

Politicians fear backlash from gay 'marriage'

San Francisco standing alone in defying law

By Cheryl Wetzstein
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

San Francisco's brazen experiment in issuing same-sex "marriage" licenses occurs at a critical juncture, both politically and culturally.

"The timing of [San Francisco] Mayor [Gavin] Newsom's action was clearly designed to influence the Massachusetts

NEWS ANALYSIS legislature, which was convening at that moment to discuss" a marriage amendment to the state constitution, said Robert Knight of Concerned Women of America.

"But their plan might backfire because if people feel they are being stampeded into a decision, that might get their backs up," Mr. Knight said. It will take only a few Massachusetts legislators to change their minds and pass the constitutional amendment, he added.

"San Francisco being in sort of a free-for-all will be used against us politically," Rep. Barney Frank, Massachusetts Democrat and an open homosexual, said last week.

The Massachusetts Supreme Court already said the commonwealth must begin issuing same-sex "marriage" licenses as of May.

"If we go forward in Massachusetts and get same-sex marriage on the books, it's going to



Mike (left) and Wesley waited in line for their turn to be "married" Friday in San Francisco City Hall, where Mayor Gavin Newsom is defying state law against same-sex "marriage."

Rod A. Lamkey Jr./The Washington Times

be binding and incontestable," Mr. Frank said. San Francisco's breaking a state law, on the other hand, gives the idea that unpopular laws can be broken or ignored, he said.

"When you're in a real struggle, San Francisco making a symbolic point becomes a diversion," he said.

National public opinion is steadfast against homosexual "marriage." An October survey by Pew Research Center found that 59 percent of Americans

oppose same-sex "marriage," although the public is often supportive of other kinds of homosexual unions.

This stance was reflected in a Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) poll of 2,004 persons taken Feb. 8-16, around the time San Francisco began issuing "marriage" licenses to same-sex couples.

Fifty percent of Californians said they opposed same-sex "marriage," while 44 percent supported it and 6 percent re-

mained undecided. The PPIC survey showed that San Francisco was the only place in the state that favored same-sex "marriage."

Mr. Newsom and his San Francisco allies have been adamant that they are correct to issue "marriage" licenses to same-sex couples.

"We don't view this as breaking the law," Peter Ragone, Mr. Newsom's spokesman, said last week. "We view this as upholding the state's constitution,

which explicitly prohibits any form of discrimination."

However, Mr. Ragone has said, "we are cognizant that Democrats disagree on this issue."

California politicians who note that there is a push in Congress to define marriage in the U.S. Constitution, have not sided with Mr. Newsom.

"If the mayor believes that [a] law is unconstitutional, the place to go is the court," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, California Democrat. "I believe this makes the national situation much more complicated and gives ammunition to those who are pushing for a constitutional amendment."

California's other senator, Barbara Boxer, a Democrat who is running for re-election this year, has said: "The mayor has decided to challenge state law. My opinion is that state law is fair and appropriate because it gives equal rights and responsibilities to all citizens."

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the House Democratic leader and San Francisco representative, has said she "is focused on defeating" the proposed federal marriage amendment.

State official Carole Migden, who was "married" Friday by Mr. Newsom, has warned Democrats not to be too cautious.

"We've done our work; we've raised visibility . . . and being a lesbian and gay leader for 20 years, I understand about patience," Miss Migden told the San Francisco Chronicle. "But this is igniting America, and any Democrat that doesn't recognize it should step back and get out of the way."

• This article is based in part on wire service reports.