

The tide is turning. Here in D.C., the Democratic State Committee and several Democratic ward organizations have endorsed marriage equality. Mayor Adrian Fenty promptly signed the marriage recognition legislation, which is now undergoing congressional review—and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has stated she opposes congressional interference with the decision by D.C.'s elected representatives. Elsewhere, Maine became the fifth marriage equality state, and New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch has reached an agreement with the legislature that will make that state the sixth.

Here are ten points we have drafted in anticipation of the full marriage equality bill that is likely to be introduced later this year. Use them as a resource in urging your D.C. Council members to stand firm for equality, and in educating your neighbors.

Marriage Equality: 10 Points for Lobbying D.C. Council Members

1. D.C. voters have long supported diversity and inclusiveness, including equal rights for their GLBT neighbors. It has been three decades since an anti-gay candidate has been elected in our city. The anti-gay ministers have a long record of being politically ineffectual. See, for example, the fights in the early 1990s over domestic partnerships and sodomy law repeal. Several ministers thundered against those measures at the time, to no avail. Much of the opposition to marriage equality comes from outside the city. Ward 9 voters can neither elect nor defeat anyone.

2. Most clergy in the District have steered clear of Bishop Harry Jackson and his inflammatory demonstrations. This is partly because of Jackson's notoriety, including a sense that he is a tool of right-wing evangelical ministers whose purpose is exploitation rather than any ongoing fellowship; and partly because even many ministers opposed to marriage equality are not

prepared to set aside more pressing issues for their communities like health care, jobs, and education in favor of a divisive and emotional fight that helps no one. There is little need for any Council member to worry that he or she will lose a re-election bid due to the ill-informed and misguided opposition of a small minority.

3. The claim by the anti-gay ministers that they will be forced by the government to conduct or approve of same-sex marriages is simply false, nor has any marriage equality advocate proposed any such thing. If the government ever sought to force ministers to perform same-sex marriages of which the ministers disapproved, we would gladly submit an amicus brief on the side of the ministers. This issue is a red herring. Ministers for religions that frown on divorce are not forced to marry people who have been divorced. No ministers in marriage-equality jurisdictions have been forced to marry same-sex couples. Council member David Catania stated in *The Washington Post* on May 10 that "any legislation that I propose will specifically protect the free exercise of religion as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution. All religious institutions will be free to decide for themselves whether or not to solemnize same-sex marriages consistent with their religious beliefs."

4. This is not a fight between activists on one side and clergy on the other. The GLBT community is one of diverse faiths, and includes many clergy members. A list of gay-affirming congregations compiled by the D.C. Office of GLBT Affairs is available online at: [http://lgbt.dc.gov/lgbt/cwp/view.a.3.q.554396.lgbt.Nav.\[32273\].asp](http://lgbt.dc.gov/lgbt/cwp/view.a.3.q.554396.lgbt.Nav.[32273].asp). Those who cherry-pick biblical passages to justify intolerance (while ignoring inconvenient passages that are favorable toward polygamy and slavery) have no monopoly on faith or the use of Holy Scripture. The difference is that we respect and value Washington's religious diversity and do not seek to use government to establish one faith over others.

5. Marriage equality benefits people of all colors, contrary to efforts by Bishop Jackson to create a racial wedge issue. A majority of the District's gay population is black, extrapolating from the fact that about 60 percent of the city's population is black. A number of leaders of D.C.'s marriage equality effort are African American, including Michael Crawford of D.C. for Marriage and Jeffrey Richardson of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club. Furthermore, the Foundation for All D.C. Families recently provided Council members with a summary of polling data from 2006 showing that significant numbers of black voters, while short of a majority, support equal rights for same-sex couples and oppose any anti-gay initiative.

