



Lawmakers Explain Gay Marriage Votes

Activists Say They'll Ride Momentum

BOSTON -- Massachusetts gays and lesbians celebrated after nine state lawmakers changed their votes and blocked a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed state residents to decide whether to keep or ban same-sex marriages in the Bay State.

NewsCenter 5's Gail Huff reported that the ballot initiative needed 50 supporters to go to a statewide vote. It only got 45 votes. The loss by five votes equaled a big victory for homosexuals in the state.

"In Massachusetts today, the freedom to marry is secure," Gov. Deval Patrick, a strong supporter of gay marriage, said after the vote. The governor, House Speaker Sal DiMasi and Senate President Therese Murray were all united in their efforts to defeat the ballot initiative in the Constitutional Convention. They had delayed the vote several times until lobbyists could convince enough legislators to change their votes and reject the ballot initiative.

Lawmakers had voted in an earlier Constitutional Convention to send the gay marriage question to voters, but gay marriage opponents said back-room political favors were offered to legislators who switched their votes.

"Insinuations are ridiculous and the only thing I accepted was information," Rep. Paul Kujawski of Webster, Mass., said.

Kujawski joined representatives Richard J. Ross, of Wrentham, Paul Loscocco of Holliston, Robert J. Nyman of Hanover, Brian P. Wallace of Boston, James E. Vallee of Franklin, and Christine Canavan of Brockton in switching their votes at the last minute. On the Senate side, Sen. Michael Morrissey of Quincy joined a former representative who is now a senator, Gale Candaras of Wilbraham.

"We had a full 6,800 people call us from the district and ask us to vote no," Candaras said.

Gay rights activists said they will take the momentum from their Bay State victory across the country.

"We have shown that the issue of gay marriage is not the third rail in electoral politics," said Sue Hyde of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Massachusetts is the only state in the union that has legalized gay marriage. Four others permit same-sex civil unions, all of them in the northeast, including Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut and New Jersey.