

Freedom to Marry E-Update
Issue #15 | April 12, 2006

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1) A Note from Executive Director Evan Wolfson

Dear Friend --

As our country debates a variety of proposals on immigration, I am reminded of two other reasons I fight for marriage equality, as well as our stake in assuring humane and fair immigration policies.

First, denied the freedom to marry, same-sex couples are deprived of the family reunification goals and options that modern immigration law has generally favored. Gay people in binational relationships, or gay people seeking to live or remain in America, should not be forced to choose between their partner and their country, between remaining a citizen or becoming an "outlaw." Clearly, gay people have a direct stake in both immigration fairness and ending marriage discrimination.

And second, not just as a gay person, but as an American, I see the need to stand up against hostile or unfair policies. Like many Americans, I am the grandchild of immigrants. I believe in our country's historic promise of pluralism and welcome. I have grave concerns about punitive measures, which to my mind includes even a "guest worker" approach that, if not a speedy and reliable route to citizenship, would create a large group of disenfranchised, politically powerless second-class residents. We gay people are already experiencing a right-wing campaign to amend constitutions so as to deprive us, a minority, of access to the political process and deny us equal rights. The last thing this country needs is another such assault on other minorities.

One of America's greatest strengths is our pluralism and the great diversity of our citizenry. And historically, one of our most exploitable weaknesses has been our fear of "others," whether people of different races or religious beliefs, lesbian and gay couples and their families, immigrants, or foreigners. America is at its best, and its strongest, when we fulfill our commitment to equality and inclusion, and push past our discomfort with change or the unknown.

Not surprisingly, the forces leading the charge against gay Americans and our freedom to marry are many of the same pushing punitive and demeaning immigration legislation now. For gay people who are immigrants or who love an immigrant as a partner or family member, and for all of us as Americans, we must stand up for inclusion and equal rights for all.

-- 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:

- * Immigration Equality - <http://www.immigrationequality.org/>
- * Washington Post Article -

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/04/AR2006040401606.html>

* Letter to the Advocate - Marriage equality, justice in immigration go together - http://www.freedomtomarry.org/images/pdfs/press_releases/letter_advocate041106.pdf

* Resources - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3466>

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2) LANDSCAPE: Happy Anniversary!  
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This April marks the fifth year since the first legal marriages of gay and lesbian couples took place in the Netherlands, opening the doors for other nations with a commitment to equality for all to follow suit. Since then, Belgium, Canada, and Spain have joined the Netherlands in acknowledging the right of loving and committed same-sex couples to share in the institution of marriage with the same rules, responsibilities, and respect. Following a high court ruling, South Africa will become the next country to end discrimination in marriage later this year.

None of these countries have suffered a demise of morality, harm to other families, or social unrest. Rather, as Spain's Prime Minister explained, they recognized that basic fairness and the principle of equal treatment required ending the exclusion of these couples from marriage, rectified their existing statutes, and got on with life, leaving some families a bit stronger and, thus, the entire community a better off.

Less than equal – but certainly remarkable by the current standards of our country as it lags further and further behind – are the protections and responsibilities afforded same-sex couples and their kids in other countries worldwide, including many of our nation's closest military and economic allies. Countries offering civil partnerships or other measures virtually akin to, or on the road to, marriage itself include the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Israel, and even predominantly Roman Catholic Ireland.

Closer to home, our own Pedro Julio Serrano just completed an exciting trip to Puerto Rico, his homeland, earlier this month, participating in a whirlwind of events and media appearances on marriage equality and a pending non-discrimination bill. Puerto Rico's Legislature's Joint Commission for the Revision of the Civil Code voted to recommend a sweeping partnership measure for same-sex couples and their loved ones on the island.

