

Obama Remarks Spark Gay-Marriage Debate

BY DAVID CRARY
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — From the left and the right, rival sides in the gay-marriage debate claimed they would reap Election Day benefits from President Barack Obama's long-awaited declaration that he supports same-sex couples' right to wed.

For some gays, however, the politics were secondary to an emotional embrace of what they viewed as history in the making.

"Wow — that was wow," said Rodney Mondor of Portland, Maine, after hearing the news. He has lived with his partner for 13 years and is raising a 12-year-old son in a state that will be voting in November on whether to legalize same-sex marriage.

Gay-marriage supporters said Obama's pronouncement on Wednesday would galvanize legions of progressive voters who had grown impatient with the president's self-described "evolving" on one of the nation's most divisive social issues.

"There are, no doubt, some places where it will hurt him, and it may change his Electoral College strategy," said Richard Socarides, a former Clinton White House adviser on gay rights. "But ultimately it's a big plus for him — it highlights his willingness to tackle tough issues in a thoughtful but ultimately decisive way."

Opponents of gay marriage depicted Obama as bowing to gay-rights pressure, and predicted his new stance on marriage would jeopardize his re-election chances.

"President Obama has now made the definition of marriage a defining issue in the presidential contest, especially in swing states like Ohio, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida and Nevada," said Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage.

While six states have legalized gay marriage, and three more could do so this year, 30 states — including North Carolina on Tuesday — have passed constitutional amendments limiting marriage to unions of a man and a woman.

In Ohio, the head of a conservative group that approved such an amendment in 2004, predicted a backlash that would hurt Obama.

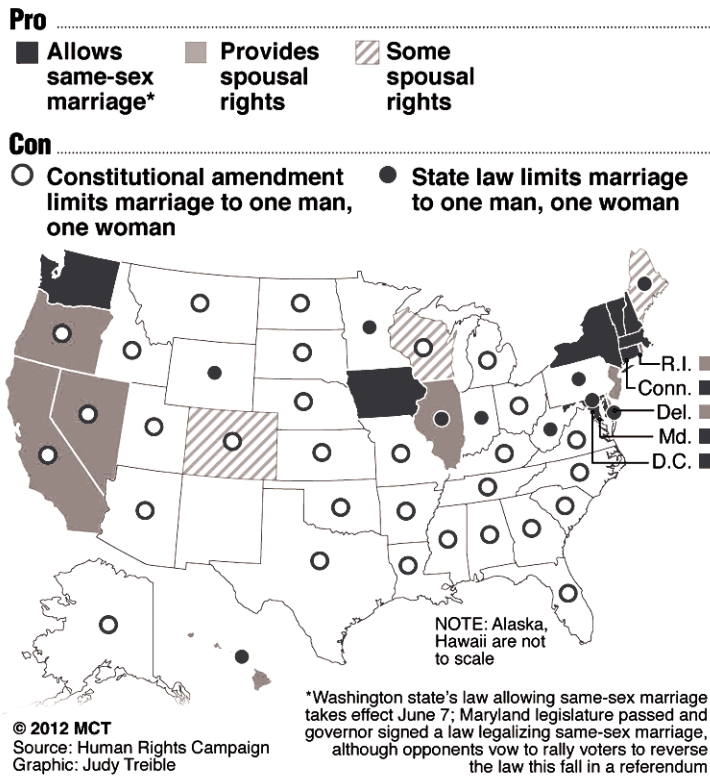
"He's going to lose Ohio and he's going to lose all the states that are huge on this issue," said Phil Burress, president of Citizens for Community Values. He advised Obama's presumptive Republican rival, Mitt Romney, to seize on the issue and campaign hard against gay marriage.

Chris Seelbach, elected last year as Cincinnati's first openly gay city councilman, suggested that Obama might lose some votes with his declaration, but will gain others.

"It will energize some of the people who have been waiting a long time for this and have been

Same-sex couple laws by state

The range of state laws on the subject of same-sex couples:



disappointed," he said. "Some of us are extremely proud today and ready to do whatever we can, do 120 percent, to get him re-elected."

In addition to Maine, gay marriage may be on the Nov. 6 ballot in three other states.

