

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Yea or nay to gay?

Students face off on issue racing to the forefront of national politics: homosexual marriage

By Amber Gray
THE BATTALION

During the last U.S. presidential election, Chris Smith was shocked to hear his mother oppose Al Gore for his beliefs supporting same sex marriages.

"My mother thought by allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry, that her own vows to my father would be less meaningful," said Smith a sophomore psychology major and former president of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Aggies organization. "I just couldn't believe it. There's only one way to way make a marriage less meaningful, and that is by not fully giving yourself to that someone."

With the issue of gay marriage sparking debate across the nation, many students at Texas A&M are taking strong political stands on the subject.

"Knowing that (President George W.) Bush very strongly supports the passing of an amendment to ban gay marriages, I will vote for anyone but him," Smith said.

Democratic candidate, John Kerry said he is open to civil unions; however, he opposes gay marriages and the amendment, which leaves the door open for states to consider civil unions for gay and lesbian couples.

"I have nothing against anyone who is homosexual," said Andrea Waltisperger, a senior journalism major. "However, I think there is too much at stake to allow homosexuals to take their relationships to a legal level of marriage."

According to a recent Gallup poll, 51 percent of Americans are in favor of a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman.

"Banning marriages between homosexual couples will prevent an uproar of further debate on similar communal issues," Waltisperger said.

For the gay community to win the battle as quickly as possible, two perspectives need to be considered, Smith said. One perspective, he said, needs to be from a legal standpoint, writing letters and organizing protests, while the other needs to be on a more personal level.

"We can sustain a much heavier victory by going up to individuals and building a relationship with them," Smith said.

"Then we can help people to realize that a ban on gay marriages is wrong."

While Bush stands by his decision to support the amendment, Smith said he believes the president does not understand the viewpoints on the opposite side of the spectrum.

"I understand Bush's point of view; I used to have that same one," Smith said. "However, he doesn't understand my point of

view or where the gay community is coming from, and I definitely do not believe we should be ruled by that type of person."

Bush's critics feel his intense focus on the controversial amendment is a diversion to keep negative issues about his presidency out of the spotlight.

"I believe he is trying to get re-elected. So, he chose a topic that would push Republicans' hot buttons and get people to overlook his mistakes in the war and with the military," Smith said.

According to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, people opposed gay marriage by more than a 2-1 margin; however, they placed it 21st out of 22 topics they deemed priority.

"I believe this is a minor issue, one that doesn't affect a majority of the people," said Ryan Brus, a junior journalism major. "We need to be focused on the issues of war and economy where people's lives and welfare are at stake."

Although it is easy to recognize that there is dedicated support for a constitutional ban on same sex marriages, activists argue Bush is trying to write discrimination into one of our nation's founding documents.

"I, personally, do not believe Bush is trying to write in discrimination," Brus said. "I believe he is just trying to clarify that marriage is between a man and a woman."

On the other hand, people in the gay community believe much differently.

"People are underestimating marriage these days," Smith said. "Marriage can be so much more than a man and a woman together to procreate; it can be about pledging your life to someone else."

With four states that have already banned same sex marriages and 14 more trying to amend their state constitutions to do so, most gay rights activists believe the marriage licenses in California were a great stepping stone.

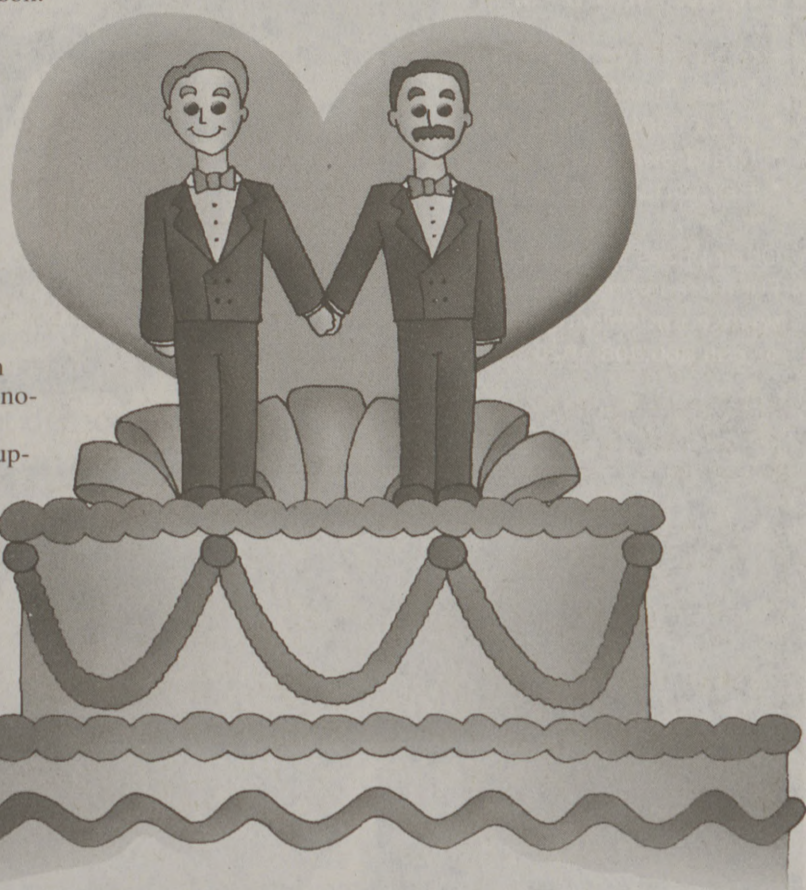
"Just when the gay community thought they had achieved a victory in San Francisco, Bush fires back with an amendment to ban gay marriages," Smith said.

Smith said he believes that the amendment brought beneficial developments encouraging gay rights.

"People are getting more involved," said Smith, "This is getting people who were on the fence before to start doing something about it now."

Although Brus supports Bush and the amendment, he believes the fight is a lost cause.

"The way society is moving toward today, I don't believe the



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amendment is worth fighting for," Brus said. "Within the next 20 to 30 years, this will be a dead issue, and I believe all states will be allowing such marriages."

Smith said he cannot see this issue turning out any other way except for gay and lesbian couples receiving the right to marry.

"Denying gays to marry brings up too many assumptions about homosexuality being wrong and sinful, and that their love isn't good enough, which defines those people as second-class citizens," Smith said. "Eventually people are going to realize that doesn't jive with the Constitution and the American ideal that all men are created equal."

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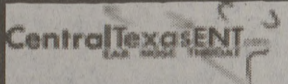
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