

Top Senate Democrat Unsure Whether Religious Schools That Oppose Gay Marriage Should Keep Tax-Exempt Status

Following the Supreme Court decision that declared same-sex marriage a constitutional right, Democrats are considering the impact this will have on religious schools and their tax-exempt statuses. Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, minority whip and the second most powerful Democrat in the Senate, told The Weekly Standard's John McCormack that he was unsure if he supported revoking the charitable tax status of religious schools. "There's no question this was an historic decision, and now we're going to go through a series of suggestions for new laws to implement it. I can't predict how this will end," Durbin said Wednesday. "But from the beginning we have said that when it comes to marriage, religions can decide what their standards will be." When The Weekly Standard asked Durbin if religious protections extend to Christian schools that require employees to hold the same beliefs as the faith's teaching about marriage, he didn't "have a quick answer." "I'll have to think about it long and hard," Durbin said. During the oral arguments of the Supreme Court gay marriage case, the Obama administration's top attorney, Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli, affirmed that the charitable tax status of religious organizations that oppose gay marriage "is going to be an issue." Ryan Anderson, William E. Simon senior research fellow at The Heritage Foundation, explains the issue this way in his new book "Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom:"

Government policy that discriminates against faith-based social service providers that believe marriage is a male-female relationship undermines our nation's commitment to

reasonable pluralism and diversity. All citizens and the associations they form should be free to participate in government programs according to their reasonable beliefs.

“Non-profit tax status,” Anderson added, “shouldn’t be revoked because of a school’s support for marriage.” Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont socialist, is less sure about taking away the tax-exempt status of religious organizations that do not support the Supreme Court’s definition of marriage. “We have religious freedom and I respect people who have different points of view,” Sanders said on CNN’s “State of the Union” after voicing his own strong support for the Supreme Court decision. When asked about diminishing the tax-exempt status of religious institutions that refuse to recognize same-sex marriages, “I don’t know if I would go that far,” Sanders said. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, weighed in on the issue in an interview with The Daily Signal. Now that the Supreme Court has “settled” the marriage debate, Wasserman Schultz explained her views of the implications. “That doesn’t mean that churches and institutions have to conduct same-sex marriages and it doesn’t mean that religious institutions aren’t able to practice their own values. But, in this country, we do not allow people to discriminate,” Wasserman Schultz explained. Responding to the \$135,000 fine that Aaron and Melissa Klein were saddled with after refusing to bake a cake for a lesbian wedding due to their own religious beliefs about traditional marriage, Wasserman Schultz said, “You shouldn’t be able to turn people away based on who they are.” She elaborated further: “I think Americans make a distinction between protecting the First Amendment rights for religious organizations or religiously affiliated organization and being able to discriminate, broadly, simply because of one individual who owns a business and their own values and their being able to impose those values on either their employers or their customers.” *Reprinted from The Daily Signal.*