Minnesota voters will be asked to decide on a ban-gay-marriage amendment similar to those in other states. In Maryland and Washington state, opponents of same-sex marriage are circulating petitions on behalf of proposed ballot measures that would overturn laws passed earlier this year to legalize same-sex marriage.

Zach Silk of Washington United

for Marriage, a coalition that supports the gay marriage law, said Obama's remarks were "an enormous boost for us."

"It changes the way that the conversation will take place in the state," Silk said. "We expect voters in Washington will have a similar sort of evolution and similar sort of journey."

But a leader of the rival campaign said Obama's comments will boost efforts to overturn the gay-marriage law.

"This will galvanize and energize our folks," said Joseph Backholm, executive director of the Family Policy Institute of Washing-

ton. "This will help us make the case that national forces, including the president, are getting behind this effort to redefine marriage in Washington state."

Similar comments came from a leader of the Minnesota campaign to pass the amendment banning gay marriage.

"President Obama's statement demonstrates why marriage needs to be protected and put in the state constitution where politicians can't get at it," said Chuck Darrell, spokesman for Minnesotans for Marriage.

The spokeswoman for the pro-gay-marriage side, Kate Brickman of Minnesotans United for All Families, said Obama's pronouncement would be an asset.

"Obviously we're very pleased," she said. "If this sparks more conversations, that is a really great thing."

Reactions to Obama's remarks pervaded Facebook and Twitter.

Among the VIP's chiming in was Chai Feldblum, an openly gay member of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She said in a tweet: "Just listened to my President affirm my right to get married to the love of my life."

From New York City, Mayor Michael Bloomberg called the decision "a major turning point in the history of American civil rights." He said the move is "a testament to the president's convictions."

Conversely, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, called Obama's decision "deeply saddening."

"I pray for the President every day, and will continue to pray that he and his administration act justly to uphold and protect marriage as the union of one man and one woman," Dolan said in a statement.

Pilot Who Helped Fly Crippled Jet In 1989 Dies

CHICAGO (AP) — Airline pilot Denny Fitch was hitching a ride home on a DC-10 in 1989 when he heard an explosion somewhere in the back of the jet. He soon made his way to the cockpit to see if the crew needed help.

Inside, he found three men desperately trying to keep the giant plane in the air after losing all hydraulic power needed to control direction and altitude. Fitch took a seat in the only space available — the floor — and helped operate some of the only equipment still working — the wing engines — to try to land the aircraft carrying nearly 300 people.

Fitch, who died Monday at 69, used everything he knew about flying to confront an emergency that engineers never imagined could happen to a modern jetliner.

When the crippled plane crash-landed in Sioux City, Iowa, more than half of the passengers survived — one of the most admired life-saving efforts in aviation history.

After the accident, aviation experts conducted simulations in which test pilots and trainer pilots tried to land similarly stricken aircraft.

Inmate Gets 4 In 10 Votes In Dem. W.V. Primary

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Just how unpopular is President Barack Obama in some parts of the country? Enough that a man in prison in Texas got 4 out of 10 votes in West Virginia's Democratic presidential primary.

The inmate, Keith Judd, is serving time at the Federal Correctional Institution in Texarkana, Texas, for making threats at the University of New Mexico in 1999. Obama received 59 percent of the vote to Judd's 41 percent.

For some West Virginia Democrats, simply running against Obama is enough to get Judd votes.

"I voted against Obama," said Ronnie Brown, a 43-year-old electrician from Cross Lanes who called himself a conservative Democrat. "I don't like him. He didn't carry the state before and I'm not going to let him carry it again."

When asked which presidential candidate he voted for, Brown said, "That guy out of Texas."

FBI Adds Fugitive Suspect To 10 Most Wanted

GUNTOWN, Miss. (AP) — A Mississippi man charged with kidnapping a Tennessee mother and her three daughters and killing two of them was added Wednesday to the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list.

The announcement came amid an intense manhunt in northeast Mississippi for 35-year-old Adam Mayes and two girls he is accused of abducting.

The girls are 12-year-old Alexandria Bain and 8-year-old Kyliyah Bain.

Federal authorities pleaded for the public's help in finding the sisters.

An affidavit filed in court Wednesday said Mayes killed their mother, Jo Ann Bain, and teenage sister, Adrienne, at the family home April 27 so he could take the two younger girls.

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