



Highlights:
Task Force in the News
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THE NATION

More Backlash Than Bliss 1 Year After Marriage Law

Massachusetts gays can celebrate, but their gain has energized foes of same-sex unions.

By Elizabeth Mehren
Times Staff Writer

May 17, 2005

BOSTON — In the year since Massachusetts became the only state to permit gays and lesbians to wed, more than 6,000 same-sex couples have traded marriage vows.

To commemorate today's anniversary, many of those couples plan to waltz at a gala party at Boston's swank Fairmont Copley Plaza hotel and pose for a group photograph outside the statehouse. Among other festivities around the state, the Boston suburb of Belmont plans an ice cream social.

But those celebrations occur against a sobering national backdrop for supporters of same-sex marriage: A powerful coast-to-coast backlash has meant that rather than emerging as the legal trendsetter on marriage for gays and lesbians, Massachusetts has become a cultural anomaly.

Opponents of same-sex marriage have successfully marshaled forces to prevent other states from following suit. Legalizing same-sex marriage has had the effect, unintended by its backers, of providing a new sense of purpose for groups and individuals who identify themselves as pro-family.

Supporters of traditional marriage are carefully monitoring measures concerning gays and lesbians in legislatures around the country. They study school curricula, watching for signs of acceptance of same-sex family structures. To keep the topic in the public eye, they stage rallies, including one last month at a parking lot in Augusta, Maine, during a bitter spring rainstorm that drew 1,000 supporters.

"Nothing has energized previously uninvolved citizens more than this issue," said Robert Knight, who traveled to Augusta as director of the Culture and Family Institute, an affiliate of Concerned Women for America in Washington.

"It has energized the pro-family movement because it has moved the debate beyond theory to actual images of men marrying men and women marrying women," Knight said. "And the realization has set in that this is about more than marriage. It will affect, eventually, every classroom in the country, as textbooks begin to portray two men as a marriage. And it will affect businesses as they are forced to subsidize homosexual relationships."

Moreover, Knight said, "the political impact alone has been enormous. It probably swung the election for George W. Bush."

The man who Bush defeated in last year's presidential race, Massachusetts Sen. John F. Kerry, might not disagree. This month, Kerry criticized the Massachusetts Democratic Party for supporting same-sex marriage in its new platform.

"I think it's a mistake," Kerry said. "I think it's the wrong thing."

That sentiment is shared by many in government, including Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, a Republican.

["In Congress and in statehouses nationwide, it's rhetorical and legislative open season" on](#)

gays and lesbians, said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington. In large part he blames "the anti-gay industry, which has used the marriage issue as a way to ratchet up its really venomous rhetoric."

Foreman said same-sex marriage had provided his opponents "a wonderful organizing opportunity, because they are able to exploit so many people's lack of understanding about gay people, and their visceral feelings about the institution of marriage."

But Foreman said Massachusetts might be its own best advertisement for the harmlessness of same-sex marriage. In the last year, he noted, "nobody in the Legislature who supported gay marriage lost their jobs, and the Boston Red Sox won the World Series. And the crops came up, and the locusts stayed away."

But constitutional amendments restricting marriage to a union between one man and one woman passed overwhelmingly on ballots of all 13 states that took up such measures last year. Four state legislatures have approved similar amendments to their constitutions. California is one of 16 states where amendments banning same-sex marriage are pending.

A federal judge in Nebraska, however, struck down that state's ban on gay marriage last week, saying that a constitutional amendment approved overwhelmingly by voters in 2000 barred gays and lesbians from too many other rights, including adoption and foster parenting.

Courts in California, New York, New Mexico and Oregon nullified same-sex marriages that briefly had been permitted by municipalities. In states where marriage for gays and lesbians is under consideration, such as Maine, opponents of same-sex marriage have stepped up their efforts.

H.B. London Jr., vice president of ministry outreach/pastoral ministries at Focus on the Family, said he traveled from Colorado last month to demonstrate in Augusta because "Maine is right in that line of states with Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. They all have very liberal leadership, and I think that makes marriage vulnerable."

London added: "What happened in Massachusetts was a wake-up call to the rest of the United States that if you aren't vigilant, and if you don't stand firmly on what you believe morally and spiritually, traditional marriage is in jeopardy."

