

Freedom to Marry E-Update
Issue #14 | March 29, 2006

Contents:

- 1) A Note from Executive Director, Evan Wolfson
- 2) Landscape: Beating back anti-gay attackers from coast to coast
- 3) On the Horizon: New York High Court to Hear Marriage Case
- 4) Get Engaged: Looking for Leaders: Help Enlist Diverse Voices of Equality

1) A Note from Executive Director Evan Wolfson

Dear Friend --

Two recent polls, a national survey by the Pew Research Center, and the nonpartisan Field Poll in California, confirm that the more we talk about gay couples and the freedom to marry, the more people favor inclusion.

First, the most surprising, and encouraging, finding: As the Pew poll reports, "'Strong' opposition to gay marriage, which surged in 2004, has ebbed to a new low." Resistance to ending discrimination in marriage has fallen significantly among most demographic groups, with "substantial declines even among Republicans."

Groups who have long opposed equal marriage, including, also, seniors, Catholics, and non-evangelical Protestants, are showing that they, too, can be softened and swayed by the mainstream's flow toward acceptance and inclusion.

"Among people age 65 and over, for example," reported Pew, "strong opposition to gay marriage jumped from 36% in 2003 to 58% in 2004, but has fallen to 33% today. White evangelical Protestants are the only major group in which a majority still strongly opposes gay marriage, but even here the intensity of feeling has receded somewhat."

Likewise, California's Field Poll found that Californians support legal recognition of the relationships between lesbian and gay couples by a 3-to-1 margin, with 44% supporting equal marriage rights, a huge jump from just five years ago.

Although a slight majority of Americans – only 51%, far less than many think – for now continue to oppose same-sex couples' freedom to marry, Pew reports that opposition has "declined significantly from 63% in February 2004, when opposition spiked following the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision and remained high throughout the 2004 election season."

Why are we seeing this dramatic and continuing movement toward support for the freedom to marry? The power and resonance of the shared stories of committed couples seeking and – in places such as Canada, Spain, and, of course, Massachusetts – exercising the freedom to marry. The more we ask our neighbors to think this through, the more they move, even many of the seemingly unmoveable.

If anything, survey results show that we've been under-optimistic. Not only is the middle moving, but those who have traditionally been against us are also beginning to embrace the need for equality in marriage.

Polls are snapshots at a given moment, and during a period of national civil rights conversation such as we are having now, such snapshots can mislead. What ultimately counts is not the snapshots, but the movie, the long-term trend that unequivocally shows the American people's growing acceptance of marriage equality.

Read more in my recent editorial about why we need to drop our under-optimistic approach, *The reachable middle: more in the middle, and marriage is reaching them*, on www.TomPaine.com.

-- Evan Wolfson

Follow developments in the movement for marriage equality on our website (www.freedomtomarry.org), and in future issues of Freedom to Marry's bi-monthly E-Update.

LINKS:

- * Pew Poll - <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=273>
- * Field Poll - <http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/COI-06-Mar-Gay-Rights.pdf>
- * The reachable middle - http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/03/29/marriage_equality_moves_forward.php
- * "Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People's Right to Marry" - Evan Wolfson - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3470>
- * Resources - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=3886>

~~~~~  
2) LANDSCAPE: Beating back anti-gay attackers from coast to coast  
~~~~~

Right-wing opponents of equality continue their assault on gay families, stooping so low as to amend the constitutions of states to take away basic safeguards intended to protect all Americans. 2006 will see at least seven more states stamped into constitutional attacks – Alabama, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Fortunately, as in the previous waves of this anti-gay offensive, other states continue to reject putting people's basic constitutional rights up for a vote. In four states so far this year -- Washington, Iowa, West Virginia, and New Hampshire -- the hard work of statewide equality groups and allies once again kept these discriminatory measures off of the ballot.

For example, the New Hampshire House voted overwhelmingly last week against a proposed anti-gay amendment to the state constitution aimed at fencing gay couples and their kids out from marriage and any other recognition of their families. And in Minnesota, a January poll reports that 54% of registered voters oppose the discriminatory amendment currently before the legislature. By more than a 3-to-1 ratio, respondents said lesbian and gay couples "should have the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else."

In Minnesota and in other states, more work is needed to block these anti-gay and un-American measures from reaching the ballot. And in the states where the constitutional rights of a minority have now been put up for grabs, gay families and fair-minded non-gay people need to speak urgently, personally, and authentically about why marriage matters and why discrimination, particularly in the constitution, must be rejected.

