



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

May 22 – June 9, 2006

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quotes of the Week:

“No one should have to shop around for rights, from state to state.”

– Jason Cianciotto, research director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
speaking about the *Mapping Our Rights* project
Associated Press
May 31, 2006

“Above all, this is an immoral attack on gay people, our families and our fundamental humanity.”

– Matt Foreman, executive director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
Chicago Tribune
May 31, 2006

The Religious Right

New York Times (letter to the editor by Matt Foreman) May 22, 2006

Federal Marriage Amendment

1. Backlash-wary gay rights advocates revel in marriage ban defeat
Associated Press June 8, 2006

NOTE: This story was also picked up by other outlets: including:

Boston Globe

Boston Herald

Minneapolis Star-Tribune

Yahoo! News

San Diego Tribune

Insurance Journal

Gay.com

2. **Heated exchange between senators over marriage amendment**
Bay Area Reporter May 25, 2006
3. **Marriage Amendment voted out of U.S. Senate committee**
Windy City Times May 24, 2006
4. **Sharp exchange marks Senate panel's approval of marriage ban**
Gay People's Chronicle May 16, 2006
5. **Clergy for Fairness Speak Out Against Federal Marriage Amendment**
People for the American Way
6. **Bush to Reiterate Marriage Amendment Support**
Edge Boston May 31, 2006
7. **A Gay Rights Debate Begins: Some Seek Constitutional Ban On Marriages**
Hartford Courant June 5, 2006
8. **Statement by National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on President's Radio Address**
US Newswire June 3, 2006
This story was also picked up by Yahoo! News
9. **Activists Condemn Bush's Marriage Amendment Support**
Edge Boston June 6, 2006
10. **Bush Makes Push for Traditional Marriage**
CNSNews.com June 5, 2006
11. **Bush moves to shore up support among conservatives**
Chicago Tribune June 5, 2006
12. **Debate over gay marriage amendment about much more than marriage**
Gannett News Service June 2, 2006
13. **Senate looks unlikely to ban gay marriage**
PinkNews.co.uk June 7, 2006
14. **Tell the Massachusetts story**
Bay Windows June 8, 2006
15. **Senate Takes Up Anti-Gay Amendment Today**
356gay.com June 5, 2006
16. **25 Years to the Day: Bush Sullies Solemn AIDS Anniversary by Gay Bashing**
Gay City News June 8 - 14, 2006 issue
17. **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Calls President Bush's Push for Federal Marriage Amendment an 'Immoral Attack on Gay America'**
Civilrights.org June 5, 2006
18. **The O'Reilly Factor (transcript of discussion on Howard Dean)**
Fox News Channel May 11, 2006
19. **A silly amendment?**
BP News (Southern Baptist Association) May 18, 2006

Victory in Washington state

20. **Eyman fails to deliver**
Seattle Post-Intelligencer June 7, 2006
21. **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Hails Latest Victory in Washington State**
Civilrights.org June 7, 2006
22. **New Gay Civil Rights Law Takes Effect in Washington**
Insurance Journal June 8, 2006

Mapping Our Rights project

23. **New Mexico, New York top liberal groups' rankings**
Associated Press May 31, 2006
NOTE: This story was also picked up by many other outlets, including: Yahoo! News, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Boston Globe, Miami Herald, Houston Chronicle, San Jose Mercury News, Guardian (U.K.), WCBS TV (New York, N.Y.), Common Dreams NewsWire
24. **The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (transcript)**
CNN June 1, 2006
25. **Utah ranks poorly on a list of reproductive, gay rights**
Deseret Morning News June 1, 2006
26. **Kansas ranks 27th on sexual, reproductive rights, groups say**
The Wichita Eagle May 31, 2006
27. **Northeast Among Best Places for Gays**
Boston Edge June 3, 2006
28. **Progressive Groups Release Rights-Tracking Map of United States**
Feminist Daily News Wire (Feminist Majority Foundation) June 1, 2006
29. **New Web Site Ranks States on Reproductive, Sexual Rights**
GayWired.com June 8, 2006
30. **Advocacy Groups Rank States Based On Reproductive, Sexual Rights**
KaiserNetwork.org (Kaiser Family Foundation) June 1, 2006
31. **For Pete and Pete's sake: We're not top liberal state**
Boston Herald June 2, 2006
32. **U.S. Map Shows Differences in Gay, Repro Rights**
Windy City Times June 7, 2006
33. **A new state-by-state ranking, compiled by three liberal advocacy groups**
Lexington (Ky.) Herald Leader June 4, 2006

Immigration

34. **We too are immigrants**
The Advocate May 22, 2006
35. **Si Se Puede! Immigration is and needs to be a gay issue**
Political Affairs Magazine May 22 – May 28, 2006 (Online edition)
36. **Queers + Immigrant Rights + Standing up for Hotel Workers = Justice
(with author response)**
TPM Café (blog) May 21, 2006
37. **Same sex, different countries: Couples seek immigration help**
CityLimits.org week of June 5, 2006

United Nations

38. **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Applauds U.S. Vote in United Nations
Supporting Two Lesbian and Gay Rights Groups**
CivilRights.org May 22, 2006
39. **U.S. Delegation to the U.N. Flip-Flops on Homosexuality**
CitizenLink.org (Focus on the Family) May 24, 2006
40. **US State Department Succumbs to Homosexual Pressure in UN Vote**
TheFacts.org June 2, 2006

Twenty-five years of AIDS

41. **Lesbians join in AIDS fight**
Southern Voice June 2, 2006
42. **25 Years of AIDS**
Washington Blade June 2, 2006

Other Highlights

43. **The Colin Higgins Foundation Honors Three Brave LGBT Youth;
Awards Honor Courage in the Face of Discrimination**
Business Wire June 5, 2006
44. **Gay boycott could hurt Cox in primary**
Atlanta Journal Consitutuion May 29, 2006

45. **Calif. Assembly Passes Gay Seniors Bill**
365gay.com June 1, 2006
46. **From the pulpit to the circuit for out duo**
Philadelphia Gay News
47. **Religion Notes: Being Gay and Bicultural**
Miami Herald June 8, 2006

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES **EDITORIAL/LETTERS** MONDAY, MAY 22, 2006

The Religious Right

To the Editor:

Re "Conservative Christians Warn
Republicans Against Inaction"
(front page, May 15):

Since 2001, Republicans have fed the maw of the religious right with hundreds of millions of dollars for its "faith-based initiatives," done everything possible to restrict abortion here and abroad, subverted science by forcing "abstinence only" AIDS prevention policies, stacked the federal bench with conservative zealots and relentlessly sought to eliminate any financing for gay-related health and social service programs. And it's still not enough.

All this proves is that bullies can never be appeased.

MATT FOREMAN
Executive Director, National
Gay and Lesbian Task Force
New York, May 15, 2006



Backlash-wary gay rights advocates revel in marriage ban defeat

June 8, 2006 Thursday 7:55 AM GMT

By LISA LEFF, Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO --Supporters of gay marriage celebrated the Senate's defeat of a constitutional amendment to ban such unions and seized the moment to warn conservatives and President Bush that anti-gay sentiments won't influence November elections.

The Senate rejected the measure by a wide margin, voting 49-48 to limit debate and bring it to a yes-or-no decision. That was 11 votes shy of the 60 necessary.

Charles Simpson, 49, a bookstore clerk in Northampton, Mass., called the proposed constitutional amendment "morally bankrupt and politically irresponsible."

"As a gay man watching what's happening, I carry this anxiety that this kind of manipulation of homophobia can carry severely negative consequences," he said. "Some politicians take advantage of how easy it is to provoke prejudices and make them worse."

The amendment's backers announced plans to resurrect the measure in the House next month.

"It is clear that most Americans saw this for what it was: base political pandering, skewed priorities and abdicated responsibilities," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Massachusetts' gay nuptials and San Francisco's short-lived same-sex wedding spree in 2004 were credited with creating a conservative backlash that fueled Bush's re-election. Yet gay marriage activists pointed to Tuesday's primary elections as evidence that sexual orientation is irrelevant in politics.