Even in Massachusetts, the legality of same-sex marriage is not guaranteed to stay that way.

State Senate President Robert E. Travaglini, a Democrat, said he would convene a constitutional convention Aug. 24 to consider an amendment that would bar same-sex marriage but legalize civil unions for gays and lesbians.

The bill won preliminary approval from the Legislature last year, but not in time to block the ruling by the state's highest court that allowed gay and lesbian couples to take out marriage licenses, beginning May 17, 2004. The court ruling stemmed from a lawsuit filed by the Massachusetts advocacy group known as GLAD, for Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders.

If the bill barring same-sex marriage passes the full Legislature in the 2005-06 session, the amendment would still need the approval of voters on the November 2006 ballot.

Marty Rouse, campaign director for a group fighting to preserve same-sex marriage called MassEquality, said his organization was worried. "We currently do not have the votes to defeat this amendment," Rouse said. If the bill earns legislative approval, Rouse said, he could not predict what would happen in a general election: "We don't know what the people would do behind the curtain of a voting booth."

But Bob Meadow, a partner in the Washington polling firm Lake Snell Perry Mermin/Decision Research, said survey data from Massachusetts indicated strong support for allowing same-sex marriage. Meadow said a poll released May 4 found that 61% of voters approved of the Supreme Judicial Court's decision to extend marriage to gays and lesbians. The margin of error in the poll, commissioned by

the MassEquality Education Fund, was plus or minus 4 percentage points, he said.

In addition, Meadow said, 84% of those questioned said legalizing same-sex marriage either had a positive effect or no effect on the quality of life in Massachusetts. Nearly the same percentage said same-sex marriages had no effect on traditional marriages.

According to GLAD, all the Massachusetts legislators who supported gay and lesbian marriage were returned to office in November. Two same-sex marriage opponents lost their legislative seats in 2004 primaries, and three supporters won special elections last month.

When neighboring Connecticut authorized civil unions for gays and lesbians last month, it became the first state to approve marriage-like rights for same-sex couples through its Legislature and not under court order. Vermont, which pioneered civil union in 2000, was ordered to create marriage-like status for gays and lesbians by its top court.

In Washington, the state Supreme Court is expected to rule on same-sex marriage this year.

Same-sex marriage in Massachusetts remains restricted to state residents. To ensure that, Gov. Romney invoked an obscure 1913 statute to prevent couples from out of state from marrying here.

Despite the repercussions, GLAD lawyer Mary Bonauto — who argued the court case that changed the law in Massachusetts — said the cause of same-sex marriage had advanced since the first marriage licenses were issued last May.

"Of course there are going to be obstacles," she said. "There are going to be obstacles for years and years. No social justice struggle has ever been won in a day, or even a year. What is important is that we are moving forward."

In the last year, same-sex marriage licenses were issued in every Massachusetts county and at least 290 of the 351 cities and towns. Nearly twice as many female couples took out marriage licenses as male couples.

For Marcia Hamm and Susan Shepherd, what was important was a new sense of affirmation. Partners for 27 years, Hamm and Shepherd camped outside Cambridge City Hall for 24 hours last May, determined to become the country's first same-sex couple to get a valid marriage license.

Unlike many same-sex couples, Hamm, 58, said she and Shepherd, 53, never had a commitment ceremony.

They did not wear wedding rings until they traded marriage vows.

Before marriage, she said, they sometimes had trouble explaining their family situation.

Their son Peter, 25, often told his hockey teammates that Hamm was his mother and Shepherd, his aunt; now he calls them both Mom.

Their first year of marriage has been "just wonderful," Hamm said. "And the surprise is that it has felt so different to be married, even after all these years."



Gay marriage debate still fierce one year later

By Charisse Jones, USA TODAY

May 16, 2005



Julie and Hillary Goodridge carry copies of their wedding licenses with them everywhere they go in case they have to prove they're married in an emergency
By Elise Amendola, AP

A year after marrying her long-time partner, Maureen Brodoff says the word "wife" still does not flow easily from her lips. But knowing that Ellen Wade is, indeed, her legal spouse has unexpectedly strengthened their 25-year bond.

