

Governor signs same sex marriage bill into law; takes effect Aug. 1

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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With a throng of nearly 6,000 supporters on hand at the Capitol, Gov. Mark Dayton signed into law a bill that will legalize same sex marriages in the state.

The law, which was fast-tracked through the Minnesota state House and Senate, was signed on the steps of the Capitol this past Tuesday (May 14). Minnesota joins 11 other states and the District of Columbia in allowing same sex couples to legally marry. The law goes into effect Aug. 1.



"It's historic, it's so exciting," said Monica Meyer, executive director of OutFront Minnesota. OutFront is a gay rights advocacy group that has been at the forefront of the fight for gay marriage in the state. "I think the country is seeing a sea change and we're gaining momentum across the country."

Meyer said the next big date in the fight for marriage equality will come this fall when the U.S. Supreme Court is set to hear two different cases involving rights for same sex couples.

"I keep telling my wife, then we'll be married, married (if the Supreme Court rules on the side of same sex couples)," said Meyer, who said she and her wife have been married for four years. She said the two were married in Canada (her wife is Canadian) and again in Iowa, another

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state that legally recognizes same sex marriages.



Meyer said the passage and signing of the same sex marriage law is historic not only because of the significance of permitting same sex couples to legally marry, but because just this past November there was a ballot initiative to amend the state's Constitution to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

The Rev. Jerry McAfee, pastor of New Salem Missionary Baptist Church was one of the opponents of legalizing gay marriage, but he said his issue has less to do with gay marriage than it does with the state's lawmakers.

"This should send a message to African-Americans (in the state)," said McAfee. "They (state legislators) talked about gun control, they talked about poverty, they talked about education, but not one bill came out. They (proponents of the gay marriage law) cried about same sex marriage and they fast-tracked it. This bill should show our people that (state) Democrats don't really care about us. How many people get pulled over for driving while gay? As long as I've been alive people have been getting pulled over for driving while Black."

McAfee said with so many issues plaguing African-Americans in the state, it's disturbing that the gay marriage issue got so much traction at the expense of other critical issues. The reverend pointed to the Ban the Box legislation as an example of legislators not wanting to seriously address the issues facing some African-Americans. Ban the Box addresses employers being able to ask prospective employees questions of arrest on job applications.

"Rep. (Bobby Joe) Champion got Ban the Box passed, but only for the first round of interviews," said McAfee. "But they can still ask on the second and third interviews. Rep. Champion knew if the bill said employers can't ask the question at all, it would have never passed. How long are we going to hold people accountable for their past? We've got greater issues than same sex marriage."

A couple of allies of McAfee may come as a surprise to some.

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Michael Cole Smith and his husband, Jamil Smith Cole made national news when photos of their opulent 2009 wedding went viral on the Internet. While their marriage was not recognized by the state and though it will be recognized come Aug. 1, the couple, which together own and operate Talk of the Town salon inside the Sabathani Community Center, 310 E 38th St., #117, said though happy their marriage will be legally recognized there are issues of greater importance.

"Rev. McAfee is not against gays or homophobic – far from it," said Cole Smith. "He's about getting poor people fed and getting guns off the street. But because he let it be known that he wouldn't support gay marriage (legislation) he came off as homophobic. I commend him 100 percent."

Cole Smith said the fight for gay marriage in the state has largely been a white issue and African-American gays were rarely included in any planning or events.

"There's so much racism within the gay community. There's a Black gay community and a white gay community," said Cole Smith. "OutFront is two floors above us (inside Sabathani) and they could have used us (to support gay marriage) a long time ago, but they didn't come talk to us until long after things got going. There's a lot of division and separation in the gay community."

Smith Cole said while happy the law has passed, he did not do anything special to celebrate the governor's signing.

"I've always said I don't need a piece of paper to legitimize my marriage. I never needed a piece of paper or anyone's approval," said Smith Cole.