The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, a political action committee funding lesbian and gay candidates, reported that nine of its 51 endorsed candidates either won primaries Tuesday or earned enough votes for a runoff.

Winners included a lesbian running for a seat in the Alabama Legislature who made it to a two-person runoff, an Iowa lawmaker who won re-election after coming out as gay during his first term, and a lesbian who could become the first openly gay lawmaker in the Arkansas Legislature.

But Evan Wolfson, director of Freedom to Marry, said it was too soon to celebrate, noting that Alabama voters decided Tuesday to amend their state's constitution to ban same-sex marriage. Voters in seven other states will be asked to do the same in November.

The amendment's supporters, meanwhile, angrily denounced the Senate for refusing to put the matter to an up-or-down vote.

Robert Knight, director of Concerned Women of America's Culture and Family Institute, said he was insulted by comments from some senators that gay marriage was not a pressing national issue.

"There's nothing more important than protecting marriage and families, because without them the United States faces a bleak future in which government is daddy and mommy and the state keeps growing to pick up the pieces of the shattered social order," Knight said in a statement.

Patrick Guerriero, president of the gay political group Log Cabin Republicans, said it was "laughable" to say the amendment was gaining support.

"Momentum is on our side as a growing conservative force stands up in defense of the core American values of equality, liberty, and federalism," he said.

Associated Press Writer Adam Gorlick in Springfield, Mass., contributed to this story.

BAY AREA REPORTER ON THE WEB

Heated exchange between senators over marriage amendment

by Lisa Keen
05/25/2006

Tempers flared last Thursday, May 18 when the Senate Judiciary Committee met to consider the proposed constitutional amendment to ban legal recognition of same-sex marriage and other gay relationships.

While the outcome of the vote was widely anticipated – it passed on a party line 10-8 vote – committee Chairman Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania) provoked an angry reaction when, at the last minute, he changed the committee's meeting from its usual large public room to a much smaller room that is not open to the public.

Specter's office defended the move as necessary to accommodate senators' movement between the committee meeting and the Senate floor, where debate was taking place on highly controversial immigration legislation.

But Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) objected strenuously to the change, calling it an "affront to the Constitution."

"Constitutional amendments deserve the most careful and deliberate consideration of any matter that comes before the Senate," said Feingold in a statement released by his office. Votes on constitutional measures, he said, should be held "in the light of day, open to the press and the public, with cameras present so that the whole country can see what is done."

According to an Associated Press report, Feingold and Specter engaged in a "shouting match," which ended when Feingold walked out on the committee meeting in protest, and Specter shouted, "If you want to leave, good riddance." Specter then proceeded with the vote.

The committee voted along party lines as expected, with 10 Republicans for and eight Democrats against (Feingold voted by proxy).

David Smith, vice president of policy and strategy for the Human Rights Campaign and a former staffer of judiciary committee member Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), said the room Specter chose for the constitutional amendment vote is a small room near the Senate cloak room and is off limits to anyone but senators and credentialed staff.

HRC President Joe Solmonese criticized Specter's move, too, saying, "Using the constitutional amendment process as a political tool is bad enough, but doing it behind closed doors is appalling."

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tennessee) has scheduled the bill for consideration by the full Senate beginning June 5, with a vote as early as June 6. Frist has said very little to dispute widespread charges that the vote is politically motivated.

The *New York Times* reported May 15 that right-wing religious leaders have been behind the push for a vote on the amendment this year, openly threatening Republicans to withhold voter turnout during this November's congressional elections unless Congress takes action on the measure. Focus on the Family's James Dobson, according to his spokesman Paul Hetrick, has also embarked upon "a fact-finding trip to see where Republicans are regarding the issues that concern values voters most, especially the Marriage Protection Act."

The *Times* article also quoted right-wing organizer Richard Viguerie as saying: "There is a growing feeling among conservatives that the only way to cure the problem is for Republicans to lose the congressional elections this fall." And Richard Land, an official of the Southern Baptist Convention, told the *Times* that "a lot of people are disappointed that [President Bush] hasn't put as much effort into the marriage amendment as he did for the prescription drug benefit or Social Security reform."

At a national meeting of religious conservatives earlier this month, said the *Times*, some attendees complained that, "as soon as Mr. Bush was re-elected he stopped expressing his support for a constitutional amendment banning such unions."

Kennedy criticized the Republican leadership as "pandering to its far-right wing" and said "each state should be allowed to decide the [same-sex marriage] issue for itself."

Currently, Massachusetts is the only state that issues marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Vermont and Connecticut recognize civil unions, and California and the District of Columbia recognize domestic partnerships.

The proposed amendment, S.J. Res. 1 entitled the Marriage Protection Amendment as introduced by Senator Wayne Allard (R-Colorado), states that: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any state, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

"The legal incidents thereof" phrase has been interpreted to implicate civil unions and domestic partnerships because they provide some of the legal benefits of marriage.

HRC's Smith said he has heard from reliable sources that Senate Republicans may replace Allard's proposal with one attempting to ban only marriage. But Smith said such an amendment would still jeopardize other forms of gay relationships because it would still undercut the ability of courts to decide such questions.

Smith said he has heard the House will take up its version of the amendment in July or September.

The amendment was voted on by both houses in 2004, just prior to the last congressional and presidential election, but failed to get the two-thirds majority needed to pass either. Smith said that, while the amendment has picked up four votes in the Senate since 2004, it still appears to tally only 52 – eight shy of the 60 votes it needs to pass a procedural vote before receiving a vote on the merits.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said the decision to vote again on the marriage amendment this year is strictly politics.

"It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment – so reads the right-wing playbook," said Eleanor Acheson, director of public policy and government affairs for NGLTF. She said the measure attempts to "enshrine one egregiously intolerant religious view of marriage" in the constitution.

Windy City Times

Marriage Amendment voted out of U.S. Senate committee

by Bob Roehr
May 24, 2006

Partisan fireworks erupted when the Senate Judiciary Committee moved forward the anti-gay marriage amendment to the U.S. Constitution (S.J. Res. 1) on a 10-8 party line vote May 18.

Chairman Arlen Specter, R-Penn., changed the scheduled meeting to a small room in The Capitol itself, while the Senate was in session, for what all knew would be a pro forma vote.

That raised the ire of Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., who objected to the change in venue to a room that offered less public visibility. A testy exchange with Specter ensued and Feingold stormed out.

"Today's markup of the constitutional amendment concerning marriage, in a small room off the Senate floor with only a handful of other people other than senators and their staffs present, was an affront to the Constitution," Feingold said in a written statement. "Constitutional amendments deserve the most careful and deliberate consideration of any matter that comes before the Senate."

Specter gave the objection little credence, noting that the very short and simple language of the amendment has been the subject of numerous hearings and committee discussions during this session of Congress and the last. There has been extensive debate on the floor of the Senate. He believed that further talk would not affect the outcome of the committee vote.

The full text of the Marriage Protection Amendment reads: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., said the amendment also would outlaw civil unions and domestic partnerships. "It's a vote to impose discrimination on all 50 states and deny them their right to interpret their own state constitutions and state laws." Marriage traditionally has been the legal province of the states in the U.S., not the federal government.

Criticism from gay organizations has been swift and sharp. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force policy director Eleanor Acheson said, "It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment—so reads the right-wing playbook." National Stonewall Democrats interim executive director Jo Wyrick called the Republicans "immoral" for sending the amendment to the Senate floor.

"Today's vote served only to divide Americans, not help us with our collective challenges," said Human Rights Campaign (HRC) President Joe Solmonese. In the days leading up to the vote he said that \$3-a-gallon gasoline should be a priority for Congress.

At a news conference earlier in the month, HRC political director Samantha Smoot said the organization had not decided on a strategy of whether to seek to filibuster the amendment or allow a vote on its content. Perhaps that is because Democratic leaders are themselves unsettled on a strategy.

A filibuster requires 60 votes to end debate; a constitutional amendment requires 67 votes. Neither supporters nor opponents believe there are anywhere near the votes required for passage, and most acknowledge that if the Democrats choose to filibuster, debate will not be closed off.

Specter and a handful of other senators have said that, while they do not support the amendment itself, they believe the Senate should vote on the measure and so would vote to end a filibuster.