"I've never wavered in my commitment ... and never felt anything less from Ellen," says Brodoff, 53. "And yet we look at each other and we just marvel at how much closer in some mysterious way this whole experience has made us. It's partly the ritual. It's the coming together of you and your relationship with your community."

Today is their anniversary — and exactly one year since the first same-sex couples were wed in Massachusetts, following a decision by the state's highest court that legalized gay marriages.

Massachusetts remains the only state in the nation where same-sex marriages are legal. In the past year, more than 6,100 same-sex couples have gotten married — one out of six marriage licenses issued in the state. Among the same-sex weddings, about two-thirds are female couples.

But the national debate over whether such marriages should be allowed is as fierce today as it was after the Massachusetts court ruling in November 2003. Supporters and opponents are battling at the ballot box, in state legislatures and in courtrooms across the country.

"It was the second shot heard 'round the world from Massachusetts," says Kris Mineau of the Massachusetts Family Institute, which opposes same-sex marriage. He calls state bans on same-sex marriage "a national referendum to firmly establish marriage as being between a man and a woman."

Mary Bonauto of the Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders sees a different momentum. "Massachusetts helped people to crystallize in their minds that this country can't keep turning its back on gay and lesbian families," she says. "There's disagreement about how to change and how fast to change, but there's at least, clearly, some emerging consensus that that's the path we are on."

In the 15 months since the Massachusetts court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, polls consistently show a majority of Americans against it. Opposition reached a historic high of 68% in March in a USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll. But the most recent poll, April 29-May 1, showed a significant drop of those against gay marriage, down to 56%. The poll showed support for gay marriage at 39%.

When asked if gay men and lesbians should have equal rights in job opportunities, 90% said yes, according to a Gallup Poll earlier this month. Polling also shows that people respond differently if asked about homosexuals vs. gays and lesbians. For example, when the Gallup Poll asked if "homosexuals" should be hired as high school teachers, 62% said they should. When the wording was changed to "gays and lesbians," 71% said yes.

Legislatures take action

Eighteen states have adopted state constitutional amendments against same-sex marriages. But a federal judge on Thursday struck down Nebraska's by saying it "goes far beyond merely defining marriage as between a man and a woman." Voters in three states — Alabama, South Dakota and Tennessee — will decide in 2006 whether to ban same-sex marriages. And legislatures in at least 13 other states are weighing similar amendments.

"We're going to continue to lose in many of these states," says Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. But he says opponents of same-sex marriage are rushing to pass such measures because the public over time will become less resistant to the idea. "They understand their window of opportunity to slam this door in our face gets smaller and smaller every year that goes by. The sky didn't fall on Massachusetts."

Gary Bauer, president of American Values, says the issue won't fade. "While the country is deeply divided on a number of issues, same-sex marriage is not one of them," says Bauer, whose Arlington, Va.-based organization opposes same-sex marriage. "The public overwhelmingly rejects any redefinition of marriage. ... Typical Americans are looking for ways through the democratic process to prevent that from happening."

A checkerboard of court decisions has affirmed and denied gay marriages. Judges in California, New York state and Washington state recently ruled that prohibiting same-sex marriage violates their state constitutions. But the Oregon Supreme Court ruled in April that 3,000 same-sex marriages performed last year were illegal.

Two states have opted to legalize civil unions. Connecticut passed a civil unions law in April that goes into effect in October. Civil unions give same-sex couples the same benefits as married couples without marriage. Vermont has permitted civil unions since 2000 following a state Supreme Court ruling.

Despite the lawsuits and amendments, the hub of the gay marriage debate remains Massachusetts.

"I think everybody was holding their breath. And then May 17 came and went," says Bonauto, whose organization filed the 2001 lawsuit that led to gay marriages in Massachusetts. "Non-gay people were able to experience what this looks like. And seeing what it looks like is the one thing that's brought the temperature down. People can see everything's fine."

Still, the state is moving forward on a constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage but allow civil unions. The Legislature approved the amendment last year and will take it up again in late August. The state constitution provides that the Legislature must pass it a second time before the measure would go to the voters in November 2006. The outcome is uncertain. Some state lawmakers who supported the amendment have left office.

