

Couples Head to NY to Fight for Gay Marriage Rights



Dozens of gay couples are planning to converge on Albany, N.Y., Thursday to witness what would be a historic vote to legalize gay marriage in New York. But for that to happen, Gov. Andrew Cuomo's considerable political skills will be tested as never before to engineer one of the biggest social changes in a generation.

The Democrat has been using a kind of shuttle diplomacy to privately test proposals for additional religious exceptions within the Senate's Republican majority. He's talked to individual senators or small groups of lawmakers privately, breaking down barriers and letting them take his message to others in the Republican caucus.

The proposed protections are aimed at saving religious groups from discrimination lawsuits if they refuse to recognize gay marriage based on their principles.

Those exceptions—carve-outs in the political lexicon—are intended to coax the state Senate's Republican majority, most who oppose gay marriage, to allow the bill to the Senate where Cuomo thinks it will

pass by a bipartisan vote led by Democrats. He's made the issue one of his primary objectives in his first year in office.

"Will the conference allow a vote to be taken, that's the threshold,"

Cuomo said Wednesday evening. "I'm pro-marriage equality, I'm also

pro-First Amendment, I'm pro-church-state separation and I'm pro-religious freedom. So I also have the same concern."

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