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We meet because we have learned that someone very close to us is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgendered.

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Love Stories

Monthly Meeting

Sunday, February 19, 2012

2:30–5:30 PM

Kenilworth United Church of Christ

The February meeting will begin with LGBT couples sharing their stories. As always, newcomers will be offered the alternative of meeting privately with a PFLAG parent.

Kenilworth United Church of Christ
45 Dalton Drive
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The church is located two blocks west of Niagara Falls Boulevard at the corner of Decatur Rd and Dalton Dr. Decatur runs off of Niagara Falls Boulevard about 0.8 miles south of Sheridan Drive and about 0.8 miles north of Kenmore Ave.

Our monthly meetings are in the library, which is near the parking lot entrance. The facility is handicap accessible.

New Parents Meetings are scheduled as needed at a location convenient to those involved. These self-help one-on-one meetings deal with the concerns of parents and family members who have recently learned that a loved one is Lesbian or Gay.

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Buffalo/Niagara, is a non-profit, all volunteer, community-based organization not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic, or political group. Membership is open to all. PFLAG membership lists are kept confidential and mailings are sent in plain envelopes.

Gay marriage repeal bill no sure bet

By Matthew Spolar, Concord Monitor staff

While the fate of a bill repealing same-sex marriage in New Hampshire remains uncertain, two facts are not in dispute: Republicans hold veto-proof majorities, with votes to spare, in the House and Senate. The state Republican Party platform defines marriage as "the legal union between one man and one woman" and opposes "all other forms of civil unions, regardless of where such unions were formed." So what's so hard about getting it done?

"It is certainly disappointing to me," Sen. Fenton Groen, a Rochester Republican who has been vocal in his support of the repeal. "I think that, in the House particularly, we have a significant libertarian caucus within the Republican Party... And there are some Republicans who differ on that within that caucus."

The 2010 elections entered a wave of Republicans from varying backgrounds, all generally united in a desire to cut spending and lower taxes. Where this group stands on the 2009 marriage law, an issue that turns on ideology and life experience, has never been as clearly defined. With lobbyists on both sides of the issue gearing up efforts to sway a House vote expected in the coming weeks - creating lists of those for and against and on the fence, urging constituents to pepper their lawmakers with phone calls and emails - legislators are wondering how their colleagues will finally come down on the issue.

"I'm for liberty and freedom, leaving people alone so long as they don't harm or defraud other people," said Rep. Steve Winter, a Newbury Republican who opposes the repeal. Winter, a 73-year-old retired airline captain,

was Senate clerk under Republican former Senate president Tom Eaton from 2002 to 2006. He considers himself a "fiscal conservative and a social libertarian." "I believe what people do with their lives, how they select their mates, is none of my business and none of the state's business," Winter said.

Rep. Seth Cohn, a Canterbury Republican who moved here as part of the Free State project, a libertarian movement to relocate to New Hampshire, is also against repeal. Cohn and others believe the bill may pass the House but does not have the two-thirds majority to override a potential veto by Democratic Gov. John Lynch, who signed the bill three years ago legalizing same-sex marriage. "I know for a fact, based on people I've talked to, that if Gov. Lynch vetoes it, that veto is not overrideable," Cohn said. Cohn said he plans to introduce an amendment on the House floor that would take government entirely out of marriage, instead giving all couples a civil union and leaving marriage up to churches and other religious institutions. That same approach is supported by the Republican Liberty Caucus of New Hampshire, a libertarian-leaning group that endorsed 107 House members elected in 2010.

Carolyn McKinney, chairwoman of the state's Republican Liberty Caucus, said the group has not taken a position on the repeal bill, which presents "a little bit of a rift among the libertarian types." "There's two different minds when it comes to this bill: The first is obviously the individual liberty aspect, that people should be allowed to do what they want to do," McKinney said. On the other hand, McKinney said, some argue recognizing gay marriage could infringe on religious liberties, such as clearing the way for public schools to teach all marriages as equal against the conviction of a child's parents. McKinney is personally in support of repealing the law because she believes families are stronger when built on a marriage between a man and a woman. "The family is one major bulwark against a large and intrusive state," McKinney said. "When we have stronger families... the less need there is for a strong, centralized government."