For couples, some adjustments

Thousands of gay men and lesbians are now living as married couples in Massachusetts. They're filing income taxes together for the first time, becoming used to the words "husband" or "wife," and acquainting themselves with the myriad benefits and obligations that come with marriage.

The privileges became clear to Bob Buckley of Boston last fall, when his husband, Marty Scott, had to go to a hospital emergency room. "When they asked me what was my relationship, I said 'husband.' And I was sent right in, no questions, which was comforting," says Buckley, 45, who will celebrate his wedding anniversary with Scott, 39, on Friday.

"Marriage affects so many things ... from being able to pick your sick child up from school to visiting your dying partner in the hospital emergency room," says Foreman of the gay and lesbian task force. "It's taxes, it's Social Security, it's survivor benefits."

Brodoff and Wade, celebrating their anniversary today, were among the seven couples who filed the lawsuit against the state after being denied marriage licenses. "We wanted to have ... access to the protections and benefits and wanted to take on the obligations," says Wade, 56, who lives with Brodoff and their 16-year-old daughter in Newton, a Boston suburb. "We wanted to be part of that institution. ... It's an important civil right, and we should have it."

Brodoff found that while her job at the National Fire Protection Association provided benefits for domestic partners for nearly a decade, some benefits were available only to married couples. For example, if Brodoff died before retiring, a death benefit from her pension would go only to a spouse. "Probably the most important benefit I could hope to have ... is to know that if something were to happen to me, my beloved would be cared for. And that wasn't available to me," Brodoff says. "It shows you how marriage is just a bundle of important protections."

One of the twists that same-sex couples say they have encountered is getting used to calling each other husband or wife. Before their marriage, Brodoff says the term "partner" never seemed appropriate. "But on the other hand, the word 'spouse' or 'wife' is also not completely adequate. ... It's been an opportunity for us to talk about our relationship and what we are to each other." They decided to call each other "spouse."

Erin Golden, on the other hand, has reveled in being able to tell bank officials that the other woman on the deed to her home in North Truro is her wife, Eileen Counihan. Now, Golden says strangers don't even blink when she calls Counihan that. "I think it was freeing and empowering in talking to the world," Golden, 46, says of getting married. She says it has made her more outspoken about her relationship. "At work, I'll say to the guys, 'I have to get home to the wife.' And I never would have done that in the past."

But some aspects of marriage have proved less romantic. This year, for the first time, same-sex couples could file jointly on their state income taxes. But for their federal taxes, they had to file as single or head of household. The Massachusetts Department of Revenue put out a special form to sort through the potential confusion. Bonauto's group held a tax seminar. Couples and accountants spent extra time filling out a "phantom" joint federal return for the sole purpose of calculating their state taxes.

"There was a lot of education we needed to do with our clients," says Lillian Gonzalez of Sandberg, Gonzalez and Creeden, an accounting firm in Stoughton, Mass., which filed taxes for more than 100 same-sex couples. Gonzalez says she offered to put a footnote on her clients' federal returns that they were filing as a married couple in Massachusetts. And Bonauto's group encouraged couples to do the same by stating they were filing as single only because of federal law.

"I don't think any social justice struggle is won or lost in a day," Bonauto says. "And this one won't be."

The Miami Herald

Posted on Wed, May. 18, 2005
PHILANTHROPY

Winter Party profits to help gay projects fund

A national gay civil-rights group is donating \$150,000 to gay charities in Miami-Dade.

BY STEVE ROTHHAUS
srothaus@herald.com

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will donate two-thirds of this year's Winter Party Festival profits -- \$150,000 -- to Miami-Dade County's newly formed gay Community Projects Fund.

"It gives us an opportunity to continue the tradition that the Dade Human Rights Foundation started, that the organizations that serve the needs of our community continue to be met," said attorney Jerry Chasen, a fundraiser for South Florida's gay community.

The Winter Party money will go to the Community Projects Fund at Dade Community Foundation, where seven civic leaders will help in the grant-making process.

Proposal guidelines for grants will be available on June 1, said Charisse Grant, programs director at Dade Community Foundation.