LINKS:

* More - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3482>

* Spain's Prime Minister's speech - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=3065>

* The news in Europe - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3501>

* Pedro Julio Serrano - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=2876>

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3) ON THE HORIZON: Tax Time  
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With April 15th around the corner, our thoughts here at Freedom to Marry –along with the rest of the country–turn to taxes. Among many instances of discrimination that gay and lesbian couples face because of the denial of marriage are lack of access to the Social Security survivor benefits we paid for (we are not allowed to provide

them to our partners) and unequal inheritance taxes on a jointly owned home (married couples inherit from each other tax-free; same-sex couples cannot).

Even when states offer equal marriage rights, there remains an overlay of federal discrimination because of the so-called "Defense of Marriage Act" (DOMA). For instance, the conflict between Massachusetts's equality in marriage and federal discrimination makes the filing of taxes anything but routine for married gay and lesbian couples in the state, who have to prepare at least four returns: a joint filing in Massachusetts, then two individual filings with the federal government, and before all of this, a "phantom" federal tax return the IRS will never see, a joint married filing prepared solely to determine their state taxes, which are based on federal calculations.

Other federal tax penalties are just as disadvantageous and confusing. For example, if one partner gets domestic partner benefits at work—often limited to medical benefits—they are considered taxable income, while spousal benefits remain tax-free for married co-workers.

Marriage affects every area of life, from birth to death, with taxes in between -- and the discrimination falls harshly on families seeking to cope with the ups and downs of life. No taxation without representation was a rallying cry for the American Revolution, when a tax on tea sparked a flame of liberty. If unfairness is not your cup of tea, this April 15 Tax Day, speak out against discrimination in marriage.

LINKS:

- * More - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/search.asp?search=tax>
- * Gay.com's 2006 tax guide - <http://www.gay.com/business/article.html?sernum=1659&navpath=/channels/business/taxes>

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4) GET ENGAGED: Freedom and Equality for All  
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Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), a prospective 2008 presidential candidate, affirmed his support for the freedom to marry for gay and lesbian couples, saying that institutionalized discrimination has no place in our country's laws.

"My state now is considering a constitutional amendment that I will personally vote on about whether we want to enshrine in our constitution this form of discrimination," said Feingold in an interview with the Advocate, staking out a stand against the anti-gay measure heading to Wisconsin voters in November. "I think this is completely inconsistent with our state's progressive tradition."

"[T]his is one of the real cutting-edge issues in our society: whether we're going to be kind and decent to each other and be a community, or whether we're going to try to divide ourselves," Feingold continued. "To me this is a real test for our society." Feingold joins other governors and legislators across the country in opposing ant-gay amendments.

Although Feingold's public support for equal marriage rights is the first from a presidential contender (exceeding Gore's and Kerry's support for civil unions in earlier elections), he is by no means the only public servant to speak out on marriage equality. There are hundreds of local, state, and national elected officials who are also standing up for lesbian and gay couples, and their families, including our own voices of equality Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) and Mayor Rocky Anderson of Salt Lake City, Utah.

Find your state marriage equality organization through the Equality Federation, and learn where your representative stands and how you can work with them to win support for the freedom to marry.

LINKS:

- * Sen. Russell Feingold - <http://feingold.senate.gov/>
- * Action Wisconsin - <http://www.actionwisconsin.org/>
- * Congressman John Lewis - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=1053>
- * Mayor Rocky Anderson - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=3320>
- * Equality Federation - <http://www.equalityfederation.org/>

QUOTE:

"So down the road, when the white evangelical community calls us and says, 'We want to partner with you on marriage, we want to partner on family issues,' my first question will be: 'Where were you when 12 million of our brothers and sisters were about to be deported and 12 million families disenfranchised?'"

- Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST:

Most visited pages last week:

- * New York - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3550>
- * Evan Wolfson on TomPaine.com - http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/03/29/marriage_equality_moves_forward.php
- * 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>
- * Voices of Equality - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/voe.asp>

The WEDrock cd will be available in stores soon, but you can get it now with a donation! - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3623>

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

Wolfson 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>

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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>

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* 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>

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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

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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!

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