Rep. Andrew Manuse, a freshman Republican from Derry, was an early member of the Tea Party movement and serves as secretary of the Republican Liberty Caucus. Manuse said the 2009 law "was forcing a definition of marriage that does not exist in society as large." "To me, that's not liberty. That's tyranny," he said. Manuse said he would also prefer a measure that removes government from defining marriage entirely, and freshman Republican Sen. Jim Forsythe of Strafford, the Liberty Caucus's treasurer, says he is considering an amendment in the Senate similar to Cohn's. Manuse said despite having a firm position in support of the repeal effort - unlike Forsythe, who is undecided - he doesn't want to be known as a leading voice for the cause. "I've tried to stay out of this issue as much as possible," Manuse said.

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That unwillingness to take up the mantle in opposition to same-sex marriage has extended to top lawmakers in both chambers. Early last year, after House Majority Leader D.J. Bettencourt did not include the issue in his Republican agenda, the National Organization for Marriage sent out a mailer in his legislative district accusing him of standing "with Governor Lynch" and not supporting "traditional family values." Bettencourt wrote a letter to House Speaker Bill O'Brien, who has openly opposed same-sex marriage, arguing that the bill should be put off for a year. "An assault on our agenda has the potential to take important focus and energy away from our focus on the budget," he wrote.

When the 2012 session began this month, Bettencourt said the session would center on attracting jobs and business while "Democrats and some in the media remain obsessed with social issues." Senate President Peter Bragdon, a Milford Republican, said 2012 would be an "unsexy" affair for his chamber, focused on rolling back business taxes and regulations.

Gay marriage supporters in New Hampshire say the current of public opinion favors their side. A University of New Hampshire survey in October found 62 percent of residents oppose the repeal and 27 percent support it. The rest were neutral.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Kevin Smith, who spent three years as executive director of socially conservative group Cornerstone Action, had advised against retaining the repeal bill for 2012 after it was introduced last year by Rep. David Bates, a Windham Republican. "I thought they should just deal with it quickly and let the chips fall where they may," said Smith, who is also a registered lobbyist for the National Organization for Marriage, which is advocating the repeal bill.

If the bill is passed by the House and Senate and vetoed by Lynch, Smith said lawmakers should quickly attempt an override vote instead of letting the issue linger and seeking to pick up additional support. "My advice to the Legislature is: If you're going to drag out issues, let them be the issues that matter most to the people, which are jobs and the economy," he said.

Former House speaker Gene Chandler, a Republican from Bartlett, voted against making gay marriage legal in 2009. He said the silence from some lawmakers this time doesn't mean they haven't made up their minds, but rather "they don't want to get dragged into it." "It's kind of one of those issues we're going to have to deal with but wish we didn't have to, in my opinion," Chandler said. He also said it's a tough decision whether to support repeal, but he's leaning toward his previous opposition to same-sex marriage. "At the risk of getting 500 phone calls, I'd say I don't know," he said.

Senate Majority Leader Jeb Bradley also voted against the gay marriage law. But before he could support the repeal bill, he said, language establishing civil unions for same-sex and heterosexual couples must be

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strengthened so all employers and other entities would be required to recognize them. Additionally, the Wolfeboro Republican has concerns that civil unions are defined so broadly as to allow business partners to qualify. "These are deeply personal issues," Bradley said. "Leadership in the Senate is not going to push people one way or the other."

Groen said "it's always harder to repeal something than prevent it from passing. If we were attempting to pass gay marriage in this Legislature, I think it would fail 60-40," Groen said.

Like Groen, some legislators are ready to address the repeal effort head on. Sen. Ray White, a Republican from Bedford, has long been a social activist in the state and published conservative newsletter New Hampshire Family Watch in the mid-1990s. As a small business owner, however, he said his motivation to run for Senate in 2010 was solely to improve a "terrible business climate." White said his opposition to gay marriage stems from his father divorcing his mother in 1968, when White was 8 years old. White's father then married his secretary. "That left a real impression on me," he said. "I still carry those memories and those scars." White said his experience in a broken home fueled his belief that a family with a mother and father is the best environment to raise children. "I wouldn't say every family is Ozzie and Harriet, but I do think that's the best setup," he said.

Rep. Jennifer Coffey's view has also been colored by life experience. The Andover Republican, a nurse's assistant for 16 years, remembers a terminally ill woman who had been estranged from her family for 20 years because of her relationship with another woman. When the family she hadn't talked to for decades came to visit her in the hospital, they did not allow the woman's partner in the room. "It really stuck in my mind," she said. "There are certain things you see in health care that break your heart." Still, Coffey - who considers herself a "Goldwater Republican," a "little-'I' libertarian" - voted against the gay marriage law in 2009. Now, she plans to vote against repealing it, but says her position has been consistent all along. "I voted against government defining marriage," she said. "It doesn't have the right to define marriage in any sense. It is a religious ceremony."