Over nearly a decade, the Dade Human Rights Foundation gave more than \$1 million to charities throughout South Florida. The group, later called the Gay & Lesbian Foundation of South Florida, raised most of the money through its popular Winter Party, which every March attracts thousands of gay men to South Beach, and through its local recognition dinner.

The Gay Foundation collapsed, broke, in a management crisis last year. The Washington-based Task Force bought the Winter Party and the dinner -- the Gay Foundation's only assets -- and paid \$150,000 to the foundation to pay off its debts and replenish spent donor-advised funds. The Task Force promised to keep the fundraising events alive and two-thirds of the profits in South Florida.

This week, the Task Force named three Miami-Dade gay-community activists to its national board:

- Michael Aller, Miami Beach's tourism director and protocol chief.
- David da Silva Cornell, a corporate attorney.
- Dr. Hope Wine, a clinical psychologist.

The Task Force recently opened a Miami office at 3510 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 206. Michael Bath has been hired to coordinate events, including the dinner and Winter Party.



May 17, 2005

Articles of faith: Biblical values for American families

If we have any intention of preserving marriage or protecting families, we must base our support on values that are unchangeable: faith, hope, and love. The greatest among these—whether the couple is same-sex or heterosexual—is love

By The Reverend Jay Emerson Johnson, Ph.D.

May 17 marks the first anniversary of Massachusetts offering equal marriage benefits to same-sex couples.

For those of us who believe in those rights—and the more than 5,000 same-sex couples who have been married—it is a moment for reflection and celebration. Our joy, however, is mixed with a sense of loss, because 14 states have since passed measures banning legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

Religious opponents of equal marriage frequently use the Bible for justification of their stance. In March the Southern Baptist Convention released the “Nashville Declaration on Same-Sex Marriage,” in which it based its opposition to equality on “the biblical teaching that God designed marriage as a lifetime union of one man and one woman.” For biblical literalists they don’t know much about the Bible. Biblical families and American families share the word family in common but not much more. But if we look beyond the radically different structure of biblical marriage, modern families can still find timeless values in the Scriptures to guide them.

First, it’s important to recognize that the most common marriage pattern in the Bible is polygamy: not a union of one man and one woman but a union of one man and as many women as he could afford to keep (see Solomon and his 700 wives and 300 concubines). In the Christian Scriptures the two primary figures, Jesus and the Apostle Paul, are both unmarried and childless. Based on the model of Jesus and his disciples, the early church developed a radical model of family that broke with ancient kinship patterns in favor of a religious—and nonbiological—church family.

“Biblical family values” present just as many problems as “biblical families.”

Abraham’s use of his slave, Hagar, to sire a child, and his subsequent banishment of her and the child to the wilderness (Genesis 21:14) would be considered unspeakably callous by today’s standards. Yet according to the family values of his day, Abraham was acting completely within his rights. When Jacob steals his brother Esau’s birthright, the Bible describes it not simply as an act of brotherly betrayal but as a necessary part of God’s will for God’s people (Genesis 27).

Even more severe is Jephthah’s sacrifice of his own daughter to fulfill the terms of a foolish vow (Judges 11:29-40) or Onan being put to death for refusing to impregnate his late brother’s wife (Genesis 38:9). Parents who cover their children’s eyes during *Desperate Housewives*, might be shocked to discover what lurid tales of betrayal, rape, incest, and adultery—all transpiring within traditional biblical families—lurk between the covers of their family Bible.

Not every biblical family relationship is as dysfunctional as these examples. But when biblical figures act virtuously, they often do so outside the bounds of “traditional family.” The story of Ruth and Naomi is an account of same-sex devotion often read, ironically, during heterosexual marriage ceremonies (Ruth 1:16). David and Jonathan’s relationship is presented with a tenderness lacking in most biblical marriages: David admits that his love for his friend “surpassed the love of women” (2 Samuel 1:26). In the Gospels, when Jesus is asked about his own family, he replies with an answer

that was as radical for his day as it is now: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50).

The structures of biblical families are rooted in ancient cultural practices far removed from the sensibilities of Western society; the authors of the Bible would scarcely recognize the partnership of equals that marks a contemporary American marriage. But this doesn't mean we should abandon the Bible as a guide to family values. As the mutable institution of marriage evolves with shifting cultural norms, the Bible continually calls us back to what truly matters in human relationships.

