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Editor's note

Fear and loathing in the Carolinas

Same-sex marriage — according to so many media sources — is taking the U.S. like "wildfire."

I suppose when you realize prior to Feb. 12 in San Francisco, no official government agency had ever handed out marriage certificates in this country, and you look at the handful of developments in New Mexico, New York and Oregon, it might look like pretty scary to your average dyed-in-the-wool ultra-conservative.

With such an abundance of those types in both Carolinas, it comes as no surprise that South Carolina is busy at work trying to pass a discriminatory anti-gay marriage bill that would deny any benefits to gay couples married in other states.

The bill, initiated by Reps. Gloria Haskins (R-Greenville) and Marty Coates (R-Florence) states flatly, "Any marriage entered into by persons of the same sex in any other jurisdiction must be considered and treated in all respects as having no legal force or effect in this State and must not be recognized by this State."

"This in no way violates an individual's civil rights," Haskins told the *Beaufort Gazette*. "I'm not intending to tell them what to do. I'm just reinforcing what our public policy is."

When asked whether her opinion of the proposal would change if the words "of the same sex" were replaced by "of Latino descent," Haskins reportedly became flustered and replied, "That's comparing apples to marbles."

The *Gazette* columnist — Andy Brack — offered his summarization of Haskin's rhetoric:

"If the proposal would have said, for example, any marriages of blacks or Latinos or Irish or WASPS outside South Carolina shouldn't be recognized inside the state, citizen groups, the NAACP, the Christian Coalition, the ACLU and the like would be screaming about the state's backwardness. Just because it targets gays doesn't make the proposal nondiscriminatory."

South Carolina is one of 38 states that already bans gay marriages. It is one of 17 that, out of fear and ignorance, feels that it is necessary to consider measures to close any

loopholes that might remain in that ban.

North Carolina has



already beat its southern neighbor to the punch line: according to the N.C. Constitution, marriage is explicitly defined to be between a man and a woman and same-sex marriages granted outside the state are already not recognized.

Community leaders in North Carolina's only liberal (I happen to like that word) enclave — Chapel Hill and Carrboro — have taken significant steps toward recognizing same-sex couples in the past. In 1994, Carrboro became the first Southern town to enact domestic partnership legislation. Chapel Hill followed in 1995. Benefits were extended to the domestic partners of government employees of each town. Since 1994, Carrboro has registered 23 domestic partnerships. In Chapel Hill, where non-residents also can apply, 69 partnerships have been registered.

Meanwhile, North Carolina's most sizable city — Charlotte — and the largest city between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, Ga., continues to sit by quietly, seemingly unable to offer something as minor as benefits for same-sex partners of city employees.

Mayor Pat McCrory has made it clear he opposes the very idea of such a thing. Even though other North Carolina towns have proved it's a no-brainer, McCrory prefers to couch his response to the issue in fiscal rhetoric, though it is my own personal opinion that his feelings are mired in ignorance and religious beliefs.

According to an article in the *Charlotte Observer* a gay city employee who served on a nine-member committee that explored the possibilities of benefits for same-sex partners of city employees, Charlotte is taking a very "provincial" approach to an "amazingly easy" issue.

"I suppose that it's necessary in Charlotte because Charlotte's a really conservative town," Tom Warshauer told the *Observer*. "People are really afraid of this issue in this political climate."

Sometimes it's really painful being queer in this part of the country — especially when you think about all the fear and loathing directed at you from government officials — individuals that you think would be educated and enlightened.

Despite the desire to flee for greener pastures, I think it's important that we stay the course and stand our ground.

Carolina gays and lesbians will not be trounced upon. We will not take this polite intolerance from conservative officials at state, county and city governments quietly and simply hang our heads in sorrow.

We are here. We are not going away. Eventually, we will prevail.

— David Moore
Editor

BUSH PROPOSES CODIFICATION OF MARRIAGE

