

Democrats Capture House, Arizona Becomes First State To Reject Gay-Marriage Ban Amendment

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by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff

Democrats swept the House of Representatives on Tuesday, and Arizona became the first state where voters rejected a bid to ban same same-sex marriage in its constitution.

Amendments

Twenty-six states have passed amendments to their constitutions to block same-sex couples from marrying. On Tuesday proposed amendments were on the ballot in eight states.

The victory in Arizona comes after a tough fight by Arizona Together, a group formed to oppose the amendment.

"This outcome speaks volumes about Arizona's commitment to families," said Kyrsten Sinema, chair of Arizona Together.

"Arizona voters saw through Prop 107's rhetoric and knew that the intent of 107 was to take away domestic partner benefits from thousands of Arizona families."

Voters in Virginia, Wisconsin, South Carolina, South Dakota, Idaho, Tennessee and Colorado, however approved amending their constitutions to ban same-sex marriage.

In Colorado the vote to ban gay marriage was not unexpected, but most observers believed the state was likely to approve a second ballot measure that would have allowed civil unions and domestic partner rights.

Called Proposition I, it was approved by the legislature earlier this year but must be ratified by the electorate. It would create a domestic partner registry and give same-sex couples many of the rights of marriage.

The constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage was undertaken by religious conservatives who collected enough signatures to have it placed on the ballot. One of those religious leaders was the Rev. Ted Haggard who was forced out of his Colorado mega church after admitting he sought the services of a Denver male prostitute.

Polls prior to election day had shown that proposed amendments in Virginia and Wisconsin were in danger, but on Tuesday voters passed the measures with little difficulty.

More than 200 noted attorneys in Virginia, including Gov. Tim Kaine, have voiced their opposition. Business groups and several chambers of commerce, mainly in more liberal northern Virginia have also come out in opposition, saying the amendment would impede companies from attracting the best workers.

Seventeen former presidents of the Wisconsin Bar Association announced their opposition to the proposed amendment because of its far reaching consequences. In June four former Wisconsin governors - three Democrats and one Republican - issued an open call to reject the proposed amendment. And Wisconsin's biggest unions also have announced their opposition.

Congress

Democrats swept the GOP out of the House on Tuesday but two seats hold the balance of power in the Senate. Democrats would need to win both to secure control of the Senate.

The two openly gay members of Congress who sought re-election: Barney Frank (D-Mass) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc) had little difficulty retaining their seats

Gay foe Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) was trounced by Democratic challenger Bob Casey Jr. Santorum was one of the most outspoken supporters of the federal amendment to ban same-sex marriage, but it was his support for Pres. Bush and the war in Iraq that led to his downfall.

Casey beat the one time presidential hopeful by a two-to-one margin.

“We are thrilled, ecstatic and overjoyed that Rick Santorum has been thrashed at the polls. His extreme and gratuitous homophobia will no longer pollute the Senate. Good riddance,” said Matt Foreman, Executive Director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

The author of the original proposed amendment in the House, Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo) is locked in a tight race with Democratic challenger Angie Paccione.

Senator Ted Kennedy (D), who has pushed legalization to add sexuality to list of categories under the federal hate crime law, won re-election from Massachusetts. Rep. Marty Meehan (D) was unopposed in his Massachusetts district. Meehan was the author of legislation that would repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell".

“Republicans lost this election because independent voters abandoned the GOP,” said Log Cabin Executive Vice President Patrick Sammon. “Social conservatives drove the GOP’s agenda the last several years. Their divisive agenda alienated the mainstream Republicans and independents who determined this election’s outcome. Social conservatives should take responsibility for this loss.”

“Democrats didn’t win because of anything they stood for. They won because of Republican mistakes,” said Sammon.

Governors

Democrats regained the majority of governorships, taking back the statehouses in Colorado, Massachusetts, Maryland, Ohio and New York on Tuesday and holding onto a vulnerable seat in Michigan

Three gubernatorial races were closely watched by LGBT activists: Florida, California and New York.

Elliot Spitzer (D) had little difficulty winning the New York race. The Democrat who had been Attorney General has been a longtime supporter of equal marriage and has voiced that support throughout the campaign. Last month in a speech to about 1,000 people at the Empire State

Pride Agenda's annual dinner he pledged that if elected he would author legislation and send it to the Legislature.

In Florida Charlie Crist (R) easily won the Florida gubernatorial race. Throughout the campaign was dogged by questions about his sexuality. The rumors that he is gay began several years ago but intensified after he began the race to replace Jeb Bush who is leaving because of term limits.

Early in the campaign when asked about the rumors a radio show Crist insisted he is straight. Nevertheless, appearing last month on WFTL, a South Florida news-talk station, independent gubernatorial candidate Max Linn said it is common knowledge in Tallahassee that Crist is gay.

In California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger won re-election.

Schwarzenegger has said he is not opposed to same-sex marriage but believes it should be decided by the courts or by plebiscite. Last year he vetoed a bill that would have allowed same-sex marriage in the state. The issue is still before the courts but his Democratic opponent, Phil Angelides, has said he would have signed the marriage bill.

State Houses

Two state house races are gaining particular interest where gay candidates are running.

Patricia Todd ran unopposed as a Democrat in Alabama. After winning the primary she was challenged by the loser on technical grounds. After winning the challenge Todd was threatened by the state GOP which organized a write-in campaign.

In Minnesota, state Sen. Paul Koering (R) narrowly won the GOP nomination for re-election after coming out. Koering announced he is gay after voting against a proposed constitutional amendment to prevent gay marriage in the state. Early returns show him ahead in the heavily Republican district.

Judiciary

Lesbian attorney Virginia Linder is running for the Oregon Supreme Court. She has the backing of the state bar association and a judicial group but is trailing in the polls. If she is elected she would join gay Supreme Court justice Rives Kistler.