Debate and an on-the-floor Senate vote are scheduled for the week of June 5.



Sharp exchange marks Senate panel's approval of marriage ban

by Eric Resnick
05/26/2006

Washington, D.C.--In a small room with no TV cameras and with sharp words between two senators, the Senate Judiciary Committee sent a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage to the Senate floor on May 18. The 10-8 vote followed party lines.

A vote in the full Senate is expected on June 6 or 7. A two-thirds majority--67 votes--is needed to pass the measure, and observers say it has far fewer than that.

Human Rights Campaign political director Samantha Smoot estimated that the amendment could get as many as 52 votes, but no more. This is four more than a similar measure got on a procedural vote in 2004.

But the committee vote gave the green light to Republicans to use the amendment to energize their anti-gay political base, gaybash on the Senate floor, and portray Democrats as pro-gay marriage just before the mid-term election in November.

Judiciary Chair Arlen Specter, a Pennsylvania Republican, does not support the amendment and says he will oppose it on the Senate floor. But he said he felt it should be voted upon.

Specter is under constant scrutiny and pressure from the Republican base, and threats from Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist that he will lose his powerful chair if he fails to advance their socially conservative causes.

Those threats were realized two years ago when Specter faced a well-funded right wing primary opponent. Recovering from Hodgkin's disease at the time, he squeezed out a narrow 51 to 49 victory.

That backdrop provided enough frustration and tension for fireworks before the vote, and a Democratic senator walking out of the meeting.

Less than 24 hours earlier, Specter had moved its location from the Judiciary Committee's regular hearing room to the President's Room, a small room behind the Senate chambers in the Capitol, which does not have enough chairs to accommodate the 18 committee members and is not open to the public. He also changed the meeting time.

In addition to the marriage ban amendment, the committee was to consider one to restrict flag burning, four bills and two nominations that day.

Irritated at both the amendment and the change of venue, Wisconsin Democrat Russell Feingold objected. He declared his affinity for the Constitution, his opposition to the amendment and his intention to leave the meeting.

"I don't need to be lectured by you," Spector shot back. "You are no more a protector of the Constitution than am I. If you want to leave, good riddance."

"I've enjoyed your lecture, too, Mr. Chairman. See ya," said Feingold as he left.

Feingold is emerging as a 2008 presidential favorite of the Democratic base.

The proposed amendment, sponsored by Colorado Sen. Wayne Allard and 29 other Republicans including Ohio's Mike DeWine, is officially called the "Marriage Protection Amendment." It reads: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution nor the constitution of any State shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

Anti-gays believe it is "necessary" to take the marriage issue out of the hands of judges, whom they believe will rule state constitutional marriage bans unconstitutional, as they have in Nebraska and Georgia.

LGBT activists believe the amendment writes discrimination into the Constitution, undermines the federalist system of government and promotes religious intolerance.

"It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment. So reads the right wing playbook," said National Gay and Lesbian Task Force public policy director Eleanor Acheson.

HRC's president Joe Solmonese said, "As this amendment nears a vote on the Senate floor, it's critical that fair minded Americans speak up and speak out against discrimination in the Constitution."



Clergy for Fairness Speak Out Against Federal Marriage Amendment



People For the American Way helped organize and support a day of activities to focus attention on growing opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment among religious leaders. Clergy for Fairness, which has gathered more than 1,600 clergy signatures opposed to writing discrimination into the Constitution, brought a group of more than 40 ministers, rabbis, and other religious leaders to the U.S. Capitol for a May 22 press conference, briefing for Senate staff, and lobby visits with congressional offices.

Two members of [African American Ministers in Action](#) – Rev. Kenneth Samuel of Victory for the World Church in Stone Mountain, Georgia and Rev. Rolen Lewis Womack of Progressive Baptist Church, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – explained how their religious values have led them to oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Rev. Samuel spoke of the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King to secure the blessings of liberty for all people, and the commitment of Coretta Scott King to oppose homophobia. “To discriminate against a class of people is wrong,” he said, “because a threat to justice anywhere is still a threat to justice everywhere.”

Rev. Womack said that his own family contained many different types of people, and that his faith called on him to oppose an amendment that valued some family members more than others. He called on the audience to let their faith guide them to oppose discrimination. “It’s your faith. It’s your future. It’s our family.”

The Clergy For Fairness activities were supported by many members of the Coalition Against Discrimination in the Constitution, including The Interfaith Alliance, The National Council of Jewish Women, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Human Rights Campaign, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

People For the American Way advocates for full legal equality for all Americans, and is working to defeat the Federal Marriage Amendment and other discriminatory legislation.



Bush to Reiterate Marriage Amendment Support

By Peter Cassels
EDGE National News Editor
Wednesday May 31, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Bowing to demands from right-wing extremist groups, President George W. Bush reportedly will hold a news conference June 5 in the White House Rose Garden to reiterate his support of the Federal Marriage Amendment

In a column for the conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*, Executive Editor Fred Barnes reported on the White House plans over the Memorial Day weekend. June 5 is the day before the U.S. Senate is expected to vote down the Constitutional amendment.

"As for Bush, he will appear on June 5 in the Rose Garden before a gathering of amendment supporters and, a White House official says, 'strongly support' the amendment," Barnes wrote. "The president has rarely mentioned the amendment in the past. The choice of the Rose Garden as a venue means he is raising the marriage amendment to a higher level on his agenda, his wife's advice notwithstanding."

Leading conservative groups are upset that the only comments on the amendment were those of First Lady Laura Bush and Mary Cheney, the lesbian daughter of the vice president, both of whom asked that it not be used for political purposes.

"It's a national disgrace that President Bush has yet again bowed to the far-right extremists," Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese said in a May 30 statement. "Instead of addressing the real challenges facing American families--from record high gas prices, bankrupting health care costs and an endless and costly war in Iraq--the president will further divide this country and put the far-right extremists' interests ahead of the American people's well-being."

Noting that Rose Garden addresses have historically been reserved for occasions of unity and justice, Solmonese added, "Unfortunately, President Bush will break with history and use the Rose Garden as a backdrop to promote discrimination against a group of Americans. The president should stop playing politics with our Constitution and use his speech as an opportunity to lay out an agenda to fix what's really wrong in America."

During a May 31 telephone news conference on another subject, EDGE asked Jason Cianciotto, research director at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, for its reaction.

"We share in the Human Rights Campaign's frankly utter disgust and outrage that yet again the president is attempting to divide and conquer politics when there are so many other needs the nation needs to focus on," Cianciotto replied.

Reached at the National Stonewall Democrats' annual convention in Pittsburgh, John Marble, its communications director, told EDGE May 31: "The fact remains that President Bush through all of his years in office has not offered a plan on how he is going to include same-sex couples in the life of the nation through marriage, civil unions or other measures. It's just premature for him to hold a press conference when he has yet to address the fundamental legal challenges that these families face."



Hartford Courant

A Gay Rights Debate Begins Some Seek Constitutional Ban On Marriages

June 5, 2006

By DAVID LIGHTMAN, Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON -- With the U.S. Senate due back today from a long Memorial Day recess, one item tops the agenda -- and it's not gas prices, the war in Iraq or immigration reform.

Instead, senators are scheduled to debate and vote on whether to approve a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage.

That debate is important, argues Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., because firmly establishing marriage as a union of a man and a woman is as important as any issue facing this country today.

"This institution, more than any other, concerns the well-being of our future, of our children, of the states that my colleagues and I represent -- indeed of this country," he said.

Opponents, though, view this debate as a crass political ploy and a huge waste of time. No one expects the amendment to get anywhere near the 67 votes that would be needed to help send it to the states for ratification, and foes see Frist's move as little more than an effort to boost his standing among conservatives as he prepares to run for president.

"Once again, lesbian and gay families are being used as political pawns, and the political opportunism of those pushing for the federal marriage amendment is nakedly transparent," said Eleanor D. Acheson, director of public policy and government affairs for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Supporters will launch their campaign for the amendment today in a big way.

President Bush plans a Rose Garden ceremony at which he will express his support, and on Capitol Hill, senators will be flanked by religious and political leaders at a kickoff news conference. The debate is expected to begin shortly afterward, with a vote expected as soon as Tuesday.

