

Posted on Mon, Jul. 24, 2006

## **Board to debate gay marriage**

**CONTRA COSTA: Supervisors will discuss resolution that backs unions and opposes ban**

**By Randy Myers**

**CONTRA COSTA TIMES**

The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors may take up one of the most hot-button political topics this fall as a resolution supporting gay marriage moves slowly toward the board's agenda.

Two supervisors -- John Gioia and Mark DeSaulnier -- have said they would support the resolution, which endorses civil marriages and opposes a constitutional amendment to ban it on both the state and federal levels.

But the measure will not likely be heard until at least September, when the board returns from its summer break. It will be in the thick of a midterm election season when the issue might figure prominently in races across the country.

The resolution already received the endorsement of two county advisory panels, the Contra Costa Commission on Women and the county Human Relations Commission. Nine California counties, including Alameda County, have adopted similar resolutions.

Leslie Stewart, leader of the Contra Costa County chapter of Equality California, a gay marriage organization, said the two-year process to have the resolution heard by the board has been frustrating at times.

"I think there has been a great willingness to put it on the back burner," she said. "All of the momentum has had to be on our side."

Alameda County approved a similar resolution around the time when Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, was pushing through his gay marriage bill. It was approved in 2005 by the California Legislature, a first. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger later vetoed it. Leno plans to bring the bill back in December after the elections.

Gioia of Richmond, the board chairman, met with Stewart and other supporters earlier in the process. He said he has not put it on the agenda because other high priority matters, including discussion about urban limit lines, are facing supervisors before they take a break in August.

Gioia said that the measure would generate a lot of interest. "If we put it on (the agenda) I'm sure a lot of people will come to the meeting."

DeSaulnier said some supervisors might be reticent about weighing in on topics they consider to be more of national scope.

"Contra Costa is not Berkeley," he said, referring to that city's support of resolutions addressing national subjects.

Earlier this year, supervisors rejected an advisory resolution DeSaulnier introduced that supported National Guard troops in Iraq being sent back home.

It fueled a rancorous, often heated debate.

Other supervisors said they had not seen the gay marriage measure. Gayle Uilkema said she would comment only after having seen it. Mary Piepho echoed that, adding that any discussion should include how California voters in 2000 approved Proposition 22, which defined marriage as between a man and a woman. Federal Glover could not be reached for comment.

According to 2000 Census figures, Contra Costa County ranks 10th in the state's 58 counties with the most same-sex couples; Alameda County is fourth. More than 100,000 same-sex partners live in California.

For Pamela Burton, a supporter of the measure, it is both a personal and a local issue.

Burton, who is a Marriage Equality USA volunteer, worked on getting the resolution approved in Alameda County and is now turning her efforts to Contra Costa County. She and longtime partner Shauna Rajkowski were married at San Francisco City Hall in 2004 when Mayor Gavin Newsom cleared the way for marriage licenses to be issued there.

Reach Randy Myers at [rmyers@cctimes.com](mailto:rmyers@cctimes.com) or 925-977-8419.

## **AT A GLANCE**

The following California counties have passed marriage equality resolutions:

- Alameda
- Humboldt
- Los Angeles
- Marin
- Mendocino
- San Francisco
- San Mateo
- Santa Cruz
- Sonoma