6. False lessons from Prop 8. Bishop Jackson invokes the passage of California's anti-gay Proposition 8 last November as somehow proving that Americans in general, including African Americans, share his immovable opposition to marriage equality. By contrast, statistician and polling analyst Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight.com wrote on November 11 that "the notion that Prop 8 passed because of the Obama turnout surge is silly. Exit polls suggest that first-time voters -- the vast majority of whom were driven to turn out by Obama ... -- voted against Prop 8 by a 62-38 margin." Thus the "Obama surge" on balance helped the pro-gay side. And the overall vote (52 to 48 percent in favor) was much closer than the previous time Californians voted on the issue (in 2000, passing Proposition 22 by 61 to 39 percent), which means the trend favors equality.

7. Marriage helps people of all income levels, but provides the most help to couples with the fewest financial resources. This is because legal marriage serves as the "poor man's lawyer," granting couples a wealth of protections in one fell swoop that otherwise could only be approximated by a series of legal instruments costing thousands of dollars.

8. The 2006 poll commissioned by the Foundation for All D.C. Families shows strong majority support for marriage equality among likely District voters. When Bishop Jackson and his friends claim that the Council is way out of step with District voters, you should ask what happened to his thousand supporters on April 28, how many of those who did show up that day and May 5 were actually District voters, and where they are getting their polling information. Their over-the-top pronouncements have earned them only skepticism.

9. The claim that marriage has remained unchanged for millennia is preposterous. As Empire State Pride Agenda points out, "Marriage is a dynamic institution that has evolved throughout history to meet the needs of society. In fact, much of what was associated with marriage in the past would today be incomprehensible to the majority of Americans. This includes arranged marriages, payment of a dowry, the legally inferior status of women in the marital relationship, polygamous marriages and royal and aristocratic marriage between relatives, such as first cousins."

10. The push for marriage equality is not just about rights, but about people embracing responsibility. When two people of whatever gender seal their mutual love and commitment with a marriage contract, the community is strengthened. Children are better protected when both of their parents are legally responsible for them, and marriage is the best way of assuring this. Civil unions and domestic partnerships lack the universal recognition and legal certainty of marriage. There are bound to be tensions in any diverse society, but the fact that someone disapproves of, or is uncomfortable with, a particular family is no justification for placing that family outside the protection of the law. We are talking about the simple justice of extending equal protection to all families in our city. Let's keep D.C. on the right side of history.

References

1. "Mr. Barry's Ugly Words," Editorial, *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2009
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/08/AR2009050803544.html>
2. Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, *A Timeline on Marriage Recognition in D.C.*, April 19, 2009
<http://www.glaa.org/archive/2009/timelineonmarriagerecognition0418.shtml>
3. Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, *Marriage Law in the District of Columbia*, December 2003
www.glaa.org/archive/2004/glaamarriagereport.pdf
4. D.C. Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Affairs, "Affirming Churches, Synagogues, and Religious Groups"
[http://lgbt.dc.gov/lgbt/cwp/view,a,3,q,554396,lgbtNav,|32273\].asp](http://lgbt.dc.gov/lgbt/cwp/view,a,3,q,554396,lgbtNav,|32273].asp)
5. Nate Silver, FiveThirtyEight, "Prop 8 Myths," November 11, 2008
<http://www.fivethirtyeight.com/2008/11/prop-8-myths.html>
6. Empire State Pride Agenda, "Same-Sex Marriage Myths Busted"
<http://www.prideagenda.org/IssuesExplained/MarriageandFamilyProtection/SameSexMarriageMythsBusted/tabid/480/Default.aspx>

Copyright © 2009 Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, D.C.
P.O. Box 75265, Washington, D.C. 20013
(202) 667-5139
equal@glaa.org ■ www.glaa.org



Marriage Equality: 10 Points for Lobbying D.C. Council Members

May 17, 2009

"We hurt our fellow citizens and our community when we deny gay people civil marriage and its protections and responsibilities. Rather than divide and discriminate, let us come together and create one nation. We are all one people. We all live in the American house. We are all the American family. Let us recognize that the gay people living in our house share the same hopes, troubles, and dreams. It's time we treated them as equals, as family."

— Rep. John Lewis