St. Paul wrote about these values, calling them the "fruit of the spirit": "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). Surely these are biblical values every family would embrace. According to Paul, "love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Even when knowledge and human institutions fail, these values, Paul says, remain constant: faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these three, Paul concludes, is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Societal definitions of marriage and family will inevitably change over the course of history. It's clear that what is important in the Bible is not a family structure based on biology, or even heterosexuality, but the quality of love exhibited in the relationships. And if same-sex couples exhibit such spiritual values, they deserve the legal protection and civil recognition of marriage.

If we have any intention of preserving marriage or protecting families, we must base our support on values that are unchangeable: values such as faith, hope, and love. But the greatest among these--whether the couple is same-sex or heterosexual--is love.



Gay marriage opponents file language for ballot initiative

- By BRIAN MELLEY, Associated Press Writer
Friday, May 20, 2005

(05-20) 00:04 PDT SACRAMENTO, (AP) --

Gay marriage opponents filed a proposed amendment to the state Constitution that would ban same-sex marriage in the state and strip domestic partners of most spousal benefits.

Randy Thomasson, organizer of a group called VoteYesMarriage.com, said Thursday that the far-reaching measure he hopes to qualify for an upcoming election is designed to prevent judges and lawmakers from eroding laws that limit marriage to one man and one woman.

The move comes as California lawmakers debate a bill to legalize gay marriage and follows a March ruling by a trial judge in San Francisco who said state laws prohibiting gays from marrying are unconstitutional.

"The bad guys here are the judges and the politicians. The people are frustrated," Thomasson said outside the state Capitol. "The people are ready to protect marriage once and for all."

The amendment's sponsors must submit nearly 600,000 signatures from voters to the California Secretary of State to qualify the measure for the June 2006 ballot.

Under the proposed amendment, same-sex couples still would be allowed to register as domestic partners, but most of the privileges and responsibilities the state has provided for such unions would be taken away. State and local governments, for example, would no longer be allowed to provide health coverage for the partners of their gay employees.

Gay rights supporters described the measure as among the most extreme attempts nationwide to block the gains same-sex couples have made since Massachusetts legalized gay marriage a year ago. If passed, it would make California the 20th state with a constitutional prohibition against gay marriage.

"It's extremely mean-spirited and far-sweeping in its effect," said Thalia Zepatos of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "It's absolutely ahead of the pack in its viciousness."

Massachusetts has allowed gay marriage since last May. Vermont has offered civil unions to gays since 2000; Connecticut will begin offering civil unions in October.

Since Jan. 1, domestic partners in California have had all the rights and responsibilities of marriage conferred by the state except the ability to file joint income taxes.

Thomasson said he would seek as much as \$2 million in donations from around the world to fund the signature-gathering campaign.

Lorri Jean, chief executive officer of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, said gay rights supporters would be ready to mount a vigorous campaign to defeat the amendment if it qualifies for the ballot.

"I'm still in shock, but I have to say the good news is because they are trying to take away every right we have, rights the vast majority of Californians support, I think this is a battle we can win," she said.

Thomasson's group filed the initiative Thursday at the attorney general's office, which is the first step toward qualifying it for the June 2006 ballot. The attorney general will create a title for the measure and write a 100-word summary. Supporters would then be allowed to circulate signature petitions.

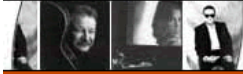
The ballot measure mirrors constitutional amendments rejected by the state Legislature last week.

As Thomasson made the announcement, one woman clapped among a small group that gathered. A heckler told him to "Go back to Iowa," and Thomasson ignored a group of high school students on a visit to the Capitol from Colfax, in the Sierra foothills, who asked why he was opposed to two women marrying.

Because it is so broad, the amendment would face stiff legal hurdles even if voters approve it, according to Jean.

Last week, a federal judge in Nebraska overturned the gay marriage ban adopted in that state in November after ruling that its "broad prescriptions," which included limiting public employee benefits to married spouses, went "far beyond merely defining marriage as between a man and a woman."

Associated Press Writer Lisa Leff contributed to this story.



