

Gays, the Church & Public Policy

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 14, 2009 NCR Today

[Politico.com is reporting](#) [1]that Congressman Barney Frank, the openly gay champion of liberal causes from Massachusetts, is opposing efforts to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act. "It's not anything that's achievable in the near term," the congressman said. "I think getting ENDA [the Employment Non-Discrimination Act], a repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and full domestic partner benefits for federal employees will take up all of what we can do and maybe more in this Congress."

The Catholic Church continues to support the Defense of Marriage Act, passed by a GOP-controlled Congress in 1996 and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. The hierarchy has continued to oppose gay marriage at the state and local level as well. I wonder if they might not meet Cong. Frank half-way and support ENDA or a repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." I can think of no religious grounds for believing that gays and lesbians should not be able to serve in the military. And, provided there are conscience protections for religious institutions, I do not see why the Church could not support a bill aimed at ending employment discrimination.

One of the problems gay activists have been unwilling to admit is that in many states of the Union, the push for gay marriage has back-fired. In Massachusetts, getting the Commonwealth to recognize gay marriage may not have been that difficult, but as a consequence, states like Arkansas adopted constitutional provisions banning gay marriage and, in some states, civil unions as well. You attack a cultural totem like marriage at some risk.

There is a risk for the Church, too, a risk that the Church will appear to be aligned with anti-gay bigots. The Church's commitment to marriage has nothing to do with anti-gay bigotry. The Church does not recognize divorce or heterosexual cohabitation or birth control for the same set of reasons as it does not recognize gay marriage. By joining the effort to overturn "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" the bishops could show that their commitment to traditional marriage flows from the Gospel, not from mere prejudice.

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[1] http://www.politico.com/blogs/glennthrush/0909/Frank_wont_back_Marriage_Act_repeal.html