The debate will proceed on two fronts -- as a debate on gay marriage itself, and, outside the Senate chamber, on whether conservatives are brushing aside other issues in order to energize their most ardent supporters.

The Senate Debate

The would-be 28th amendment to the Constitution says: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any state, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

Ratification requires two-thirds majorities of each house and then approval by 38 states. The last amendment, establishing rules for congressional pay raises, was adopted in 1992.

Even supporters concede that adoption of the marriage amendment would likely take years, but they insist the issue has tremendous urgency.

"The clock is ticking," said Brian S. Brown, executive director of the Family Institute of Connecticut. "People understand what's at stake."

The Massachusetts Supreme Court gave same-sex couples the right to marry in 2004, and it remains the only state where gay marriage is legal. But amendment supporters cite eight cases making their way through different courts that have the potential to legalize gay marriage elsewhere. On Wednesday, New York's Court of Appeals heard a challenge to that state's marriage laws, and Connecticut Superior Court Judge Patty Jenkins Pittman is expected to rule soon on a case brought by eight state couples who were denied the right to wed.

Anne Stanback, executive director of Love Makes a Family, a Hartford-based activist group that supports same-sex marriage, said the amendment debate "does not worry me. As marriage becomes legal in more and more states, support will go up."

Brown thought the opposite. Though he does not expect to win the battle this week, he hopes to cite progress by having the proposal get the support of more than 48 senators who backed it on a procedural vote when it came up two years ago.

But recent polling gives hope to Stanback and her allies. When Gallup asked last month whether people favored the constitutional amendment, half said yes, down from 57 percent a year ago.

And they cite this: In March 1996, 27 percent of those asked told a Gallop poll that such marriages should be valid; last month, support was up to 39 percent.

But, opponents counter, some 58 percent of those surveyed still opposed such marriages.

The Political Debate

Many political consultants call gay marriage a "wedge issue," one that motivates a determined band of voters to go to the polls because they want to express strong views on a specific matter.

Politicians have debated for years whether wedge issue strategies work, and one of the key tests this year will come in the Pennsylvania Senate race, where incumbent Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., is being challenged by moderate Democrat Bob Casey Jr.

If Santorum, who has been trailing in polls all year, wins the race, issues such as gay marriage probably will be cited as crucial -- and provide some guidance to Frist and other conservative 2008 hopefuls.

But the conservatives are taking some risks.

One is that they could appear to be over-emphasizing the ban on gay marriage.

"People are going to say, 'What are they doing spending so much time on this issue?'" said Washington political analyst Jennifer Duffy.

The other political danger is that the amendment will mobilize not only conservatives, but amendment foes who otherwise might not turn out for a given election.

Casey, for instance, lost a big chunk of the liberal vote in last month's Democratic primary, but "this amendment could convince Democrats tempted to take a hike in November to come back," said Keystone Poll director G. Terry Madonna.

Most Senate Democrats have voted against the amendment in the past and are expected to do so again. Joseph I. Lieberman and Christopher J. Dodd, Connecticut's Democratic senators, both believe the matter is best left to the states.

"I believe it should be up to each state to define marriage within its own borders," Lieberman said last week.

Dodd also stresses states' rights. When the amendment came up in 2004, he noted that marriage "has been the province of the states, and in my view should continue to be a state issue."

In his other comments -- which his staff said last week were still valid -- Dodd noted that ``if the federal marriage amendment is adopted and we are to deny rather than confer rights upon individuals, I believe it will be a step backward for all Americans concerned with the Constitution and the intended purpose of it."

Chances are that both sides could declare victory after the vote. If the amendment supporters are crushed, they will claim progress if they top 48 votes, and will probably keep bringing up the issue through the rest of the election season.

"One thing you'll be able to say," Madonna said, "is that the political environment this year is weird."



Statement by National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on President's Radio Address

Sat Jun 3, 10:31 PM ET

To: National Desk

Contact: Roberta Sklar of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 917-704-6358

WASHINGTON, June 3 /U.S. Newswire/ -- President Bush devoted his radio address today to urging support for the Federal Marriage Amendment, a measure which would amend the United States Constitution to prohibit the recognition of same sex marriage and preclude courts from extending other types of family protections to gay couples. The President said, "An amendment to the Constitution is necessary because activist courts have left our Nation with no other choice." He also said, "As this debate goes forward, we must remember that every American deserves to be treated with tolerance, respect, and dignity. All of us have a duty to conduct this discussion with civility and decency toward one another, and all people deserve to have their voices heard."

Following is a statement by Matt Foreman, executive director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:

"Today's radio address is another example of the lengths to which President Bush will go to pander to religious right. They demand that he speak out on the Federal Marriage Amendment and, on command, he obeys. If this were just a political game, it would be one thing. But this is also hurting real families solely to score political points.

"The president's attacks on the judicial system and 'activist judges' are not only insulting to the foundation of our republic but profoundly ironic given that they come from a man who would not be president at all but for 'activist judges.'

"Finally, his words 'that every American deserves to be treated with tolerance, respect, and dignity' and that '(a)ll of us have a duty to conduct this discussion with civility and decency toward one another' are the height of hypocrisy. He knows the forces of religious extremism insisting upon today's address and forcing this issue in the United States Senate have made an industry out of denigrating, demonizing and defaming gay people."



Activists Condemn Bush's Marriage Amendment Support

by Peter Cassels
EDGE National News Editor
Tuesday Jun 6, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Gay rights groups and political organizations sharply criticized President George Bush June 5 for once again voicing his support of a proposed Constitutional amendment that would codify marriage as between one man and one woman.

The U.S. Senate is scheduled to vote this week on the Federal Marriage Amendment. The amendment, which requires a two-thirds majority for passage, is expected to again be defeated. A vote to get the bill passed failed in 2004. Even if there were enough votes, to add such an amendment to the U.S. Constitution would also require a two-thirds vote in the U.S. House of Representatives and ratification by three-quarters of the 50 states, a process that would take years.



President Bush speaks to religious leaders and supporters of a ban on gay marriage at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building Monday, June 5, 2006, in Washington. Gay community leaders condemned the amendment. (Source:AP/Charles Dharapak)

Leaders of extremist anti-gay organizations, including the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family, as well as a leader of the so-called "ex-gay" movement, attended the White House event June 5 at which Bush once again endorsed the FMA.

As Bush was speaking at the White House, a group of activists organized by the Human Rights Campaign were at the U.S. Capitol to deliver almost a quarter of a million "Vote No!" postcards.

HRC President Joe Solmonese was scheduled to moderate a news conference on the Capitol grounds the afternoon of June 6 where, among others, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Congressman John Lewis, D-Ga., were to speak out against the amendment.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force called the president's FMA endorsement an "immoral attack on gay America."

The Log Cabin Republicans--the gay political group that has not been in lock-step with the White House for some time now--said Bush's call for "tolerance and civility" while advocating discrimination "rings hollow." The National Stonewall Democrats also condemned his endorsement of the amendment.

"Yes, this is about pandering to his base. Yes, this is about diverting America's attention from his foreign and domestic failures. But above all, this is an immoral attack on gay people, our families and our fundamental humanity," NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman said in a statement. Contending that the anti-gay supporters attending the White House event "make a living out of denigrating, demonizing and defaming gay people and our families," Foreman said it's hypocritical for Bush to talk about tolerance, respect and dignity "while he cozies up to these bigots."

Speaking at an event on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, Solmonese of the HRC said Bush showed "how enormously out of touch this administration is with the rest of America. Discrimination never belongs in the Constitution. At a time when hard-working Americans are losing sons and daughters in Iraq, struggling to afford health care for their families and worrying about being able to fill their tanks with gas, the discriminatory attack on the U.S. Constitution and American families is shameful politicking."

Log Cabin President Patrick Guerriero called the FMA "an intolerant and uncivil attack on gay and lesbian Americans and our families."

Several GLBT rights supporters also spoke at the HRC event, held to counter what was going on simultaneously at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Saying she watched her son graduate from military boot camp last fall, the Rev. Susan Russell of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, Calif., said she was surprised she would have to defend the Constitution from those willing to exploit it for political gain. "My son and his colleagues preparing to be deployed to Kuwait deserve better than that. America deserves better than that," she said.

