

Gay Marriage, Obama, Legalized Pot Dividing Families on Thanksgiving

Ah, Thanksgiving. A little turkey, some cranberry mold, maybe apple pie with ice cream, some football on TV. Getting together with the cousins. Catching up beside the fire. Togetherness.

On second thought: Scratch that. What were we thinking? This was an election year.

“The Thanksgiving table will be a battleground,” says Andrew Marshall, 34, of Quincy, Mass.

Like many extended families across the country, Marshall’s includes Democrats and Republicans, conservatives, liberals and independents. And so, like many families that count both red and blue voters in their ranks, they’re expecting fireworks. Things had already gotten so bad on Facebook, the family had to ban political banter.

“It was getting brutal,” says Marshall.

And now, it will all play out in person. In this family, the older generation is more liberal, the younger more conservative. So Andrew, a conservative, particularly expects friction with his aunt, Anne Brennan, 57. “She firmly believes in what she believes in, and we’ll go head to head with it,” he says.

But the Marshalls seem to be relishing the occasion. Not so the Davidson family in Alabama.

In fact, things have gotten so tense over politics between Brian Davidson, a 40-year-old attorney in Helena, and his father, 130 miles away in Russellville, that they’ve changed

plans, forgoing their usual gathering.

"We're not even going," says Brian, who voted for Barack Obama, and describes his father as "a little to the right of Glenn Beck." Better to skip this one, he says, than suffer "a non-recoverable blowup."

Davidson, a Boy Scout leader and the father of two school-age sons, once was firmly conservative, even serving as an officer in the Young Republicans Club at the University of North Alabama. His parents—particularly Dad—always taught him and his brother to think for themselves, he says.

And so he did. Davidson eventually realized he no longer fit in with the Republican Party, which he saw as moving rightward, and now considers himself a political moderate with liberal positions on issues like **gay marriage** and the **legalization of marijuana**—he supports both—and conservative positions on foreign and fiscal policies.

Each Thanksgiving, Davidson typically loads up his family and makes the 130-mile drive to his parents' house. This year, Davidson will take the kids to wife Kim's family instead, but even that could be tricky: They are conservative as well. So Brian and Kim will try to avoid any topics that could lead, they say, to "an Obama rant" around the table.

"Anything can cause it," Brian says. "We're just going to suck it up."

For some families, it's not necessarily the presidential race that divided them. The Cox family in Colorado has long been split over the **legalization of marijuana**—ever since Diane Cox first caught her son, David, trying to smoke the drug when he was 14.

David, now 31 and a peach farmer in Palisade, Colo., has volunteered for years on efforts to legalize marijuana. Diane, meanwhile, has spearheaded several successful protests to ban

medical marijuana dispensaries in nearby towns—even waving “BAN THE POT SHOPS” signs on the side of the road.

Colorado’s recent vote to **legalize marijuana** for recreational use again divided mother and son, who served as regional coordinator for the legalization campaign. Discussion of the vote is likely at the family Thanksgiving, but David Cox doesn’t seem too worried. “I don’t think awkward’s the proper term. The proper term is more, dissentious,” he says with a chuckle.

After all, Cox says, some things are more important than politics. “They can see that I’m a successful, hardworking person,” he says of his parents, “so they have absolutely nothing to say because I’m doing fantastic and they know it.”

In Minnesota, the issue dividing Jake Loesch’s family isn’t marijuana but **gay marriage**. Voters defeated a proposed amendment that would have banned **same-sex marriage** in the state, and Loesch, 24, of St. Paul, was deputy communications director for Minnesotans United for All Families—a group that fought the gay marriage ban. (It remains illegal under state law.)

Loesch is a conservative, like his huge family. He had difficult conversations with some aunts, uncles and grandparents when he took his recent job, and as the political season heated up, he tried increasingly to avoid the subject: “Having those conversations is healthy for the political process, but sometimes, when it’s with family, it can be really, really hard.”

But he found common ground with his grandmother, who is 85. She disagreed with his stance, but after the election, she posted on his Facebook wall: “Congratulations, Jake—even tho I didn’t agree with your stance on the issue I will have to say you really put your heart and soul into your convictions—and I must say I’m proud of you!!!”

“Our family is very understanding of everybody’s opinions,” says Jake’s grandmother, Bunny Arseneau. “We know where everybody stands because we’re a very open family. Your opinion is your opinion and we respect you for it.”

And so, Loesch says, he is hoping for the best at Thanksgiving—after all, they’re still family. Adds his grandmother: “My father was of the old school. You never leave the house mad at each other, and you never go to sleep mad at each other.”

As for the Marshalls in Massachusetts, there’s hope that the political discourse, however charged, may at least carry some levity as well.

Last Friday night, some family members gathered at the home of Andrew’s parents, in Hingham, Mass., for homemade pizza and wine—a dry run, maybe, for the bigger Thanksgiving dinner.

As a fire crackled in the fireplace, so did the political discourse.

“I did vote for Obama,” noted Rebecca Malone, 27, Andrew’s sister.

“Oh my God!” replied Andrew. “I didn’t know that! You’re out!”

But the family did find a few areas of agreement—for one thing, they all agreed on medicinal marijuana.

And though some voted for Democrat Elizabeth Warren for Senate, who won, and others didn’t, they all agreed that outgoing Sen. Scott Brown was good-looking.

As the wine flowed, Andrew waxed philosophical.

“If we didn’t care, we wouldn’t sit here and battle,” he said.

Added Anne, his liberal aunt: “And it’s all so much more interesting than the Kardashians.”

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