

Marriage Equality: An Update
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Within the past month, we have seen and heard much discussion about marriage equality, at the federal and state levels. And while our commonwealth certainly has more pressing concerns and challenges which deserve our focus, it is timely and relevant to provide a brief update on these recent events, and outline what the future portends on this topic.

Opponents of marriage equality lost at the federal level. Last month, President Bush and the Republicans in Congress failed once again in their attempt to write discrimination and bigotry into the United States Constitution. Thankfully, enough United States Senators opposed the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would have overturned marriage equality here in Massachusetts.

Opponents of marriage equality won a victory in New York and Georgia. The highest courts in these two states ruled earlier this month that same-sex couples are not entitled to marry. Specifically, the New York Court of Appeals ruled that a state law defining marriage as between a man and a woman is constitutional, and that the state legislature - and not the courts - would have to take the next step in revising that definition. The Georgia Supreme Court upheld an amendment to the state's constitution that prohibits same-sex partners from marrying or claiming benefits under a civil union.

And last week, many in the Massachusetts legislature who oppose the principle of marriage equality ducked for cover. By delaying until after the November election any consideration on the question of a voter referendum, elected officials avoided potential embarrassment related to encouraging bigotry and small-mindedness.

Where does this leave us?

At the national level, we see a prominent presidential candidate, our governor Mitt Romney, catering to extremists within the Republican Party by intimating that he disagrees with marriage equality by supporting a voter referendum. Were he to become president, one wonders whether he would try to put the question to all of the American people in a nationwide referendum. And if gay marriage could go this route, what other fundamental right would be put to the same test?

Here in the Thirteenth Middlesex District of Massachusetts, our state representative, Susan Pope, sought to outlaw marriage equality by supporting an amendment to the Massachusetts State Constitution in 2004. Supporters of this amendment and similar efforts seem to believe that some of us deserve more rights than others. Many in this country thought that way prior to a 1967 Supreme Court decision that allowed inter-racial marriage, which previously was illegal. There has been no evidence of this forty year old decision undermining the institution of marriage, as opponents alleged. Residents of Massachusetts see the parallels to today's debate quite clearly.

I support marriage equality because the US Constitution protects the fundamental rights of all its citizens; rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I oppose putting this question on the ballot here in Massachusetts, because fundamental human rights should never be subjected to a popularity contest. That's why the Bill of Rights was written, and why we have a judicial system.

So consider carefully who you would want representing Lincoln, Sudbury, and Wayland when the vote comes around in November on the constitutional amendment for a voter referendum on marriage equality. I am confident that the people of Lincoln, Sudbury, and Wayland believe in equal rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation, and many

are proud of Massachusetts for taking a leadership role in ensuring that freedom and equality are preserved in this Commonwealth, even while others are dragging their feet.

Tom Conroy is a Wayland resident who is running for state representative of the Thirteenth Middlesex District which includes Lincoln, Wayland, and Sudbury.