LaWana SlackMayfield of North Carolina, a working woman of color, said Bush's policies "have devastated my community, and I'm here to tell him this amendment is no solution." She added that the FMA would codify discrimination on the Constitution for the first time ever.

Joe and Joann Elder of Wisconsin appeared at the event to support their gay son. Joann called the amendment "divisive," "un-American" and "unnecessary."

Log Cabin President Patrick Guerriero called the FMA "an intolerant and uncivil attack on gay and lesbian Americans and our families."

It "undermines our party's conservative belief in federalism," Guerriero continued. "States around the nation are working through this issue in different ways. The president and other amendment supporters are trying to short circuit this healthy

debate by imposing a federal solution for a problem that doesn't exist. States remain capable of working through this issue without interference from politically motivated Washington politicians."

The National Stonewall Democrats accused Republicans of preferring to promote "political rhetoric than provide concrete policy that actually strengthens families." Saying Bush knows his support of the FMA won't prevent it from being voted down by the Senate, NSD Interim Executive Director Jo Wyrick said in a statement, "The only reason he campaigns for this amendment is because it is designed by political operatives to scare up a cheap influx of cash into Republican political campaigns already tainted by corruption. ...It's not just dirty politics, it's disgraceful."



Bush Makes Push for Traditional Marriage

By Susan Jones

CNSNews.com Senior Editor

June 05, 2006

(CNSNews.com) - This is marriage week on Capitol Hill. President Bush is revisiting the issue for the first time in his second term; and the U.S. Senate is expected to vote this week on a federal constitutional amendment that would define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

In his weekly Saturday radio address, President Bush urged support for the Marriage Protection Amendment, the first time he's mentioned the subject since he was re-elected in 2004. He planned to follow up on Monday with a speech at the White House in support of the amendment.

"An amendment to the Constitution is necessary because activist courts have left our nation with no other choice," Bush said on Saturday.

But homosexual advocacy groups accuse Bush of pandering to the religious right.

"The president's attacks on the judicial system and 'activist judges' are not only insulting to the foundation of our republic but profoundly ironic given that they come from a man who would not be president at all but for 'activist judges,'" said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Foreman also rejected President Bush's statement that "every American deserves to be treated with tolerance, respect and dignity," and his call for the marriage debate to be conducted with "civility and decency toward one another."

It's the "height of hypocrisy," Foreman charged: "He knows the forces of religious extremism...have made an industry out of denigrating, demonizing and defaming gay people," Foreman said.

The Senate is expected to begin debating the amendment on Monday and a vote is expected by Wednesday.

On Saturday, the Washington Post reported that neither side believes the amendment will garner the required 67 votes for passage, regardless of Bush's endorsement.

Conservative advocacy groups say they will be watching the vote closely. The Christian Coalition of America said this will be a key vote in the "scorecard" it keeps on lawmakers.

"Considering the fact that an average of 71 percent of voters in 19 states have voted for state constitutional amendments banning homosexual "marriages", one would think that at least 70 Senators (3 more than required to pass a federal constitutional amendment) would vote for the Marriage Protection Amendment when it reaches the Senate floor," the CCA said in a press release.

But, CCA added, the last time the Senate prepared to vote on the amendment, "many senators brazenly voted against the wishes of the overwhelming number of voters in their states" and voted to continue a filibuster.

Some conservative groups warn that "same-sex 'marriage' means polygamy." The Family Research Council points to the June 6 edition of "The Advocate," which bills itself as "the national gay and lesbian magazine."

The cover story is "Polygamy & Gay Men," and it should be taken as the challenge that it is, the FRC said: "This is what those senators who vote *against* the Marriage Protection Amendment (MPA) next week will be voting *for*" the group said.

"Will marriage survive or will America move in the direction of 'Big Gay Love?'" the FRC is asking.

The Marriage Protection Amendment to the Constitution states: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

The logo for the Chicago Tribune, featuring the words "Chicago Tribune" in a white, serif font on a dark blue rectangular background.

Bush moves to shore up support among conservatives

by Mark Silva

Monday, June 5, 2006

WASHINGTON _ With his renewed call Monday for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, President Bush reasserted his allegiance to a conservative constituency whose support for him has significantly eroded in the face of soaring government spending and a controversial immigration proposal.

Bush urged Congress to approve the Marriage Protection Amendment, which is likely to fall short of the required two-thirds support in the Senate this week.

But Bush's own occasional support for the proposed amendment has itself fallen short of what the most conservative advocates are seeking, while exposing the president to criticism from liberals and moderates that he is pandering to the right.

Bush insisted Monday that same-sex marriage is a matter requiring "a national solution" and framed the debate as a battle between the voters, who in many states have enacted bans on gay marriage, and "activist judges" who have overturned those bans.

"On an issue of such profound importance, that solution should come not from the courts but from the people of the United States," Bush said in a statement on the eve of the Senate debate on the proposed amendment, which kicks off Tuesday. "An amendment to the Constitution is necessary because activist courts have left our nation with no other choice."

Democrats and gay activists charged that the election-year push for the constitutional amendment, which would define marriage as the union of a man and woman, was mostly intended to provide a political boost for Republicans.

In pressing for a vote this week, for instance, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., is burnishing his conservative credentials for an expected 2008 presidential campaign. And congressional Republicans seeking re-election in November cannot afford to be abandoned by a conservative base that has provided crucial margins of victory in the past.

"Given (the president's) low popularity ratings, I think he has a lot to risk in that this could be seen by some people like, 'There he goes again,'" said Bishop Harry Jackson, pastor at Hope Christian Church in Maryland and an African-American Democrat who joined Bush at a meeting of religious leaders Monday. Holding out hope for eventual adoption of the marriage amendment, Jackson said, "This is more like a marathon than a sprint."

Yet for Bush, the expected failure of the amendment in the Senate could serve as a reminder for advocates that the president has only half-heartedly promoted the cause. While Bush devoted his weekly radio address to the amendment Saturday and made a statement urging its passage after proposed meeting with religious leaders, the White House conceded that the president is not telephoning senators to seek their support.

Recent court rulings in Washington state, California, Maryland and New York overturning state initiatives against same-sex marriage have forced the issue of a constitutional amendment, said Tony Snow, the White House spokesman. To change the Constitution, a proposed amendment requires approval by two-thirds of the Senate and the House, then ratification by three-fourths of state legislatures.

The president's failure to more aggressively promote the proposal "definitely disappoints conservative activists," said Matt Daniels, founder and president of the Alliance for Marriage.

But he suggested Bush had little choice. "The White House does not want to be seen falsely as driving or manufacturing this debate," Daniels said. "Most Americans are not conservative activists. They don't live to fight these battles."

Supporters say the proposed amendment is necessary to preserve the traditional union of a father and mother that is the building block of society and the healthiest environment for children. Opponents say gay marriage presents no challenge to traditional marriage, and that the amendment would simply enshrine anti-gay discrimination in the Constitution.

While a slim majority of Americans opposes allowing gays and lesbians to marry _ 53 percent in a Pew Center poll _ few support the idea of a constitutional amendment. The Washington-based Pew Center last year found that 29 percent of those surveyed called a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage a good idea.

The issue also has exposed a rift in the White House. Vice President Dick Cheney, in a 2004 election debate, said, "People ought to be free to choose any arrangement they want. Traditionally that's been an issue for the states ...

That would be my preference." Cheney guardedly added that Bush "sets the policy for this administration, and I support the president."

Cheney's daughter Mary, a lesbian, has not been so guarded. In promoting her new book, "Now It's My Turn," Mary Cheney has said she opposes the proposed amendment. "What the federal marriage amendment is, it is writing discrimination into the Constitution," she told Fox News Sunday in May.

In 2004, several states had initiatives to ban gay marriage on the ballot, which drove up conservative turnout and provided crucial help to GOP candidates.

Critics say Republicans are now reviving the issue to re-energize their demoralized conservative base.

