

Foes of gay marriage eye federal amendment: Riding high on President Bush's reelection

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Riding high on President Bush's reelection and on decisive victories to ban gay marriage in 11 states, activists in the traditional-marriage movement say they now have a mandate to claim their ultimate prize: an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

"The American people are now trying whatever democratic means are available to them. This is a dress rehearsal for what is to come. We are going to win," said Matt Daniels, president of the Washington-based Alliance for Marriage, which authored an ill-fated federal constitutional amendment earlier this year.

Voters approved constitutional amendments traditionally defining marriage in every state where they were on the ballot: Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon and Utah.

In Oregon, gay marriage advocates had concentrated vast resources with hopes for a single win. It didn't happen. Margins ranged from 7 percentage points in Oregon to 36 in Mississippi.

For gay marriage activists, whose cause gained unprecedented momentum in February with a Massachusetts court decision affirming the right to wed, the returns marked an occasion to pause, caucus and regroup. New York City-based Lambda Legal, which represents plaintiffs in gay issue cases, urged caution in challenging new amendments in court.

"While the picture looks bleak in states where constitutions have been amended," said an official Lambda Legal statement, "it could be even worse with court rulings upholding those amendments."

Other gay marriage supporters disagreed. They cited Louisiana, where a state court last month struck down a marriage-related constitutional amendment passed by 78 percent of voters. And they reaffirmed their faith in courts as the proper arena in which to pursue marriage rights.

"I have a fundamental problem with the fact that the rights of a disfavored minority are being voted on," said Ron Schlittler, interim executive director of the Washington-based Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. "I'll be interested to hear from the legal experts what our options are."

On the right, some credited the gay marriage issue for mobilizing a strong turnout that swelled Bush's vote totals and strengthened the GOP's majority in Congress. "There is no doubt," said Roberta Combs of the Washington-based Christian Coalition of America, "that because four radical left-wing Massachusetts judges ruled that homosexual 'marriages' are constitutional last year, there was a conservative backlash which played a major role in the election outcome."

Gary Glenn, who led the campaign to amend Michigan's constitution, joined a conference call the day after the election with more than 20 leaders in the traditional-marriage movement nationally. He said they agreed on a two-part agenda: amend the U.S. Constitution and lean on Bush to stack the Supreme Court with traditional-marriage supporters. "It's necessary because five members of the U.S. Supreme Court could wipe out everything done on the state level," he said. —*Religion News Service*