HUD: Religious groups must abide by LGBT non-bias rule

By Chris Johnson, The Washington Blade

A Department of Housing & Urban Development official said religious institutions receiving federal funds for housing programs will have to abide by a new HUD rule prohibiting discrimination against LGBT people.

John Trasviña, assistant secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, confirmed the rule would impact religious institutions during a conference call in response to a question from the Washington Blade, saying, "All HUD housing providers are covered under this rule."

Asked to clarify whether these providers include religious institutions, Trasviña replied, "Yes."

Ian Thompson, the ACLU's legislative representative, first wrote in a blog posting on the ACLU's site that the rule will cover religious institutions that receive money for federal programs. "[T]he rule will require all organizations that operate HUD-assisted or HUD-insured housing facilities to serve LGBT Americans looking for shelter and housing — including religious organizations," Thompson said. "[O]nce a religious organization chooses to provide housing services or programs with the aid of federal funds and benefits from HUD, it cannot shield itself from traditional safeguards that protect civil rights in the provision of those services." Thompson added that religious organizations providing entirely private housing services are unaffected by the change.

"We are pleased that HUD said that all organizations must provide equal access to HUD housing programs and did not sanction the use of religion to discriminate," Thompson concluded.

The rule, first proposed in January, covers programs serving an estimated 5.5 million Americans, including those living in low-income subsidized housing. The measure, which has four general components, requires owners and operators of HUD-assisted housing to make housing available to applicants and occupants regardless of their LGBT status. The rule clarifies "families" otherwise eligible for HUD programs can't be excluded because of one or more members of the family's sexual orientation, gender identity or marital status. Additionally, the rule prohibits owners and operators of HUD-assisted housing or housing whose financing is insured by HUD from inquiring about the sexual orientation or gender identity of an applicant or occupant of a dwelling, whether renter or owner-occupied.

Trasviña said HUD clarified this provision doesn't prohibit voluntary and anonymous reporting of LGBT status in state, local or federal data collection requirements. Additionally, the measure has a bearing on mortgage insurance programs. It prohibits lenders from using LGBT status as a basis to determine a borrower's eligibility for Federal Housing Administration-insured mortgage financing. "These days, when one-third of new homebuyers are served by FHA lenders, this last element to make sure that one's sexual orientation or gender identity is not a basis for denying an FHA loan is critically important to America's families," Trasviña said. Trasviña added that rule is "governed as a HUD program rule," so, unlike the Fair Housing Act provision, HUD offices throughout the country will enforce it and not just the Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity.

HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan announced during a speech at the 24th annual Creating Change conference that HUD would make final the rule by publishing it in the Federal Register. On January 30th, the department published the text of the final regulation.

Trasviña confirmed that the Federal Register would publish the rule, but in response to another Blade question said he couldn't give a more definitive time for when the rule will be published.

"That's a little bit out of our control," Trasviña said. "Typically, the rules get printed within a week once they're submitted, so the rule has been submitted, we're just waiting for its publication." Trasviña noted that publication of the rule will start the 30-day period before the measure will go into effect and expects the measure to go into effect starting in March.

In a statement provided by HUD, gay Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) commended the department for implementing the change, saying "I am grateful to the Obama administration for instituting this important policy."

Christie says like same-sex marriage, civil rights movement could have been settled through ballot referendum

By Tom Hester Sr., New Jersey News Room

In a comment related to his call for a voter referendum on the proposal to legalize gay marriage in New Jersey, Gov. Chris Christie said, "People would have been happy to have a referendum on civil rights rather than fighting and dying in the streets in the South."

The governor, who called for a referendum on the Nov. 6 ballot that would ask voters to decide if the state should legalize same-sex marriage, also said he will veto the Democratic legislation to allow it when the proposal reaches his desk.

The comment that the civil rights movement of the 1960s could have been settled through a national or southern states voter referendum stunned Assembly Speaker Sheila Y. Oliver (D-Essex), who became the first African-American woman to head the lower house in 2010.

"Gov. Christie better sit down with some of New Jersey's great teachers for a history lesson, because his puzzling comment shows a complete misunderstanding about the civil rights movement," Oliver said. "It's impossible to ever conceive that a referendum on civil rights in the South would have been successful and brought justice to minorities. It's unfathomable to even suggest a referendum would have been the better course."

