

Social Issues Still Count

Written by Harry R. Jackson
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Last week was a milestone in modern American political history. The election results (New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial races) and the battle over healthcare show that the nation's interest in social issues has not waned. New coalitions are forming around the pivotal legislative concerns of our day. From my vantage point, I am noticing a passion among individual citizens to engage in the political process - whether the topic is the economy, healthcare or gay marriage. The average citizen not only wants to express their opinion, but also has become savvy in engaging the powers that be. The insight of these new activists is shown in their ability to organize and get results. Over 20,000 people came to D.C. last week to voice their concerns about healthcare.

On Tuesday, I was personally focused on the battle for marriage in Maine. It's old news that heterosexual marriage proponents were outspent by their adversaries who sent thousands of volunteers to wage "political war" in the tiny state. Considered intensely liberal and the most likely place where same-sex marriage advocates had a chance of winning, the nation was shocked at the resounding defeat of gay marriage advocates.

Like California, Maine upheld the common sense definition of marriage after same-sex "marriage" was forced into law against the will of its people. The vote on Question 1 upheld marriage by the exact same margin as the vote on Proposition 8 (5 full percentage points), even though the pro-marriage campaign in Maine was outspent by millions.

The victory of traditional marriage proponents was very convincing with success in 75 percent of Maine's counties (12 of 16). More Maine residents voted for marriage (266,000+) than voted for Governor Baldacci (209,927) when he got elected in 2006. In Augusta, the state's capital, the definition of marriage was upheld by marriage advocates (53 percent to 46 percent).

The press repeatedly asked me what the implications were of the Maine marriage victory. First of all, the victory shows that the gay marriage activist projection of "inevitability" is false. The inevitability argument has been levied so that marriage defenders would quietly give up. Further, the inevitability argument has given many legislators cover, as they vehemently oppose the will of the people. State senators or city council members often have been led to believe that someday their stand will be seen as heroic instead of socially destructive. If the inevitability argument were correct, there would be no political consequences to voting based on pressure from powerful, well-financed gay marriage activists.

Fortunately for the nation, same-sex marriage is not a done deal. The concept is not gaining real ground among the common people. The famed Pew Research Center made the following observation last month, "An August 2009 ... survey finds that 53 percent oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally, compared with 39 percent who support same-sex marriage, numbers that are virtually unchanged over the past year."

The fact that the nation has not changed its mind about same-sex marriage during the last year is very revealing. Same-sex marriage advocates have made a lot of headway during the last few years in convincing a small number of powerfully positioned judges and legislators that same-sex marriage is a civil rights issue. Their arguments among the elite have been effective, while the average citizen is not willing to endorse changing the institution of marriage as an expression of civil rights.

This is especially obvious when one considers the history of the Maine same-sex marriage advocacy efforts. Legalization of same-sex marriage has been intensely pursued for at least five years in this state that is bordered by Canada and Massachusetts, both who have legalized same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage foot soldiers put everything they had into their effort - they developed 20 field offices manned by 30 paid staffers and raised substantially more money than traditional marriage advocates. Their efforts were supported by both national and local grassroots support. The pro same-sex marriage team was sophisticated and well trained. The hallmark of their sophistication was that they recruited an elaborate network of phone volunteers that interacted with Maine citizens, thinking that a personal sales call would close the deal. Despite the time, money and energy spent, Maine residents did not buy the marriage pitch. Ironically, exactly the same percentage number of voters opposed same-sex marriage in Maine as the national research said opposed it – 53 percent.

Specifically what does this mean for the D.C. struggle concerning marriage? It's no secret that the city council has vowed to act without consulting the citizens. Their reasoning is simple. They have read the same polls everyone else has, yet they are so beholding to gay marriage lobbyists that they must make this issue their most pressing policy concern ...more pressing than healthcare, the economy, the horrible disorganization of D.C. public schools and a host of other ills that plague the nation's capital. The council realizes that if a vote on same-sex marriage will not fly in Maine with its predominately white, liberal residents, there is no chance for it to prosper in the District of Columbia where 56 percent of its citizens are black.

In the near term, gay activists have already started attacking President Obama because he did not come to their aid in Maine. This is an unwise move because of the president's openness to the civil rights claims of gays. Further, it was their strategy that failed in Maine and no one else is to blame.

The pro traditional marriage groups in D.C. are encouraged by the grassroots efforts which have led to reversing a bad law that was passed by an out-of-control group of legislators. They will undoubtedly attempt to increase voter registration in the District, recalling willful council members and electing new political leaders. Pro marriage groups in D.C., under the banner of the Web site, Stand4MarriageDC.com, have already built one of the strongest, most diverse religious coalitions in the city's history. Last summer a large number of secular and community leaders also awakened to the call to stop the advance of same-sex marriage.

It may take a year or so, but there will be a vote to recognize only marriages between a man and a woman in Washington, D.C. When that vote occurs the people will reject same-sex marriage - once and for all.

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