

The tide is turning. The D.C. Council's marriage recognition bill was signed by Mayor Adrian Fenty and became law when Congress chose not to overrule D.C.'s elected representatives. Both the D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics and the D.C. Superior Court ruled against a proposed referendum to overturn the recognition bill. Those events give us hope that the full marriage equality bill will pass, and a recently proposed anti-gay initiative will fail to reach the ballot. Elsewhere, Maine and New Hampshire became marriage equality states, though Maine faces an expensive and divisive ballot initiative.

We still need your help to unify our city behind equality. Here are ten points we have drafted to help you make the case for equality. Use them in urging your Council members to stand firm for equality, and in educating your neighbors. **And be sure to thank our allies for their support.**

Marriage Equality: 10 Talking Points

1. D.C. voters have long supported diversity and inclusiveness, including equal rights for their GLBT neighbors. Several anti-gay ministers thundered against domestic partnerships and sodomy law repeal in the early 1990s, to no avail. It has been three decades since an anti-gay candidate has been elected in our city. The last D.C. politician to make homophobia a centerpiece of his campaign was Vincent Orange, who as a mayoral candidate in 2006 called his rivals "morally unfit" for office because they supported marriage equality. He lost badly. Much of our opposition comes from outside the city. Ward 9 voters can neither elect nor defeat anyone.

2. More than 130 D.C. clergy have signed a declaration of support for marriage equality. See <http://www.clergyformarriage.com/>. Most other clergy have steered clear of Bishop Harry Jackson's 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 true 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 and its allies represent many faiths. A list of gay-affirming congregations compiled by the D.C. Office of GLBT Affairs is available online at: <http://lgbt.dc.gov/>. Those who cherry-pick biblical passages to justify intolerance 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 last spring 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 in 2008 as 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, 2008 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. Polls show majority support for marriage equality among likely District voters. Bishop Jackson claims that the Council is out of step with District voters, but at the Values Voters summit he complained about the lack of support he is getting in D.C., and asked conservatives to stop sounding so racist. His false, over-the-top pronouncements have earned him 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. That is why a ballot initiative is a bad idea — how would you like your neighbors voting on *your* marriage? 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.

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“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