



It's high time to allow gay marriage

April 17, 2009 09:02 am

On the heels of Gov. David Paterson's introduction of a bill that would legalize gay marriage in New York state, let us look back at the history that has led to this moment.

The modern gay-rights movement is said to have its roots in the June 27, 1969, police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. When the raid was met with violent protest, it vaulted a nascent movement into the national spotlight.

Since Stonewall, each step forward for equal rights for all sexual orientations has been marked by tremendous effort in the face of loud and virulent opposition. From Midwestern grandmothers carrying picket signs reading "My son's gay, and that's OK," to colorful drag queens performing in Pride parades, the gay rights movement has been as diverse and varied as the people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered.

The struggle has also been fought by those who, while straight, find it unconscionable that a fellow human being would be denied civil liberties because of sexual orientation. Paterson is one such man, who has chosen to further this cause and, as he said Thursday, "tell the world that we want equality for everyone."

During the 1970s, gay-rights advocates fought for the most basic things: to allow people to come out without fear of being called insane, or losing their job, their home or their life.

During the 1980s, they fought to survive as the AIDS crisis reached epidemic proportions and further politicized the struggle for gay rights.

During the 1990s, they continued to fight for rights taken for granted by heterosexuals: to serve their country, to raise children and to have a family, however "non-traditional."

Today, as arguments about the so-called sanctity of marriage swirl around us, it may be hard to see this issue with clarity, but it is important to try. Civil unions are a weak substitute for marriage and one that has allowed politicians to comfortably dodge the real issue for much too long. The full rights of marriage must be extended to all citizens; as Paterson said, "It is not the state's place to define marriage in a way that excludes a segment of the population from the legal benefits associated with marriage."

While some may dismiss Paterson's bill as a political gambit to boost approval ratings, we believe it is more than that. We believe that history will show leaders such as Paterson to be on the forefront of an inevitable and long-overdue wave of social change. We must not allow moral codes to dictate the creation of second-class citizens, unequal under the law. Let this be our legacy to future generations: a vision of a more-just future for all New Yorkers.

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.