"Above all, this is an immoral attack on gay people, our families and our fundamental humanity," said **Matt Foreman, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

Top Democrats complained that with many pressing issues, such as the war in Iraq and rising gasoline prices, Bush has engaged in a divisive debate over an amendment bound to fail. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Monday, "It is clear the reason for this debate is to divide our society, to pit one against another."

The president actually is courting two critical audiences this week. As Bush sets out for a two-day cross-country tour on immigration reform _ promoting a plan that would enable millions of illegal immigrants already in the U.S. to remain and work legally _ he is reaching out to moderates and angering the most conservative members of his party. But in promoting a marriage amendment, he is appealing to conservatives.

Polls show the president's slumping job approval is tied not only to growing opposition to the Iraq war, but also to an erosion of support among conservative Republicans. In Ohio, where voters helped re-elect Bush in 2004 and also approved an initiative banning same-sex marriages, Bush's job approval has fallen to 35 percent _ the lowest rate for a president since the University of Cincinnati's Ohio Poll started its survey in 1981.

Among conservatives in Ohio, support for Bush fell from 63 percent in March 2004 to 51 percent in The Ohio Poll's May survey.

"The president definitely has some repair work to do with Republicans," said Eric Rademacher, co-director of The Ohio Poll.

Rev. Lou Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, protested this week's vote by refusing to attend Monday's meeting with Bush in the executive office building adjoining the White House.

"We have not been happy with the marriage amendment since it first came out," said Sheldon, who maintains that no same-sex relationship should be sanctioned by law. "But we laid low, because we wanted the president re-elected."



Debate over gay marriage amendment about much more than marriage

By BILL THEOBALD

June 2, 2006

WASHINGTON - When the Senate begins debate Monday on a constitutional amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman, much more will be on the agenda than the two-sentence text of the proposal.

Republicans will be trying to salve the frustration of social conservatives; Sen. Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., will be attempting to boost his possible presidential bid and proponents will be trying to get ahead of several court challenges to state laws and constitutional amendments.

But even proponents say the amendment banning gay marriage almost certainly will not receive approval from the required two-thirds of senators when it comes to a vote, possibly Wednesday.

Both Wisconsin senators intend to vote no.

"I think states should have the opportunity to deal with it as they see fit," Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., said in a recent interview. "We have dealt with it in Wisconsin. We already define marriage as the union of a man and a woman."

Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., objected when the Senate Judiciary Committee took up the issue in a small room off the Senate floor instead of meeting in a larger room that is more accessible to the public and the news media.

Feingold walked out of the meeting. When he returned, a heated exchange took place with committee chairman Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa.

Feingold acknowledged in a recent interview that he created "a little bit of a scene," although that wasn't his intent.

"I think this amendment is a terrible thing and doesn't belong in the Constitution," he said. "It's politically motivated. It's harsh. It has no business even being considered here, let alone being considered in that way."

Belief and emotions run deeply on both sides of the debate.

Frist calls marriage "the cornerstone of our society" and said Congress must act because of the risk that courts may strike down state laws regarding marriage.

In Frist's hometown of Nashville, Tenn., nightclub and restaurant owner David Taylor, 42, will celebrate his 15th anniversary Labor Day weekend with partner Michael Ward, 41, an architect. Taylor who tries "very hard to be a nice person" is puzzled by Frist, a surgeon.

"Why is this the most important thing when this causes so much pain for such a large number of citizens?" Taylor asked. "I expected more out of a physician."

Forty-one states have laws defining marriage as between a man and a woman, 19 states have put that language in their constitutions, and seven more -- Alabama, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin -- have state amendments on the ballot this year.

Kohl and Feingold also oppose the proposed state amendment, with Kohl pointing out that it would preclude civil unions and Feingold saying that it would insert discrimination into the state constitution.

Conservative religious leaders are unanimous in praising Frist for bringing the amendment to the Senate floor.

"He (Frist) has provided more leadership on core issues than anyone, including President Bush," said Tony Perkins, president of the powerful Family Research Council.

Joe Solomonese, president of the gay and lesbian advocacy group Human Rights Campaign, charges Republicans with concocting a "cheap political ploy" to distract people from high gasoline prices, the war in Iraq and other problems.

"Since they can't change the country, they are trying to change the subject," Solomonese said. The amendment would "write discrimination into the constitution," he said in the mantra that opponents use.

Christopher Sanders, president-elect of the Tennessee Equality Project, which opposes the amendment, said he thinks it is unfair for the federal government to step in before state residents have a chance to fully debate the issue.

"I think there is a great deal of anger and frustration" toward Frist, Sanders said. He predicted less support in the Senate than some expect. "I think a growing number of senators are growing weary of these tactics."

Perkins, like many social conservatives, said voters considered key to Bush's 2004 re-election and Republican prospects this fall are frustrated that the GOP and Bush have not pushed harder on the issues, including gay marriage, that they care most about.

"I think they are getting tired of waiting," Perkins said.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, credits Frist for being the first senator to come out in favor of a federal amendment after the Supreme Court struck down state sodomy laws in 2003.

"He gets full marks from our people on that," said Land, whose convention is based in Nashville and covers 16 million members worshipping in 42,000 churches.

How much political credit Frist will earn for his possible presidential bid is less certain.

"Frist could get some credit for just bringing up the bill," said Nathan Gonzalez, political editor for the Rothenberg Political Report, a Washington, D.C., newsletter. "But whatever happens in the 2006 election is going to set the tone and the issue agenda for 2007 and 2008 rather than what we are talking about this summer."

Even now, gay marriage doesn't show up among the top issues in polls of the American people in which they are asked in an open-ended question to name their greatest concerns.

Plus, the issue has caused a slight rift among conservatives. Several groups, including Concerned Women for America and The Traditional Values Coalition, oppose the amendment because they think part of its text would allow state legislatures to sanction civil unions. Civil unions are considered one legal step below marriage, providing couples many but not all of the legal protections of marriage.

Frist remains intent on pushing the amendment to the floor, even though it was defeated 50-48 in 2004. Vote counters expect the amendment to get a majority this time, perhaps 52 or 53 votes, but that's not enough to win a procedural vote to end debate and allow a final vote.

In the House, the amendment passed 227-186 in 2004, still not the required two-thirds majority. The House will likely take up the issue itself this year, according to a spokesman for Majority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, possibly in July.

To become an amendment to the constitution, voters in three-fourths of the states also would have to approve it.

On the Web:

www.allianceformarriage.org, Alliance for Marriage.

www.hrc.org, Human Rights Campaign.

www.frc.org, Family Research Council.

www.traditionalvalues.org, Traditional Values Coalition.

www.cwfa.org, Concerned Women for America.

www.thetaskforce.org, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Senate looks unlikely to ban gay marriage

7-June-2006

Marc Shoffman

An increasing number of religious, civil rights and political groups have spoken out against the Federal Marriage Amendment currently being debated in the US Senate, claiming it distracts attention from the real problems facing Americans.

The law would amend the Constitution to deny States the ability to define marriage themselves, mandating that marriage be only between one man and one woman, and would deny all benefits of marriage to all unmarried couples.

Matt Foreman, executive director of National Gay and Lesbian Task Force reacted to sources close to US President George W Bush who claimed he is only supporting the bill through political obligation, "Yes, this is about pandering to his base. Yes, this is about diverting America's attention from his foreign and domestic failures. But above all, this is an immoral attack on gay people, our families and our fundamental humanity.

"We saw the President again surrounded by the leaders of America's anti-gay industry, individuals who make a living out of denigrating, demonising and defaming gay people and our families. The fact that friends of the president say he doesn't even care about this issue is proof-positive of the grip that the forces of religious and political intolerance have on the throat of America.

"It is pure hypocrisy for the president to say that all Americans deserve to be treated with tolerance, respect and dignity, while he cosies up to these bigots.

"In the not-too-distant future, those involved in this assault, and their descendants, will look back with shame and regret."

Reverend John Thomas, United Church of Christ general minister and president, released a statement urging senators to vote against the Federal Marriage Amendment. Citing the July 4, 2005, resolution passed by the UCC's General Synod, its main deliberative body, affirming marriage equality, Mr Thomas said, "The General Synod has voiced its opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment, which proposes to single out same gender couples for discrimination in the U.S. Constitution, denying them access to the full rights, benefits and responsibilities accorded heterosexual couples through civil, legal marriage.

