

Same-Sex Marriage Bill Advances in D.C.

✖ The Washington, D.C., City

Council on Tuesday approved a first reading of a bill to legalize gay marriage in the nation's capital.

The measure, passed in an 11-2 vote, must be approved in a second vote in two weeks in order for the bill to be sent to Democratic Mayor Adrian M. Fenty for his signature. Fenty has expressed support for the measure.

The bill would be subject to a 30-day congressional review period before becoming law. If the measure were approved, the District of Columbia would join five states in allowing same-sex marriage.

Republican Rep. Jason Chaffetz of Utah, the ranking member of the subcommittee that has oversight over district laws, said the bill would be difficult to derail in Congress with Democrats who support homosexual marriage in the majority.

"I think traditional marriage is a winning issue, but the Democrats right now have the House and the Senate and the presidency, and they will be using a lot of procedural things to actually block such a vote in the Congress," Chaffetz told CBN News Tuesday. "I want to be realistic and I want to

be optimistic, but our ability to actually overturn this in the Congress is going to be very limited."

A cross-section of faith leaders known as the Stand4Marriage DC Coalition have for months been petitioning to put marriage to a vote. But last month the District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics rejected their petition for a citizens' initiative seeking to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

The coalition filed suit in Washington, D.C., Superior Court to reverse the board's decision. Gay marriage bans have passed in all 31 states that have put the issue to a vote.

"To deny the people their fundamental right to vote on such an important issue as the definition of marriage in our society is simply appalling," said Bishop Harry Jackson, pastor of Hope Christian Church in suburban Washington and chairman of the Stand4MarriageDC Coalition.

Marion Barry and Yvette M. Alexander were the only city council members to vote against the bill. Barry, who earlier this year supported same-sex marriage, said he opposed the bill because his constituents reject gay marriage, the Washington Post reported.

"I stand here today to express in no uncertain terms my strong commitment to the gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender community on almost every issue except this one," Barry said.

He said the council should have authorized a referendum on the issue.

Council member Harry Thomas Jr., who supported the bill, said he had to stand up "for the least of those among us" even though many of his constituents also oppose same-sex marriage, the Post reported.

While not formally involved in the Washington, D.C., marriage battle, more than 150 Christian leaders issued a joint declaration last month reaffirming their opposition to abortion and gay marriage, and pledging to protect religious freedoms.

In a 4,700-word document called *The Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience*, the leaders said they will not "bend to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriage or the equivalent or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family."

Signatories include 15 Roman Catholic bishops, Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, Princeton University professor Robert George, National Association of Evangelicals President Leith

Anderson, and a host of seminary leaders and pastors.

Another 150,000 people signed on to the document within a week after its release.