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Paterson backs gay rights

Directive to honor marriages moves New York in right direction

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Perhaps it was the positive experience of being around Uncle Stanley and Uncle Ronald, who served as occasional baby sitters, that later influenced Gov. David A. Paterson.

According to a New York Times article, Paterson and his little brother would stay in Harlem with family friends they called Uncle Stanley and Uncle Ronald, a gay couple in the 1960s who were obviously accepted by Paterson's parents. As he told the New York Times, he was raised in a culture that understood the different ways that people conduct their lives, "... and I feel very proud of it."

That personal story has now played out in state policy, with Paterson's directive that New York recognize gay marriages legally performed in other states and countries.

That means state agencies, including those governing insurance and health care, must immediately recognize same-sex marriages legally performed in other places as valid in this state.

It's heartening to hear the story of how Paterson grew up with the positive influence of a community that, as he says, faces a similar kind of discrimination endured by blacks in this country. He is determined to make a difference and, in doing so, will change countless lives for the better.

Empire State Pride Agenda Executive Director Alan Van Capelle issued a statement praising Paterson's leadership and commitment to equality and justice for all New Yorkers. As Capelle stated, the action brings members of the gay community even closer to being recognized as equals under the law when it comes to rights and protections of marriage. The governor is following the law and he is also, to some degree, following the will of the people.

But not all factions of the community agree with the governor's decision.

The Coalition to Save Marriage in New York issued an angry statement declaring that the governor's directive requiring state agencies to recognize what the group called, "foreign" same-sex marriage licenses is an ill-advised encroachment upon the authority of the New York State Legislature.

Stephen P. Hayford, spokesman for the coalition, said Paterson took a huge step backward. The group sees the move as the governor acting beyond the scope of his responsibility. We disagree.


Paterson's memo was based on a Feb. 1 ruling by the State Appellate Division in Rochester. Appellate judges determined that there is no legal impediment in this state to the recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states such as Massachusetts and California or countries such as Canada and Spain. Moreover, public opinion is shifting on the issue.

A recent poll reported growing acceptance of same-sex marriage, according to the Times. A majority of those said they were not morally offended by it nor did they feel it undercut marriage between members of the opposite sex.

Same-sex marriage couples deserve the rights enjoyed by opposite sex couples. That is, the right to be treated as human beings sharing a special bond. Perhaps that was a lesson Paterson learned from Uncle Stanley and Uncle Ronald.

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