

Vote no on Amendment One

The May 8 primary vote on Amendment One offers an opportunity for all North Carolinians, liberal, centrist and conservative, to oppose this measure as an invasive attempt to shape not only our lives now, but the direction of North Carolina's future.

The reasons for opposing this amendment – which would alter the state Constitution to reflect that *“marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State”* – are obvious, no matter one's beliefs on same-sex unions. In favor of marriage rights for homosexuals? Vote no. Opposed? Again, no problem: Same-sex marriage is already illegal in this state, and probably will be for some time. This amendment would do nothing except enshrine disapproval of homosexual relationships as official policy – in our state's foundational charter.

My stubborn libertarianism finds this unacceptable. I've lived here all but two of my 37 years; I've watched public opinion on gay rights shift, ever so slowly. But it's shifted; whatever one's feelings on homosexuals, it's no longer acceptable to discriminate against them in the workplace, bully them in schools, beat them up in the streets. By any measure, we've come a long way.

Gay marriage, though, is a different matter. Though the amendment applies only to state-recognized marriages – i.e., no religious organization would be compelled to recognize a same-sex union – the word marriage has angered Christians who believe that sacrament to be ordained by God alone, something man shouldn't attempt to alter. I understand their frustration; a man who's told by society to accept something he thinks God scorns is a man who's going to put up one hell of a fight against it.

Since the Republican-controlled Legislature put this amendment on the ballot, irate liberals have contended the rights of a minority shouldn't be up for public vote. But that's what's happening now; so it's time for people to leave the sidelines, and take their chosen stand. North Carolina has to decide what kind of state it wants to be: a state that welcomes the contributions of all as true equals, or one that permanently designates a minority for second-class citizenship, appeasing those who hold their own notion of what God wants for his children.

The gay marriage movement has frequently been its own worst enemy. Stunts such as San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's illegal issue of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2004 ultimately did nothing but provoke the 2008 passage of Proposition 8 (outlawing gay marriage in California). In the past I've been angered by my liberal friends' smug contentions that same-sex marriage is an inevitability, to be won “one funeral at a time” rather than working to win their opponents' hearts and minds. (The myriad problems with the analogies drawn between

the fight for gay rights and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, against the objections of many veterans of the Southern freedom struggle, shall be left aside for now.)

These arguments are legitimate, but ultimately irrelevant. In the end, North Carolina belongs to all who live here, gay and straight, liberal and conservative, God-fearing and otherwise. And in the year 2012, gays are not going back into the closet. It's one thing to be uncomfortable with gay relationships; it's quite another to chisel "No Gays Wanted Here" on stone tablets affixed with the state seal. This amendment is an attempt to short-circuit debate and discussion, to make it more difficult to change public policy if, in the future, North Carolinians decide officially sanctioned discrimination has gone on long enough.

Amendment One proponents frequently make their case by characterizing marriage as a sacred institution. I completely agree; my parents' 42-year (and counting) marriage was a powerful force in shaping my existence as a responsible man, and the seriousness with which I set about selecting a wife of my own. Having been married to a wonderful woman for the past 2 1/2 years, and having experienced the joy we've found in each other, I find myself unwilling to deny that right to happiness to anyone else, just because they're born hard-wired to love others of the same sex as themselves.

God may or may not agree. But it's not something the state should take sides on. On May 8, vote no.

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