

Stealing Liberty

✖ Last week, many 9/11 celebrations took place commemorating the heroism and loss of life experienced on that day 8 years ago. The lesson I have treasured the most comes from the story of United Flight 93. Todd Morgan Beamer's last recorded statement, "Let's roll" is the kind that epitomizes the American spirit. His statement celebrates individual courage, personal responsibility and our national can-do attitude. Millions of Americans thanked God this past week for the freedom to vote and live in a nation, which promises to give us a government of the people, for the people and by the people.

In a strange twist of fate, two of Washington D.C.'s leading newspapers carried a declaration on Sept. 11 that said the D.C. city council planned to steal the hard-fought freedom to vote from the people they represent. In fact, D.C. city council members arrogantly declared their ability to speak for the citizens of the nation's first city without even consulting them on one of the nation's most defining social issues – marriage. Last month a grassroots citizens' movement emerged which is asking for a popular vote on marriage and has received the support of Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANC), who represent over 100,000 people. By the time the remaining two-thirds of these commissioners are approached, grassroots activists expect to have over half of these commissioners ask for a vote by all the people.

In spite of a groundswell of local support for the protection of marriage in just a six-week period, the city council decided to accelerate its request to have gay marriages legally performed within D.C. This move would obviously affect the state of marriage in the region and the nation. Vincent Gray, chairman of the city council, sees himself as a

protector of the 16,000 to 33,000 gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender people in D.C. While these numbers are very high compared to most cities, it only amounts to between 3 and 6 percent of D.C.'s 570,000-person population. The chairman is quoted in last Friday's Washington Times as saying, "We are the elected representatives of the people. I think we are perfectly capable of making an informed decision on this issue. We make important decisions every day on how this city is run. And that is what the people elect us to do."

This is an amazing statement from a group that has fought over who should have access to baseball tickets at the Nationals' games. This same group also has had trouble balancing budgets, setting priorities and is currently accusing each other of fraud and ethical violations of the law. With all the truly important issues that they could address, including the highest HIV/Aids infection rate in the nation, these highly "competent" legislators want to vote in an overwhelming majority for something that private polls say the people do not widely endorse.

Gay marriage supporters purport that the debate over marriage is creating a "civil war" in the city. They believe the issue is contentious and divisive. The gay community's own spokes representative declare that they want to have several days of debates and hearings concerning this issue because they feel that their voices need to be heard.

The truth is that the gay community has manipulated the political process through extravagant campaign contributions and strategically infiltrating the city's Democratic Party's hierarchy over the last five years. D.C. council members have ironically participated in the suppression of the citizens' right to vote in order to advance a privileged minority's pet issue. This has been done in the name of civil rights.

If anybody knows what civil rights are, it would have been my father, who was threatened at gunpoint by a state trooper for his participation in voting registration efforts in the South. The officer who threatened him actually discharged his weapon in an attempt to make it clear that if my father spoke up again, he would be killed. My father could speak about civil rights because as a teenager he saw lifeless bodies hanging from lynching trees as part of the "strange fruit of the South" while taking shortcuts to deliver papers on several mornings. My father understood about civil rights as he heard the stories of an African-American man in his town who was brutally beaten, mutilated, set on fire and dragged through the town square of the city.

But my father is not the only one who understood civil rights. The unwed black mother living on public assistance understands true discrimination. She understands that there are privileged people in our culture and institutional barriers that prohibit whole segments of our society from experiencing the American dream. In D.C., gay activists enjoy better education, better jobs, better housing, greater access to the system and now – legislative power. Something is wrong when the privileged feign that they are the persecuted, when the powerful posture themselves as victims. In this strategic period of American history, when many major issues are being decided, the least city council could do, is to slow down and allow liberty to have her voice.

In the spirit of last week's 9/11 celebrations, I have one suggestion to the D.C. city council, the ANC commissioners, Congress and our national media: Let the people vote. American freedom is all about the voice of the people. We must trust our freedom, we must trust our process and we must trust our people with this treasure called liberty. Let the people vote. Let their voices be heard.