LINKS:

- * More - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=3197>
- * Equality Federation - <http://www.equalityfederation.org/>
- * Equal Marriage NOW - <http://www.now.org/issues/marriage/index.html>

* OutFront - <http://www.outfront.org>

~~~~~  
3) ON THE HORIZON: New York High Court to Hear Marriage Case  
~~~~~

New York State's highest court – the Court of Appeals – is set to hear oral argument on the constitutionality of the continued discrimination against lesbian and gay couples seeking the right to marry. The argument will be on May 31st.

"It couldn't be more fitting that the case seeking to end the discrimination against same-sex couples who want to marry is being heard the day before an entire month celebrating LGBT people and their families," said Susan Sommer, Senior Counsel at Lambda Legal.

This is the first of several lawsuits in New York challenging discrimination in marriage to reach the high court, and follows last month's state supreme court oral argument in a case brought by couples in New Jersey.

Lambda Legal, the ACLU, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, GLAD, and others have similar cases seeking equal marriage rights in California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, New Jersey, and Washington.

Meanwhile, the Washington State Supreme Court is likely to rule any time now on the freedom to marry cases there. Work is needed in all of these states now to create the climate that encourages the judges to do the right thing, and assures their independence and awareness of how the denial of marriage harms couples and their kids.

LINKS:

- * More - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3475>
- * Lambda Legal - <http://www.lambdalegal.org>
- * ACLU - <http://www.aclu.org>
- * National Center for Lesbian Rights - <http://www.nclrights.org>
- * GLAD - <http://www.glad.org>

~~~~~  
4) GET ENGAGED: Looking for Leaders: Help Enlist Diverse Voices of Equality  
~~~~~

Can you think of a prominent national or local leader – famous or influential in a particular circle – who should be speaking out on why marriage matters and the need to end discrimination in marriage?

Freedom to Marry is working to enlist civic, business and religious leaders to lend their voices to the civil rights conversations underway throughout the country.

Freedom to Marry's Voices of Equality is a diverse group of prominent Americans speaking out about discrimination in marriage. They can be found at every level of society and in every community.

From Congressman John Lewis to youth activist Marina Gatto, from Buddhist leader Lama Surya Das to Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson, America needs to hear these voices for marriage equality.

eupdate14_text

We'd love to work with you on recruiting more support – or get your ideas on whom we should approach. Contact us with your ideas for more Voices of Equality, or fill out the nomination form online to share your idea.

LINKS:

- * Voices of Equality - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/voe.asp>
- * Nomination form - http://www.freedomtomarry.org/voe_nomination.asp

QUOTE:

"The collective impact of our individual choices can help dismantle a status quo in which gay and lesbian people are subject to overt discrimination in marriage, in the military, and in employment. We aim for a world that is more joyful and more just."

– Ian Ayres & Jennifer Gerarda Brown in *Straightforward: How to Mobilize Heterosexual Support for Gay Rights*

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST:

Most visited pages last week:

- * Science, Health, and Studies - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3598>
- * Children and Families - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3485>
- * Massachusetts - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3539>
- * Special to Freedom to Marry! LGBT Parents: Building Blocks of the Marriage Movement by Jennifer Chrisler, Executive Director of Family Pride - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=4108>

Lambda Legal, National Black Justice Coalition, Asian Equality, National Latina/o Coalition for Justice, and Freedom to Marry have teamed up to spearhead a campaign featuring a diverse array of people of color depicting the wide-ranging support marriage equality has across the country. To view the banner ad and mini poster, visit Lambda Legal.

GET ENGAGED: Write to friends and family and help them understand why marriage matters to you

There are many ways you can get involved by helping win and defend marriage equality nationwide.

To read a sample letter you can write and send to family and friends, visit: <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=3171&view=page=280>

SPEECH: Winning Marriage Equality: The Road Ahead

eupdate14_text

Wol fson delivers the Cal Anderson Memorial Lecture at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, and calls for all of us to engage neighbors and fellow citizens in the personal and informational conversations they deserve – and trust that from that engagement will come marriage.

To read this speech, visit:
<http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=3886>

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People's Right to Marry, by Evan Wolfson

For more information about this great resource, visit:
<http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3470>

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

* Sign the Marriage Resolution:
"Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual choice, RESOLVED, the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of civil marriage."

To add your name to the long and distinguished list of supporters of Civil Marriage in America, visit: <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3508>

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Sign our Religious Endorsement:
Endorsements are only accepted from ordained clergy, professional religious educators, theologians, and staff of religious institutions.

To sign, visit: http://www.freedomtomarry.org/religious_institute.asp

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

SIGN-UP:
If you received this E-Update from a friend or family member and find it a useful resource on marriage equality, sign-up on the Freedom to Marry website to get E-Updates, visit: http://www.freedomtomarry.org/e_update.asp

Pass it on!

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*