"Governor – people were fighting and dying in the streets of the South for a reason," the Assemblywoman said. "They were fighting and dying in the streets of the South because the majority refused to grant minorities equal rights by any method. It look legislative action to bring justice to all Americans, just as legislative action is the right way to bring marriage equality to all New Jerseyans."

"The governor's comment is an insult to those who had no choice but to fight and die in the streets for equal rights," Oliver said. "The governor needs to show the same courage. We do not shrug off civil rights. We do not pass on tough decisions."

Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Mercer) also offered criticism of the governor's comment.

"It's difficult to understand what the governor was thinking," Watson Coleman said. "His words defy history and were extremely insensitive to the struggle for equality of African-Americans and other minorities in this country. Fighting and dying in the streets of the South was not a choice, governor, it was the only way."

"Anyone who lived through that time or took a history class in school understands it was an incredibly dangerous and hostile period for African-Americans and other minorities in the South," the Assemblywoman said. "Basic human rights should never be decided by a referendum. But can you imagine the outcome if civil rights in this country, during this very racially charged time in our history, had been left up to a vote?"

"It took leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. to inspire legislators to ensure civil rights for everyone in this country, regardless of race, age or creed," Watson Coleman said. "If the governor was hoping to defend his reprehensible stance on marriage equality by suggesting that those who fought and died for civil rights in this county would have preferred a referendum, that by all historical accounts would have been most likely defeated, he failed miserably."

Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-Middlesex), the state Democratic chairman, said, "Rosa Parks didn't get to the front of the bus through a ballot question and Jim Crow laws weren't repealed by public referendum. These civil rights were won because throughout our history, great leaders -- both Democrats and Republicans, from Thomas Jefferson to Abraham Lincoln to Lyndon Baines Johnson -- have stood up and lead the forward march of progress. To call for a public referendum on any civil right is the refuge of someone who refuses to lead."

"Governor Christie has an opportunity to leave a mark in history as a someone who, when the beacon of civil rights called his name, stood up to be counted among the leaders," Wisniewski said. "My hope is that he finds the courage to take up the challenge and joins in the great American tradition of fighting to expand our civil rights and for justice."

Christie's office had no immediate comment on the criticism offered by Oliver, Watson Coleman, or Wisniewski.

The Democratic-controlled Legislature has made the legalization of same-sex marriage a priority for the new legislative session.

On January 24th, after a three-hour session, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved the bill (S-1) and sent it to the full Senate to await a vote. Oliver had vowed

to move the bill quickly through the Assembly when Senate action is complete.

A side reason for the Democrats action on the same-sex marriage bill is to try to embarrass Christie politically for opposing it. Christie is making a name for himself nationally among Republican Party activists and a number of them have been urging him to seek the GOP presidential nomination this year to save the party from a seemingly weak field of candidates. He also is up for reelection as governor next year.

A recent Quinnipiac University poll showed 52 percent of New Jersey voters believe gay couples should have the right to marry.

On January 24th, Christie said, "This issue that our state is exploring – whether or not to redefine hundreds of years of societal and religious traditions – should not be decided by 121 people in the Statehouse in Trenton. The fact is we're discussing huge change, and I believe we need to approach this not only in a thoughtful way, not in a rushed way, but also in a way where we're able to get the most input that we can from the public."

Should the "Marriage Equality and Religious Exemption Act" be approved in the state, New Jersey would become the seventh state to allow same-sex marriage. Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York have legalized it as have 10 countries, including South Africa, Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Christie Says Gay Supreme Court Nominee Won't Rule on Same-Sex Marriage

By Terrence Dopp, Bloomberg News

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said his pick to be the first openly gay justice on the state Supreme Court won't rule on issues involving same-sex marriage.

Christie, a first-term Republican, also said critics, including Assemblyman Reed Gusciora, one of two openly gay New Jersey legislators, are "numbnuts" for comparing him to segregationists for comments he made about civil rights.

The governor last week proposed a referendum on gay marriage. Democratic lawmakers said the issue is a matter of civil rights and shouldn't be decided by voters. Christie drew criticism from Democrats when he said that "people would have been happy with a referendum on civil rights rather than fighting and dying in the streets of the South."

Christie expanded on that statement today, saying that in the political climate of the 1960s, no referendum for civil rights would have passed. He said those pushing for same-sex marriage are touting popular support, a message he said contradicts opposition to a referendum.