"Thus, on behalf of the General Synod... I call on the members of the United States Senate to respect the religious

diversity that exists in our country, respect the U.S. Constitution and its longstanding tradition of expanding rights rather than restricting them, and urge Senators to vote against the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment."

Senator Edward Kennedy, coined a joint statement along with Leadership Conference on Civil Rights executive director Wade Henderson and other civil rights and religious leaders, including Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, saying, "It is a real threat to millions of Americans when the Republican leadership stands on the Senate floor and gives license to treat gay and lesbian Americans as second-class citizens. It is shameful that with a war raging in Iraq and gas prices continuing to skyrocket that this President and the Republican leadership in Congress would rather spend precious time debating a divisive and discriminatory amendment to the Constitution.

"Make no mistake about it, the debate happening on the floor of the United States Senate today is whether we are going to undermine our Constitution and deny rights to millions of Americans by singling them out for discrimination."

Soulforce, the organisation founded to end religion-based discrimination of gays and lesbians, is taking their cause to the boyhood streets of Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, the Senator responsible for re-introducing the controversial marriage amendment.

Scheduled for the first week of June, Soulforce placed sixteen billboard posters in and around his hometown of Nashville, Tennessee to call attention to the issue.

The billboards feature part of a speech given by Coretta Scott King, late wife of Martin Luther King Jr, at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey on March 24, 2004, when she said, "Gay and lesbian people have families, and their families should have legal protections, whether by marriage or civil union. A constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages is a form of gay bashing, and it would do nothing at all to protect traditional marriages."

The billboards include a photograph of Soulforce executive director Jeff Lutes with his partner and son.

Mr Lutes said: "Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and others, under pressure from wealthy fundamentalists, are again trying to write discrimination into the constitution rather than focusing on the real problems facing America. Soulforce reminds Senator Frist's hometown that Mrs King stood for the full equality of lesbian and gay Americans and against homophobia, especially homophobia in the black community. Mrs King publicly saluted the gays and lesbians that fought for her freedom in Montgomery and Selma and other places during the civil rights movement, and she compared homophobia to racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of bigotry that set the stage for repression and violence."

Proponents of the previously failed 2004 amendment feel it is their duty to force a public vote by scapegoating gays and lesbians as threats to heterosexual marriage. Helen Palmer of the League of Women Voters said: "The rights of one group should not be subjected to the vagaries of the majority."

"Soulforce is dedicated to educating the public regarding the lives of non-traditional families and the harmful effects of religion based bigotry on the children caught in the cross hairs of this political red herring. The billboard campaign will

remind people that Coretta Scott King called all Americans who believed in the late Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream to resist injustice and instead "make room at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people'."

Mr Bush voiced support for the amendment earlier this week, "Our policies should aim to strengthen families, not undermine them," he said.

"And changing the definition of marriage would undermine the family structure."

National Lawyers Guild president Michael Avery said, "If this Amendment were to pass it would be the first time that the Constitution had been amended to deny any group of citizens the equal protection of the law. President Bush is joining the politics of fear with the politics of hate in a way that is fundamentally un-American."

The Senate will vote on the issue this morning while even supporters of the bill admit they are falling short of even a simple 51-vote majority, far less than the 67 votes needed to amend the Constitution.

Tell the Massachusetts story

By Susan Ryan-Vollmar

Issue Date: 6/08/2006, Posted On: 6/8/2006

This week, the United States Senate voted on a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would bar same-sex couples from marrying. The only people who treated the debate with the seriousness it deserved were the religious conservatives who want to see the amendment passed as soon as possible.

Although President Bush held a press conference urging the Senate to pass the measure, he staged it in a small room in the Old Executive Office Building, an obvious slight to the right-wingers pushing for the amendment's passage. Democratic leaders refused to engage the GOP on the issue. Instead, in a statement issued after Wednesday's defeat of the amendment in the Senate, Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean chastised Republican leadership: "The time that Senate

Republicans wasted debating a divisive federal marriage amendment is time that should have been used to find ways to reduce gas prices, help Americans find health insurance, make America energy independent, create jobs that stay in America, or come up with a plan for success in Iraq."

All of that is understandable. By many accounts, Bush doesn't think the Marriage Protection Amendment (MPA) is important business. He is, not surprisingly, engaging in election year posturing. Democratic leaders, meanwhile, are fearful of the gay marriage issue and avoid debate on it at all costs. Noting that political leaders should be focused on more important business than gay marriage makes for a great soundbite.

But it's not understandable why gay rights leaders would do the same. Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, issued a statement Wednesday after the Senate vote that failed to address the issue in moral terms. "President Bush and the Republican leadership gambled their dwindling political capital on a discriminatory amendment and came up empty," he said.

Compare that with the rhetoric of the right-wing activists like James Dobson, founder and Chairman of Focus on the Family, who attended the President's press conference: "The future of our society and our children's well-being depends on the passage of the Marriage Protection Amendment," Dobson said after the Wednesday vote. "It becomes clearer



Taking things seriously: Focus on the Family's James Dobson is relentless in his support of a Marriage Protection Amendment. We need to be just as vigorous in opposing it. *photo: Rudy K. Lawidjaja*

every day that support is building in the states to ratify the amendment should it ever make its way out of Congress. We and millions of other conservatives are committed to doing what it takes, for as long as it takes, to see that the great institution of marriage is protected from renegade judges.”

This is a moral issue. But only one side is consistently talking about it in those terms. (To his credit, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Matt Foreman got it right Wednesday, when he said: “Today is a tremendous victory for the core American values of equality, fairness and nondiscrimination. Once again, a bipartisan bloc soundly rejected this immoral constitutional amendment seeking to dehumanize and hurt lesbian and gay Americans and their families.”)

The GOP’s repeated attempts to use our rights to divide America provide a rare platform from which we can make our case. Last month, Washington Blade executive editor Chris Crain asked in a column why our largest advocacy group, HRC, isn’t making the case publicly for marriage rights. “Rather than actually defend gay families and make the case for gay marriage, HRC is stuck in a three-year strategy of arguing that the American people don’t — and shouldn’t! — care about marriage equality for gay couples.”

Indeed, the week Crain’s column appeared, HRC’s Solmonese issued a press release in which he said: “With gas prices hitting \$3 a gallon, millions living without health care, a broken immigration system and an endless war in Iraq, Congress should be helping make America stronger, not weaker by trying to put discrimination in the United States Constitution.”

As Crain asked, can anyone imagine Martin Luther King Jr., “responding to an attempt to rollback the gains of the Civil Rights Movement by arguing that the issue shouldn’t be debated because rising gas prices are more important?”

Civil marriage rights are a civil rights issue and a moral issue. One of the reasons why we have succeeded here in Massachusetts is because the issue has been framed in those terms. MassEquality, which is leading the fight to preserve civil marriage rights for same-sex couples in Massachusetts has combined political savvy with truth telling to make its case. Just this week, the organization released a series of advertisements that will tell the stories of ordinary families and how they’ve been impacted by the right to marry.

The right wing has no answer to that. There is no one in this country who has seen his or her marriage devalued by the advent of civil marriage rights for same-sex couples. The predictions of doom and gloom have been proven a lie over the last two years. This is the story our leading advocates should be sharing with the rest of the country.



Senate Takes Up Anti-Gay Amendment Today

by Paul Johnson, 365Gay.com Washington Bureau Chief

June 5 2006 - 12:01 am ET

(Washington) Debate begins today in the Senate on the proposed constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage with President George W. Bush expected to make his second appeal in three days for its passage.

Bush has scheduled a Rose Garden media session where he will be surrounded by supporters of the amendment, many of them from evangelical groups that have pushing Republicans for six years to pass the measure.

On Saturday the President used his weekly radio address to call for the amendment's passage.

"Marriage cannot be cut off from its cultural, religious and natural roots without weakening this good influence on society," Bush said.

The address was assailed by LGBT rights groups and the Democratic Party. In a keynote address to National Stonewall Democrats, DNC Chair Howard Dean accused Bush of supporting the introduction of "legalized discrimination in our Constitution."

