

Boy Scouts Set to Vote on Gay Youth Ban

The **Boy Scouts of America** will vote on Thursday on a proposal to remove its ban on openly gay scouts that has been in place throughout the organization's 103-year history.

The vote by more than 1,400 delegates comes amid intense lobbying by **gay-rights activists** and members of conservative organizations. The proposal would not remove the organization's ban on gay adult leaders.

Representatives from both sides have rallied in Grapevine, Texas, near Dallas, where the scouting organization is hosting its national annual meeting.

The vote comes about three months after the organization's leadership delayed a decision on changing its membership policy to research attitudes toward admitting gays.

The Boy Scouts' long-standing ban has become increasingly polarizing as gay rights becomes a more prominent theme in U.S. political discourse. The U.S. military in 2011 dropped its ban on gay soldiers and 12 U.S. states now allow same-sex marriage.

Although national polls show a growing acceptance of gay rights, an online survey of about 200,000 BSA members, parents and leaders showed overwhelming support for keeping the ban, by a margin of almost 2-1.

"The Boy Scouts are not listening to us," said John Stemberger, an Orlando lawyer, Eagle Scout, former scoutmaster and founder of an organization that opposes lifting the ban.

The Boy Scouts' top leadership endorse the proposed change and have encouraged delegates to support it. BSA board President

Wayne Perry said in a webcast: "It was never our intent to prevent young people from being part of this organization."

Gay-rights activists said lifting the ban on gay youth would be an important first step toward ending discrimination of gays and lesbians.

However, they vowed to continue their campaign until the ban on gay adults is removed, too.

Zach Wahls, an Eagle Scout raised by two lesbian mothers, said the time has come for change.

"There is nothing Scout-like about exclusion of other people, and there is nothing Scout-like about putting your own religious beliefs before someone else's," Wahls, founder of Scouts for Equality, said at a press conference on Wednesday.

Gay-rights advocates gathered petitions with more than 1.8 million signatures in support of ending the ban. While supporters of the current policy collected petitions with about 250,000 signatures urging delegates to vote down the change.

Conservative groups lined part of the route between Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport and the Gaylord Texan Resort on Wednesday to greet arriving delegates with American flags and signs urging them to vote "no" to the membership policy change.

Admitting gays would create "safety and security issues" at overnight camp-outs as well as a potential plummet in sponsorship if churches pull away from the Boy Scouts over differences in beliefs, Stemberger said.

Faith-based organizations sponsor some 70 percent of the Boy Scout troops across the country, according to BSA officials.

"The Boy Scouts have always stood for timeless values," Stemberger said. "Sex and politics have no place in the Boy

Scouts.”