Christie's nomination last week of Bruce Harris, 61, a Republican and mayor of Chatham, came a day before

the governor pledged to veto a same-sex marriage bill that Democrats say they have the votes to pass.

Gay Marriage

The governor, 49, said today that Harris told him that he has advocated for gay marriage personally and as a politician.

"If confirmed to the court, he would recuse himself from that matter because he did not want there to be the appearance of bias on his part on that issue," Christie told reporters. "My perspective on that issue was to put it aside because he's not going to rule on that."

The governor also said critics including Gusciora, a Democratic sponsor of the gay-marriage bill, are "numbnuts" for comparing him in prepared statements to segregationists.

"C'mon guys -- you've got to be able to call B.S. on those kinds of releases," Christie said to reporters in Trenton.

Democrats, who control both the Senate and Assembly, have made the gay-marriage issue a top priority in 2012. Two years ago, Democrats failed to pass a gay-marriage bill, even as then-Governor Jon Corzine, a Democrat, promised to sign it.

Corzine enacted a measure in 2006 to allow civil unions, after the state Supreme Court ordered lawmakers to extend marital rights to gay couples. The law is being challenged in state court by Lambda Legal, a national gay-rights advocacy group, which argues that it doesn't provide the same benefits and protections as marriage.

Bill to allow gay marriage clears state Senate committee

By Andrew Garber, Seattle Times Olympia bureau

For Senate Democrats, the last big decision left on gay-marriage legislation is when to take a floor vote.

The bill legalizing same-sex marriage cleared the Senate Government Operations, Tribal Relations and Elections Committee on Thursday with a 4-3 party-line vote after Democrats beat back several attempts to amend the bill.

Supporters say they already have enough votes to approve the measure in both the state Senate and the House, and Gov. Chris Gregoire has said she supports it.

It's not clear when the full Senate will take up the measure, Senate Bill 6239. Sen. Ed Murray, D-Seattle, the bill's prime sponsor said he's pushing for a vote next week, but doesn't know if that will happen.

Sen. Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane, would only say she expects the bill to move "fairly quickly."

Democrats have been under pressure by Republicans to speed up work on a \$1.5 billion budget shortfall. The GOP contends the majority party has been distracted by issues such as gay marriage.

There were several attempts by Republican opponents to amend the same-sex legislation in committee.

Sen. Don Benton, R-Vancouver, attempted to add a provision that would send the gay-marriage law to voters, arguing "a change this significant in long standing state law ... requires more than a simple majority vote of the Legislature."

The amendment was rejected on a party-line vote, along with four other amendments proposed by Sen. Dan Swecker, R-Rochester, an opponent of the legislation.

Swecker's amendments dealt with various protections for religious groups under the proposed law. Essentially, Swecker argues, anyone with religious objections to same-sex marriage should have the ability to decline services to gay couples.

"I have to stick by my religious faith. I really don't have any option. I think we need to give people the right to do that," he said.

Murray said what Swecker proposes "would be outright discrimination. It's not serving people at the lunch counter."

Murray and other proponents of the bill said it already makes clear that churches could decline to be involved in same-sex weddings without risking a discrimination complaint.

State Sen. Craig Pridemore, chairman of the Government Operations committee, said discussions are under way to make sure the exemption for religious organizations could not be vetoed, in order to address concerns raised by opponents. The governor has said she wants the bill to include such protections.

Gay-marriage supporters earlier this week clinched the votes needed to pass a bill through the Legislature when Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen, D-Camano Island, announced her support.

Opponents of the measure have promised to mount a referendum challenge if the Legislature approves the law.

Same-sex marriage is legal in New York, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and the District of Columbia.

Same-sex marriage supporters say minds have been changed, seek new referendum

By Judy Harrison, Bangor Daily News

Lucie Bauer has changed quite a few minds about same-sex marriage over the more than 20 years she and her partner have lived in midcoast Maine, the 71-year-old said Thursday at a press conference to announce that petitions to put a referendum on the ballot in November would be submitted to the secretary of state.

But one friend she identified only as Bob just couldn't support gay marriage. "When my partner and I had a commitment ceremony, it was in the Quaker tradition and everyone in attendance was asked to sign a document expressing their support of our commitment to each other," Bauer said at a press conference at the State

House packed with same-sex marriage supporters and the news media. "Bob did not sign it."

