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Conn. ballot masks a battle

The Boston Globe


Convention vote could lead to ban on gay marriage

By Gregory B. Hladky

Globe Correspondent / November 3, 2008

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HARTFORD - The jubilation that gay couples felt just three weeks ago when Connecticut's Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage has been replaced by Election Day jitters.

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Their worries are focused on a ballot question asking voters if they want to authorize Connecticut's first convention in more than 40 years to revise the state constitution.

Opponents of same-sex marriage, including the state's Catholic bishops, are pushing hard for a convention because they believe it could lead to a direct ballot initiative to ban same-sex marriage in Connecticut.

A new poll by the University of Connecticut and the Hartford Courant found that 50 percent of voters surveyed supported the convention and 39 percent opposed it. But the same poll indicated 55 percent opposed a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

One of the plaintiffs in the case, Jeffrey Busch of Wilton, said the constitutional convention question "has cast a pall" over his family. Busch and his longtime partner, Stephen Davis, have been planning to get married since the state's high court handed down its decision on Oct. 10.

"We were just walking on air," Busch said. But he said now, when they see signs at their local Catholic church urging people to vote for the convention, "it feels threatening."

"It's absolutely been an emotional roller coaster," said Anne Stanback, executive director of Love Makes A Family, a group that has been battling for approval of same-sex marriage in Connecticut for years.

"There was joy and excitement on decision day," Stanback said, "but we couldn't fully celebrate. We knew we needed to really dig in to defeat this."

Peter Wolfgang, president of the Family Institute of Connecticut, a conservative group opposed to same-sex marriage, said he was encouraged by the poll results indicating that half of voters support a convention.

"It's what we were hoping for," he said. "But there's no way to know for sure until Election Day."

Wolfgang said his organization had been pushing all year to have the same-sex marriage decision released before the election. He said the ruling finally got voters thinking about same-sex marriage, the constitutional convention, and direct initiative issues.

The debate over the convention question has ignited an intense lobbying war.



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