

Missouri voters back measure to ban gay marriage

State first to pass such measure

by Sue Daniels

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — Voters in Missouri on Aug. 3 overwhelmingly approved a proposal to amend the state's constitution to ban gay marriage, officially making the state the first in the nation to do so.



Vicky Hartzler of the Coalition to Protect Marriage in Missouri was at the forefront of the fight to insure successful passage of the country's first complete ban on gay marriage.

The proposal had garnered about 70 percent of the votes, with much of the support coming from



conservative rural area, according to the Missouri Secretary of State's office.

The Midwestern state already has laws barring same-sex marriage, but grassroots activists have lobbied for stronger "protection" for traditional marriage in the wake of a decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Court late last year that opened the door to same-sex unions in that state.

"We're very gratified and encouraged by the overwhelming support for traditional marriage," said Vicky Hartzler, spokeswoman for the Coalition to Protect Marriage in Missouri.

"People understand we have a wise public policy in Missouri and want to protect traditional marriage from possible

legal challenges. People don't want to see in Missouri what happened in Massachusetts."

The outcome in Missouri was not a surprise — polls had shown the measure was likely to pass.

"Gays and lesbians didn't ask for this fight; it was brought to them," said Doug Gray, campaign manager for the Constitution Defense League, which opposed the amendment.

Despite the apparent overwhelming support for the measure, Gray said opponents still felt they had accomplished something. "We educated a lot of people around the state," he said. "It's an ongoing battle."

Although Missouri is the first state to outlaw gay marriage, 40 other states already have laws outlining their refusal to recognize same-sex marriages in some form or another.

The new law — in response to the Massachusetts ruling earlier this year that declared barring gay couples from marriage was unconstitutional — is intended to limit the powers of state courts from overturning this refusal.

The state constitutional amendment is similar to the national amendment supported up by U.S. President George W. Bush.

He had hoped that the amendment would see the country's legal foundations changed so as to limit marriage to heterosexual couples.

The federal amendment was blocked by the U.S. Senate, after an outcry from both civil rights groups — who believe same-sex couples should be allowed to marry — and conservatives that were unhappy with the Constitution being altered.

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