On Election Day in 2011, however, Bob quietly walked up to a table Bauer and Bob's wife were staffing and signed a petition to ask Maine voters to allow marriage licenses to be issued to same-sex couples. "That his signature is on one of these petitions means more to me than I can put into words," she said, gesturing to the boxes stacked behind her containing the petitions.

Bauer was one of eight individuals who spoke at the press conference to announce that EqualityMaine, the Maine Civil Liberties Union and the Maine Women's Lobby had collected nearly twice the number of signatures needed to put the question on the ballot. Bauer's story about Bob illustrated that voters have changed their minds about same-sex marriage, organizers of Thursday's event said. Another reason the coalition decided to go forward, Betsy Smith of EqualityMaine said, is that polling by gay marriage supporters indicates 54 percent of state residents now support allowing same-sex couples to marry.

"The number of signatures we gathered and the thoughtful conversations we've been having with voters tell us that Mainers are eager to speak on this question again," she said.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, which opposes same-sex marriage and contributed \$500,000 to the last campaign, expressed disappointment that same-sex marriage supporters chose to seek another vote so soon. "After the bitterly divisive campaign of 2009, in which Maine people clearly and decisively voted against changing the meaning of marriage, we're dismayed that they would bring this issue back for yet another vote," Brian Souchet, a spokesman for the diocese, said in a statement.

Carroll Conley, executive director of the Christian Civic League of Maine, said in a telephone interview after the press conference that the supporters of same-sex marriage were seeking "to redefine marriage as something other than the special union between one man and one woman." "Natural marriage is the fundamental building block for all human civilization, including Maine," he said Thursday. "Protecting marriage is the time-tested way for society to make sure as many children as possible are raised by their mom and dad. Moms and dads are both necessary; they are not replaceable by generic adults."

The proposed law would not force clergy to perform same-sex marriages, Smith said at the press conference. Souchet and Conley said they expected to form a coalition soon to campaign against the expected referendum question. Smith said she expected the campaign in favor of same-sex marriage would need to raise between \$4 million and \$5 million to be effective.

"I have no doubt that we'll be significantly outspent," Conley said when asked about campaign funding. "While

we may not have those outside sources, we can still be very effective with our message.” Conley pointed to the defeat in November of expanding the number of gambling sites in Maine as an example of how effective the Christian Civic League can be in influencing issues on the ballot. “We were outspent on gambling 5- or 6-to-1,” he said.

The new petition drive kicked off in August and by November gay marriage supporters had collected more than 100,000 signatures, but supporters wanted to wait to make sure the timing was right before deciding whether to deliver those petitions to the secretary of state.

The National Organization for Marriage promised “an all out battle in Maine” against the referendum. “NOM intends to vigorously fight this attempt by same-sex marriage advocates to impose gay marriage in Maine,” said Brian Brown, NOM’s president, in a press release Thursday. “Maine voters rejected gay marriage barely more than two years ago. What part of ‘no’ don’t gay marriage advocates understand?”

The Legislature previously approved gay marriage, but it was rejected by a 2009 statewide vote, 53 percent to 47 percent. If Mainers approve gay marriage, the state would be the first to do so by a popular vote. To get the question on the 2012 ballot, organizers needed to collect at least 57,277 signatures by Jan. 30. If the signatures are certified, the proposal first goes to the Republican-controlled Legislature for an up-or-down vote. If the Legislature approves the proposal and the governor signs it, then gay marriage will be legalized. If the Legislature doesn’t approve it or the governor doesn’t sign a bill, as expected, the question goes to voters.

In New England, gay marriage is allowed in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Vermont, and civil unions for same-sex couples are allowed in Rhode Island. Other states that allow gay marriage are New York and Iowa, along with Washington,

D.C. In the six states where gay marriage is allowed, the laws all came through either court orders or legislative votes, not through a statewide popular vote.

Elsewhere, bills to legalize same-sex marriage have good chances of passage this year in legislatures in Maryland, New Jersey and Washington. Proposed amendments for constitutional bans on gay marriage will be on the ballots in North Carolina on May 8 and in Minnesota on Nov. 6.

The citizens’ initiative

The title of the proposed citizens’ initiative is: An Act to Allow Marriage Licenses for Same-Sex Couple and Protect Religious Freedom.

The proposed ballot wording submitted Thursday is: “Do you favor a law allowing marriage licenses for same-sex couples, and that protects religious freedom by ensuring that no religion or clergy be required to perform such a marriage in violation of their religious beliefs?”

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2011–2012

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