

New York could be fifth state to legalize same-sex marriage



Even after voters struck down California's same-sex marriage law, several more states have legalized it or are considering doing so.

Teacher or group leader: This story is not covered on the Basic Level. If you wish to present this story, please use the General Level. Otherwise, go to the next story.

GENERAL

As you probably know, the issue of same-sex marriage — giving men the right to marry men and women the right to marry women — is an issue about which many people feel strongly. In recent years, several states have tackled the issue in their courts, legislatures, or by having people vote on it. Massachusetts, in 2004, and Connecticut, in 2008, gave same-sex voters the right to marry. California legalized it in 2008, but the law was overturned by voters in the November elections. But just in the last few weeks, two more states, Iowa and Vermont, have legalized same-sex marriage. Now, New York looks as though it may be the fifth state to make same-sex marriage legal. Earlier this month, New York Governor David Paterson said he will propose a “marriage equality” bill for his state’s legislature. Mr. Paterson says same-sex marriage is a civil rights issue, meaning, it is a basic right that everyone should have. “The time

has come to bring marriage equality to the state of New York,” he said. **Do you agree that the right to marry should be a civil right? Why or why not?**

The nation remains very divided on the subject of same-sex marriage, although some polls show that the percent of people that accept the idea is slowly going up. Some people believe that while same-sex couples should not be able to get married in a church or have the full rights of married couples, they should have some sort of rights legally as a couple. This is sometimes called a civil union. An April poll by CBS showed that six in 10 Americans think some sort of legal recognition should be given to same-sex couples, and one-third support gay marriage outright. In 2004, only 22 percent supported gay marriage. **What do you think? Do you think same-sex marriage should be legal? If not, do you think same-sex couples should get some rights through civil unions?** NEXT

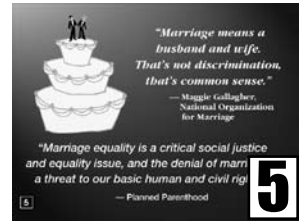
ADVANCED

Last November, as the nation was celebrating the election of its first African American president, advocates of same-sex marriage were suffering a huge letdown: the passage of California’s Proposition 8, which struck down the state’s landmark gay-marriage law. **Were you surprised by this voting result?** The vote cast doubt on the legality of thousands of marital unions. While some celebrated, mass protests took place across the state. Lawsuits have sent the issue back to the state’s high court, which heard arguments in March on whether Proposition 8 was constitutional. They are expected to rule within 90 days. **Do you think Proposition 8 was unconstitutional? Why or why not? How do you think the California Supreme Court will rule?**

Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, momentum seems to be growing to legalize same-sex marriage. Just in the last few weeks, two more states, Iowa and Vermont, have legalized same-sex marriage and in mid-April, New York Governor David

Paterson proposed a bill that would make gay marriage legal in his state. Paterson said he will send a “marriage equality” bill through the state legislature this year, in order to build on the momentum generated earlier this month by the legalization of gay marriage in Iowa and Vermont. The Democratic governor is attempting to cast same-sex marriage as a civil rights issue, comparing it to the 19th century battle for abolition. “The time has come to bring marriage equality to the state of New York,” he said. **Do you think the civil rights analogy is a good one? Why or why not?** Although the nation remains greatly divided on the issue, some polls show the percent that accept the idea of gay marriage is creeping up. One poll showed that six in 10 Americans think some sort of legal recognition should be given to same-sex couples, and one-third support gay marriage outright. In 2004, only 22 percent supported gay marriage. **Do you think Americans are becoming somewhat more accepting of gay marriage? If so, why?** NEXT

New York could be fifth state to legalize same-sex marriage (cont'd)



Those against same-sex marriage tend to see it as a threat to the traditional family, while those for it see it as an essential right.

GENERAL

What do you think of the first quote here?

Do you agree that banning same-sex marriage is not discrimination? Why or why not? As you might imagine, those who are strongly against same-sex marriage tend to be more conservative and traditional. They often argue against same-sex marriage on religious grounds. Some of them say that same-sex marriage is a threat to the traditional marriages between men and women and that it would cause further breakdown in the American family. **Do you agree or disagree with this argument?** The group led by the woman in the first quote claims that same-sex marriage is wrong because every child needs to have one female parent and one male parent. "Do we want to teach the next generation that one-half of humanity — either mothers or fathers — are ... unimportant?" **What do you think of this argument?**

What do you think of the second quote here? Do you think that the right to marry is a basic human right? Why or why not? Some people think that each state should be able to make its own laws regarding same-sex marriage. Others think that the issue should be decided in the courts. Meanwhile, more than 10 states are also considering proposals that would extend marriage-type benefits to same-sex couples. Washington state has just approved a bill that grants same-sex couples all the rights of marriage, without calling it that. **Do you think that would be a good answer? If you could vote on this issue in your state, how would you vote — in favor of same-sex marriage, in favor of civil unions or some other kind of legal relationship for same-sex couples, or would you grant no rights to same-sex couples?** END

ADVANCED

What do you think of the first quote here?

Do you agree that maintaining the traditional definition of marriage is not discriminatory to same-sex couples? Why or why not? Opponents of same-sex marriage often use arguments based on religion, and also claim that gay marriage would have a harmful effect on families. They see gay marriage overall as a threat to heterosexual marriage. A group called the National Organization for Marriage, whose president is quoted at the top of the screen, has launched a TV ad called "Gathering Storm," which shows gay marriage as a threat to family life and the rights of heterosexuals. The group has been criticized for taking real-life events and showing them out of context, yet it stands by the ad and says that gay marriage ignores the fact that children need a parent of each gender. **Do you agree? Why or why not?**

The second quote here puts forth the idea of a different kind of threat. These people say that to deny roughly ten

percent of the population the right to marry violates their civil rights and goes against the Constitution. **Do you think their point is valid? Why or why not?** Some people think that each state should be able to make its own laws regarding same-sex marriage. Others think that the issue should be decided in the courts. Many Americans approve of civil unions, which give same-sex couples many rights within their own states, but which are not classified as marriages. Civil unions also do not allow for federal marriage benefits, such as Social Security. While bills permitting same-sex marriage are pending in just a handful of states, more than 10 states are also considering proposals that would extend marriage-type benefits to gay and lesbian couples. Washington State has just approved a bill that grants same-sex couples all the rights of marriage, without calling it that. **Do you support same-sex marriages? Do you support civil unions? Where should this issue be decided?** END