



Called Out eNews - October 2009

Support marriage equality and partnership recognition in Maine & Washington

Help get out the vote on November 3

In Maine and Washington, we continue to campaign for marriage equality and the legislature that will be decided by voters on November 3. There are many opportunities to show your support in both states by helping to get out the vote.

No on Question 1 Campaign in Maine



Maine has already passed legislation this past May that allows same-sex couples the right to marry. However, after this passed there have been many groups that want to repeal the legislation. On November 3, Maine citizens will vote to see if Maine should repeal same-sex marriage legislation or not.

There are many ways to [volunteer](#) your time for this campaign. Equality Maine is the host to a huge nation-wide volunteer drive. So far there have been many phone banks set up and debates around the state and they plan to have many more before November 3.

Earlier in the month, David Gaewski, the Maine Conference Minister for the UCC, participated in a press conference where he showed his support for the "No on 1" campaign. This was not the first time though that the Maine UCC Conference was involved in the marriage equality debate. This past April, 40 UCC ministers supported Gaewski as he testified before the state legislator in support of marriage equality legislation.

It is very important to keep fighting for this legislation. If you live in Maine or know someone that does, **vote [no on Question 1](#) if you support marriage equality.**

Approve Referendum 71 in Washington



People in Washington are also campaigning for marriage equality legislation that will be voted on in just a couple of weeks. If this is passed, it will provide same-sex couples most of the same legal rights as married heterosexual couples. One of the organizations, [Approve Referendum 71](#), that is trying to preserve the domestic partnership law, has many different ways that you can volunteer your time.

Many UCC churches in Washington have been actively involved in supporting Referendum 71. All Pilgrims Christian Church is having a showing of the movie, *For the Bible Tells Me So*; Admiral UCC and a West Seattle based interfaith group are holding signs at a main intersection; Richmond Beach UCC had a panel discussion that included both pro and con speakers. Other churches are including a statement in their newsletters and Sunday bulletins that talk about the importance of voting and their support for marriage equality. It

is wonderful to hear about what our local churches are doing on this issue. If you are a Washington voter, **remember to vote yes if you support this domestic partnership law.**

Even if you do not live in Maine and Washington, there are still ways to support marriage equality legislation. Knowing what your state is doing on the issue of marriage equality is an important way to stay informed. There are only two weeks left until these states vote on these important marriage equality legislations, but there is still much to be done.

Matthew Shepard Act and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (H.R. 2647 & S. 909)

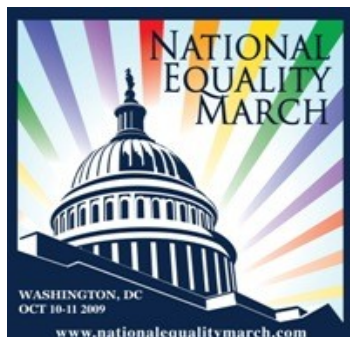


One step closer to prosecuting hate crimes

We have come a very far way with various hate crime legislations but still have a little ways to go. With the Matthew Shepard Act, it would allow the Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate and prosecute bias-related violence. Furthermore it would allow the DOJ to have jurisdiction over crimes of violence that are related to the victim's actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. In the newest version of this bill, the death penalty was taken out as an option for the maximum penalty. Instead, the maximum penalty to a bias-related violence crime would be life imprisonment. We, as well as Judy Shepard, the mother of Matthew Shepard and Chair of the [Matthew Shepard Foundation](#) are very appreciative that legislators removed the death penalty from the bill.

On October 8, this bill was passed in the House of Representatives and just recently was passed in the Senate. The next step is for it to be signed by President Obama.

National Equality March in Washington Update



On October 10-11, it was estimated that over 200,000 people marched on Capital Hill, as part of the National Equality March. Currently lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people do not have the same protections of civil rights that heterosexual people do. The purpose of the March was to bring nation-wide attention to this fact and urge Congress and the President to act for justice and equality.

The United Church of Christ was also involved in the March. One of the local UCC churches in Washington D.C., Plymouth United Church of Christ, hosted the National Equality March's official interfaith service on the Sunday morning. Rev. Graylan S. Hagler, pastor of Plymouth UCC and preacher Rev. Dr. Irene Monroe spoke at the worship service. There was also a musical performance by legendary R&B singer Tony Terry during the service.

The night before the March, President Obama spoke to the National Human Rights Campaign (HRC) dinner and committed to many concerns that are important to the LGBT community, including Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the Matthew Shepard Act, a bill that would further prosecute bias-related violence (now awaiting his signature).

To read the full text of President Obama's speech at the National Equality March, click [here](#)

Human Rights Violations and Murders of Gay Men in Iraq

A war may be going on in Iraq but much is also going on in Iraq besides the war. Although there are no laws against homosexuality in Iraq, being gay is very difficult there and even dangerous, particularly for gay men. In recent months, violence against gay men has escalated. Several who are perceived to be gay men have been rounded-up and shot in the streets not only by religious extremists, but also by their own family members. There have also been reports that Iraqi security forces have also participated in these murders. A gay Iraqi man (who did not wish to be named) said that "these killings will continue, because it has simply become normal in Iraq to kill gay men". These murders have become so frightening for gay men living in Iraq that they have had to move to Lebanon or other surrounding countries.

The Health and Wholeness Advocacy office is working in collaboration with a number of partners to develop and implement an effective advocacy strategy to stop the violence in Iraq and other places where the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are being violated, especially where there is violence and people are being killed.

Ending the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy



If the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) passes, it would be a great step to the future. Unfortunately though, ENDA does not apply to uniformed members of the military, which means that it does not affect the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy prohibits openly gay and lesbian people from serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Hundreds of military personnel are discharged each year under this policy.

Speaking at the National Human Rights Campaign Dinner the weekend of National Equality March, President Obama committed to ending the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, saying, "We are moving ahead on Don't Ask, Don't Tell. We should not be punishing patriotic Americans who have stepped forward to serve this country. So I'm working with the Pentagon, its leadership, and the members of the House and Senate on ending this policy. I will end Don't Ask, Don't Tell. That's my commitment to you."

It is certainly a step forward that Obama spoke about his commitment to end this policy. There are still other steps that need to be taken in order for this to happen though. We need to hold Obama and members of Congress to their word that they will end "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". There is a piece of legislation called the Military Readiness Enhancement Act (MREA) (H.R. 1246), which would end the old policy and discrimination due to someone's sexual orientation. If the President and Congress stay true to their word, people who were

discharged under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy would also be able to re-enter the military.

Right now MREA was introduced in Congress this past March and was later referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel. So far there has been no further action with this legislation.

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