

Democracy is Shrinking in D.C.

✖ This past week, D.C. city council member Jack Evans vehemently warned D.C. citizens that if they took their concerns about marriage to Capitol Hill there would be grave consequences. Knowing that he and his colleagues have garnered the votes they need to pass a same-sex marriage law in D.C., he thought that he would flex his political muscles. After repeating his threats in several different ways he summarized the essence of his warning: "Proceed at your own peril."

What does Congress have to do with D.C.? The connection is that D.C. laws are in fact subject to approval by the U.S. Congress. Evans' comments exposed his concerns that a large number of complaints would come from D.C. residents, their families and friends to both Republican and Democratic congressmen. He and his cronies do not want their plan for D.C. statehood to get derailed.

Most of the tax-paying citizens sitting in the audience could not believe their ears. District residents understand the paramount importance of the right to vote. It is a right for which we have struggled and fought. The District was formed in 1790, yet it was not until 170 years later that we could vote for the President of the United States. We voted in our first presidential election in 1964, helping to elect President Lyndon Johnson. In 1968, we were given the right to vote for an elected Board of Education. In 1970, we were privileged to elect our first delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives.

In 1973, for the first time, we could vote for a mayor and a city council of our own. In 1978, we were given the power to approve and make laws through the referendum and initiative process.

Yet while we still are being denied a vote in the United States Congress, the council does not want the people to vote on same-sex marriage. Citizens have complained rightly at the injustice of being forced to pay taxes without being able to have a real congressional vote. Our license plates even go so far as to make a powerful declaration, "No taxation without representation." Hypocritically, the D.C. city council appears poised to deny the people their rights. By keeping the District's power primarily in their hands, the council is acting like the District is an oligarchy – or even worse, a plantation with slaves.

The council's job is to safeguard the rights of the people – especially their right to vote. It should empower residents, not threaten them. Somehow their desire to be on the "right side of history" has become so strong for council members that they are determined to advance the cause of gay rights (even if it abridges the rights of the majority of the citizens in the District).

Our situation in D.C. is a classic example of how a special-interest group can receive extra special treatment, even favoritism, as a result of systematic and strategic work. The gay lobby has been so extensive that a majority of the city's council members say that they arrived at their conviction to support same-sex marriage a couple of years ago. Therefore, when the groundwork was finally finished this spring, the council's unity on such a difficult issue had been secured several years ago. As a result of this grassroots preparation, the people's concerns on many additional issues will not be considered.

It is ironic that the city's most fundamental civil rights—the right to vote—is being hijacked in the name of giving one group its civil rights. My opponents in the marriage debate are correct – the initiative is about civil rights– voting

rights. My father risked his life to allow blacks the privilege of voting. He taught my brother and I that we should vote at all cost because of the high price that had been paid for this privilege. While council members myopically attempt to play heroic roles in history, in reality they may become widely discussed villains of American democracy. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from the jail in Birmingham, "A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a [people] that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law." The people of the District have already suffered the injustice of being ignored with the Jury and Marriage Amendment Act of 2009. (The average citizen calls this the Same-sex Marriage Recognition Act.) We should not be ignored again.

There is a growing sense of outrage among average citizens of the city. The outrage is based on a feeling that there is a blatant disregard for the true needs of the people. The citizens are waking up to the fact there are numerous problems that are not being addressed by the council. As a result, a large number of people are willing to fight to protect marriage as the first battle in a war against D.C.'s political machine.

Last Sunday, several thousand people gathered on Freedom Plaza to shout with one voice, "Let the people vote"! Many of them feel that a people's revolution is needed to call for the ouster or recall of many of D.C.'s elected officials.

The Jack Evanses of the world are in trouble in D.C. They believe they are in charge, but in reality they are on their way out!