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese accused the President of dividing the nation.

"President Roosevelt started these radio addresses to unite Americans and President Bush is using them as a tool to divide us as a nation," said Solmonese.

Matt Foreman, the Executive Director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force accused Bush of pandering to the religious right.

"If this were just a political game, it would be one thing. But this is also hurting real families solely to score political points," he said.

In New York State, where justices of the Court of Appeals are considering whether to overturn the state ban on gay marriage, the Executive Director, Empire State Pride Agenda said that the President's attack on the judiciary is unbecoming of the office he holds.

"There's nothing activist about courts interpreting state constitutions to protect the civil rights of individuals and families. In fact, that's the reason we have a Constitutional system in the first place," said Alan Van Capelle.

New York is one of three states where gay marriage has reached the high court. The others are New Jersey and Washington.

Hundreds of New Yorkers took part in a wedding march across the Brooklyn Bridge on Saturday to show their opposition to the proposed amendment. In San Francisco on Saturday about 100 people walked across Golden Gate Bridge in support of gay marriage.

But if gays and Democrats were angry the GOP isn't faring much better with conservative Christians, the party's base.

Joe Glover, president of the Family Policy Network, called today's debate a "dog-and-pony show".

"It's too little, too late," he told the Los Angeles Times.

"Increasingly, social conservatives expect real action, not just politically timed attempts to motivate and organize the base," said Gary Glenn of the American Family Association of Michigan.

Most political observers believe the proposed amendment will fare worse than it did in 2004 when it failed to get enough votes to proceed.

The measure was reintroduced this year.

The proposed amendment would bar same-sex couples from marrying, block courts and state legislatures allowing gay marriage, nullify marriages already performed in Massachusetts - the only state in the country where they are currently legal - and according to critics possibly block civil unions and override domestic partner laws.

The amendment was introduced by Senator Wayne Allard and reads: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

The Associated Press reported Sunday that supporters of the amendment in the Senate are having a hard time securing 50 votes, let alone the super majority of 67 it would need to advance.

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He was followed by Patrick Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, who declared “the Constitution is too important to be used for such a partisan political purpose... we should be addressing Americans’ top priorities including ways to make America safer, the war in Iraq, rising gas prices...”

Supporters of the anti-gay amendment, almost to a person, trotted out several large graphs and charts to show how marriages declined and out-of-wedlock births increased after gay marriage and civil unions were legalized with corresponding statistics on how children are better off when raised in a married heterosexual household, an inaccurate representation of the research on the question.

“Once the process of redefining marriage begins, it is but a short step to the dissolution of marriage as an institution all together,” said Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican.

Brownback, along with Rick Santorum, a Pennsylvania Republican, both claimed religious freedom would be in jeopardy if same-sex marriage were legalized.

“People will lose religious freedom if they hold a different view. If they say: ‘We believe marriage is a union of a man and a woman’ ...now are you going to find that somehow discriminatory? They are going to be sued if they only recognize marriage as a union of a man and a woman,” Brownback said.

Tuesday’s debate, however, revealed a split among Republicans on the amendment.

John Warner, a Virginia Republican and chairman of the powerful Armed Services Committee, noted that the amendment’s second sentence would seem to ban civil unions and domestic partnerships, and that he had received many calls from constituents who were confused as to whether this was the case. Unless the measure’s wording were changed, Warner said, he would not vote for it.

McCain said the marriage amendment imposed the federal government’s will upon an area traditionally left to the states and therefore violated the conservative values of Federalism.

“States are successfully working to pass amendments reserving marriage for opposite-sex couples,” McCain said. “I support this effort and it is working successfully.”

Russ Feingold, a Wisconsin Democrat who is among the Senate’s tiny cadre of same-sex marriage supporters, mounted a strong attack against Allard’s amendment. Noting that the ambiguity in the amendment’s wording placed civil unions and domestic partnerships in jeopardy, he pointed out that even the amendment’s supporters could not agree how it would impact such arrangements.

“We should not play politics with the Constitution, nor should we play politics with the lives of gay and lesbian Americans who correctly see this constitutional amendment as an effort to make them permanent second-class citizens,” Feingold said. “They are our friends, our family members, our neighbors, our colleagues. They should not be used as pawns in a cynical political exercise.”

Senator Ted Kennedy followed in a similar vein.

“There are same-sex couples in every state, and nearly every county in the country,” the Massachusetts Democrat said. “They have families, and children. Why should the federal government seek to make their lives more difficult by writing discrimination against them into the Constitution?”

Feingold and Kennedy were among the few opponents of the amendment who used any of their time to defend the rights and dignity of gays and lesbians and their families. Most other opponents criticized the measure as politically motivated or a distraction from more serious matters such as Iraq, the budget deficit, and rising healthcare costs.

Notable for their absence from the debate were New York’s two Democratic senators, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chuck Schumer. Both made floor speeches against the measure when it was up for debate in 2004—though at the time each characterized the effort for an amendment as unsound, unnecessary, and a distraction, rather than as discriminatory.

In March of this year, Clinton, as chair of the Democratic Senate Steering and Outreach Committee, convened a gathering of her colleagues and LGBT activists to discuss the impending marriage amendment debate. In May, New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn hosted a follow-up meeting of local gay and lesbian leaders, attended by Andrea Minkow—a Clinton representative from the Steering Committee who played a leading role that day—as well as by a representative from Schumer’s office. The purpose of the meeting was to address a “messaging” strategy for the amendment debate, and the Capitol Hill staffers were informed by everyone on hand that New York’s gay community expected the Democrats to be more proactive this year in speaking to the dignity of gay and lesbian American families.

“I have heard from many in the LGBT community about their disappointment that Senators Clinton and Schumer did not take the floor of the Senate to oppose the amendment and stand up for gay families,” said Alan Van Capelle, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda. “But what’s most important is that they voted against this measure and defended us.”

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, was less conciliatory.

“Very few Democrats are willing to talk about this as a human rights issue,” he said. “That the president would surround himself with the captains of the anti-gay industry in America—people who say the most vile things about gay people—and call for respect for all Americans is beyond hypocrisy. It is something he should have been called on.”

A press release from the Pride Agenda applauded five Democratic senators who did speak up for the gay community—Feingold, Kennedy, California’s Barbara Boxer, Illinois’ Dick Durbin, and Minnesota’s Mark Dayton. Given its mission as a New York gay rights group, ESPA’s decision to reach out of state to cite leadership on the amendment is noteworthy.

Asked to comment on the silence by Clinton and Schumer, Quinn said, “As I understand it, there was a limited time that both sides were given in the debate and when that time was divided up, Hillary and Chuck were not included.” As to whether she was disappointed that her advice on framing the issue did not make its way into a floor speech by a New Yorker, Quinn said, “I am not disappointed that neither of them spoke because as I understand the time was divided up on each side. What I am very happy about is both of our senators did a tremendous amount of work building support for our side. And, frankly, I am more interested in that than whether they spent time talking in front of C-Span.”

The amendment’s supporters predicted they would garner more votes this time than in 2004, mainly because four Democratic senators who voted against it two years ago had been replaced by conservative Republicans. However, this year’s tally gave them only one more vote than in 2004. Two Republicans, Specter and Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, changed their votes from 2004 to vote against the amendment.

“The U.S. Senate gave a resounding defeat to the voices of intolerance who are trying to use the Constitution as a political tool,” said Log Cabin Republican president Patrick Guerriero in a statement. “Momentum is on our side as a growing conservative force stands up in defense of the core American values of equality, liberty, and federalism.”

Supporters vowed they would try again.

“I do not believe the sponsors are going to fall back and cry about it,” Senator Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican, told the Associated Press. “I think they are going to keep bringing it up.”

Samantha Smoot, the Human Rights Campaign’s political director, said the result would still be the same.

“Not a single senator buckled under pressure from these powerful conservative groups, but two bucked their party and president to cross sides,” she said. “It is a sign the American people are sick of this trend of attacking gay people when the polls are down.”

According to Republican House Majority Leader John Boehner of Ohio, the House will consider a similar amendment in July. In 2004 the House also took up the matter, but it was defeated there as well.