

NC Constitutional Amendment to Ban Gay Marriage on the Ballot in May 2012

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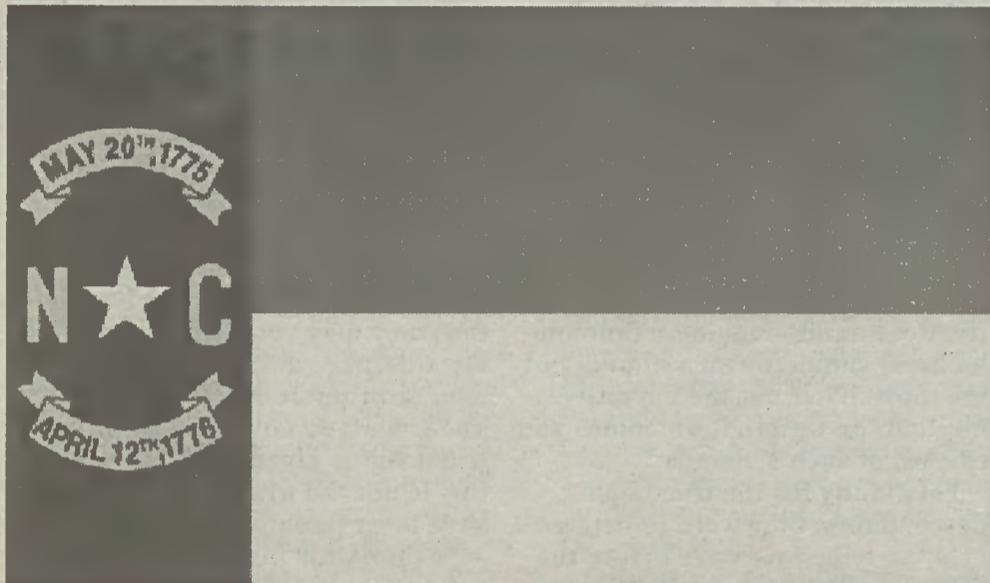


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On Monday September 12th, the NC House voted 75-42 to let North Carolina voters decide if a ban of same-sex marriage should be written into the state constitution. The bill then passed 30-16 in the NC Senate the following day. The proposed amendment would add the following language to Article XIV: "Marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State. This section does not prohibit a private party from entering into contracts with another private party; nor does this section prohibit courts from adjudicating the rights of private parties pursuant to such contracts." This amendment will be placed on the ballot in the May 2012 primary elections where voters will be able to decide if they are for or against a "constitutional amendment to provide that marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State" (the actual language that the bill

states will be put on the ballot).

The National Conference of State Legislatures (ncsl.org) reports that North Carolina is currently one of thirty states with a statute in place that defines marriage as between one man and one woman. If this amendment is passed, North Carolina could become the 31st state with constitutional language defining marriage (joining the other southeastern states including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee and Virginia).

Since the House's approval to send the amendment to voters, there has been ongoing debate about the issue. Governor Perdue has declined public comment, but according to her press secretary Chris Mackey she was influential in having the vote moved to the primary rather than the general elections: "The Governor didn't want the General Assembly to waste its time considering this unnecessary amendment at all. Moving the amendment to the May ballot removed ONE of the Governor's ob-

jections, which was that the Republicans were using the constitutional amendment process to tilt the 2012 general election." (WRAL, 9/21, "Stam: Perdue behind ballot date")

Other government officials have been very vocal about the issue since it was passed through the legislature. CNN quotes Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger as saying, "We think the people of this state – not judges, bureaucrats, or politicians – should define marriage, which I personally believe should be between one man and one woman. We look forward to eight months of healthy debate before voters decide this issue at the polls." (CNN, 9/13, "NC Senate approves...") On September 21st, this healthy debate continued as UNC Law School hosted a debate between House Majority Leader Paul Stam and Minority Whip Rick Glazier in which they argued the constitutionality and legal merits of the proposed amendment. WRAL news reports that Stam argued that "all persons are created equal, but that doesn't mean three people can claim to be married....The question is, if there are going to be limits, what are they." Glazier countered this argument by saying, "If we're really concerned about the protection of marriage, maybe we ought to do something about domestic violence and child abuse and poverty because I think they far more affect marriage than the gay couple down the street." (WRAL, 9/21, "Gay marriage amendment debate continues")

While arguing the legal dimensions of the proposed amendment has been an important aspect of this debate, others have focused on the amendment's individual impact on North Carolina citizens. Senator Josh Stein (who represented the

Meredith College's NC Senate district [16]) voted against the amendment, and CNN reports that he urged his fellow senators and voters to know that "most of us have gay neighbors, co-workers, friends and family members....Know that if you vote for this amendment, you will cause them pain." (CNN, 9/13, "NC Senate approves...")

Meredith students also have strong feelings about the proposed amendment. Current vice president of Meredith's chapter of Spectrum, sophomore Ariel Nikas, says that she thinks that "the politicians were allocating time inefficiently when they chose to write an amendment on something already illegal in North Carolina. There is currently no marriage equality here, without this bill. I feel like it will alienate a large group of people that make North Carolina interesting and diverse. The LGBT community members here are citizens as well and they deserve equal rights." Sophomore Michelle Maiden also shared in Nikas' disapproval of the amendment: "This amendment is a blatant act of discrimination. I am ashamed that not only do I live in a state that is not open to gay marriage now, but a state that is trying to close its doors to the LGBT community forever. I hope people in North Carolina realize the hardships they are putting our friends and members of our community through if they pass this amendment."

With the vote still seventh months away there is plenty of time for individuals to voice their opinions in support of, against or indifferent to the proposed amendment. If you want to see your opinion in print, send an editorial to the Herald: herald@email.meredith.edu.

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