



# Name dominates dispute

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Article Launched: 03/13/2008 12:59:00 AM PDT

REDLANDS - A debate between two Massachusetts politicians who came to the University of Redlands to wrangle over the prospect of gay marriage in this country simply boiled down to semantics.

On one side, former Massachusetts state Sen. Cheryl Jacques, a Democrat, argued that same-sex couples should enjoy the same rights to marry as opposite-sex couples do.

"You are living in the middle of the gay person's battle for civil rights," she said.

On the other side was John H. Rogers, majority leader in Massachusetts' House of Representatives.

Rogers, also a Democrat, contended same-sex couples should have federally guaranteed rights that are equivalent to marriage, although he was unwilling to call legally recognized relationships between same-sex couples "marriage."

"Can the institution of marriage coexist with another institution of financial and emotional commitment? I believe that it can," he said.

"We do not have to change the time-honored definition of marriage."

The debate took place Tuesday night at Memorial Chapel at the University of Redlands.

Same-sex relationships could be dubbed "civil unions" or "domestic partnerships," Rogers said, as long as those differently named institutions are legally equal to marriage.

Jacques, who is openly gay, charged that Rogers' position echoed America's segregationist history.

"It's not separate and equal. It's separate and unequal," she said. "Not to mention we tried separate and equal in this country, and that didn't work."

Massachusetts recognizes same-sex marriage, but Jacques said she is troubled that other states are not bound to recognize such marriages.

Jacques also noted that her Massachusetts marriage is not recognized by the federal government.

"I'm a stranger, in the eyes of the law, to my spouse," she said.

A Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life poll found that 55percent of Americans oppose gay marriage.

The survey looked at the role of religion in the current presidential campaign. Poll results were released in September.

Opposition to gay marriage was highest among

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those described as evangelicals.

People who did not claim a religious affiliation were in the only religious subgroup in which a majority of those polled - 60percent - supported gay marriage.

Massachusetts is the only state to recognize same-sex marriage. Ten thousand such marriages have been recorded in that state since the 2004 court ruling that cleared the way for gay marriage there, according to Stateline.org.

California law has recognized same-sex domestic partnerships since 2005.

The state Supreme Court heard oral arguments on whether the Golden State's prohibition of same-sex couples' ability to enter into a legal relationship called "marriage" is constitutional.

Jacques predicted that an evolving patchwork of state laws relating to same-sex couples will eventually require the U.S. Supreme Court to decide whether gays have a constitutional right to marry.

"Something will go to the Supreme Court, and they will ultimately settle this one way or another for the whole country," she said.

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