Census numbers hint at greater political opportunities for gays

2005-05-19

By Erin Stookey

Athens NEWS Contributor

The 2000 U.S. Census could be a treasure trove of information for those in the gay community who wish to increase their political power, according to one organization.

It's good to have numbers when doing political advocacy for the gay community, and the Census is a great tool to use when talking to legislative leaders, said Tim Marshall, communications director for the Lesbian Gay Community Center in Greater Cleveland.

Marshall said that with health issues and other political issues, the gay population has never been seen as a priority population, and the numbers can show that they are worthy of political focus.

The Census numbers give the gay community some grounding and show they are a part of communities all over the world, Marshall said.

In the past, he added, anti-gay groups would make up off-the-wall statistics about the LGBT community. "It is something tangible that says gay people exist and in great abundance in some communities," Marshall said, referring to the Census.

The numbers indicate the geographical distribution, income, education and parenting trends of gay and lesbian couples. The unmarried-partner option was first included in the 1990 census, but because of the 1996 Federal Defense of Marriage Act passed by the 104th Congress and signed by President Clinton, the same-sex responses were flagged as invalid, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The state breakdown showed that Ohio has 18,937 same-sex unmarried partners, which is about 0.8 percent of coupled households. The Census Bureau also compiled a data set for all the counties in the states, including Ohio's Franklin (Columbus), Cuyahoga (Cleveland) and Athens counties. In Athens County, the Census reported a total of 98 same-sex-couple households -- 46 male and 52 female. In Franklin County, the figures showed a total of 3,241 -- 1,718 unmarried-partner households consist of male partners and an estimated 1,523 with female partners. Cuyahoga County has a total of 2,694 same-sex households -- 1,368 male and 1,326 female.

In the 1990 Census, the number of gay and lesbian couples who checked the unmarried-partner option was 150,000. The number increased considerably in 2000 with more than 600,000 unmarried same-sex-partner households.

However, the numbers are not exact. The 1990 Census was deemed invalid because of the Marriage Act, and the 2000 numbers give a more accurate representation of same-sex couples.

Still, those numbers do not include single gays and lesbians, homosexuals who are in a relationship but don't live with the person, bisexuals and transgender people.

The serious limitations of the 2000 census also can be attributed to how uncomfortable people are with marking the same-sex-partner household options, said Mickey Hart, coordinator for the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Programs at Ohio University.

"If the government knows that you are LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender), that could be held against you and could cause backlash," Hart noted.

He said that many couples might not want to report it because the government does not recognize their relationship as a marriage.

The Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a national organization that works for political equality through grassroots organizations, analyzed the 2000 Census data and found the information can be used to compile parenting, aging and household status data -- which can be used for policy advocacy.

In 2000, 99.3 percent of U.S. counties reported same-sex-couple households. The Census numbers, which show the presence of same-sex couples nearly everywhere, mean that legislators can no longer say they do not have gay or lesbian constituents in their area, according to the Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Hart said that although there is potential for policy advocacy, the underreporting needs to be defined further. For instance, there is no concrete classification except for same-sex-couple households. The 2000 Census did not ask respondents their sexual orientation or gender identity, and did not include most people in the LGBT community including single people and those in same-sex relationships who are not living together.

"It's harder to know the exact numbers of the underreporting and to also know what defines the underreporting," Hart said.

LGBT ADVOCATES ALSO suggest the 2000 Census, with its first official numbers for gay and lesbian unmarried, same-sex partner households, point toward societal discrimination against gay men in the workplace, according to the Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide.

The GLRW, a forum for discussing gay and lesbian topics, analyzed the 2000 Census report and found that in raw data terms, gay men earn \$3,000 less annually than straight men, but have a higher educational attainment. This, they claim, suggests job discrimination against gay men.

"Obviously, there is societal discrimination against (gay) men," said OU LGBT coordinator Hart. "There seems to be a stereotype that gay men have more (money) to spend, and (it) neglects the fact that a lot of gay men are at or below the poverty line."

More than 35 percent of people living with same-sex partners have a college degree compared with the 28 percent of married people and 19 percent of opposite-sex unmarried partners, according to The Review.

That poses the possibility of a bias in the workplace that gays and lesbians have to compensate through higher educational attainment, it noted.