a foyer of the legislative hall.

**"This is one of the most historic days in the history of our movement – on so many levels," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, who watched the proceedings from an auditorium in the capital. "Not only does it preserve the freedom to marry in Massachusetts," he said, "but it demonstrates that we have the political clout to win three-quarters of a legislative body. And perhaps most important of all, it frees the national community to focus energy on other parts of the country, as opposed to engaging in a bitter, divisive campaign in Massachusetts."**

The vote also silenced arguments by anti-gay activists that gays and their allies were using their supporters in high places in the legislature to avoid a vote. However, those same marriage proponents are now complaining that the people will not be allowed to vote on the issue. They are also claiming that Democratic Governor Deval Patrick and others offered political bribes in order to win the votes of some hold-outs.

In the five months since the first vote was taken in January – when the measure won 62 votes – 17 legislators who initially supported the anti-gay amendment either lost their seats in an election, retired, or changed their votes. By last month, gay civil rights supporters were saying they still needed to persuade five to seven legislators to switch their votes.

Even as late as Wednesday night, Arline Isaacson, chief lobbyist for the Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus, said the measure might pass by as little as one vote.

Because a constitutional amendment cannot be put onto the ballot until the proposal wins 50 votes in the legislature for two successive sessions, any effort to overturn equal rights in marriage for gay couples in Massachusetts is now at least four years off.