

Gay Rights in Canada Secure

Contributed by Doug Struck
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Canadian Prime Minister Loses Bid to Revisit Gay Marriage Law

By Doug Struck
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TORONTO, Dec. 7 -- Canada's House of Commons rejected a move Thursday by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper to reopen debate on a national law permitting same-sex marriages.

The House, by a vote of 175 to 123, defeated the motion brought by Harper to fulfill a campaign promise to opponents of same-sex marriage. Thirteen members of his Conservative Party voted against the motion, reflecting a desire by Parliament not to reopen the issue.

"Times have changed. We've moved on. The House has moved on," Bill Graham, a Liberal Party member, said Wednesday in debate on the proposal.

After a succession of court decisions in favor of gay rights, Parliament approved legislation last year allowing same-sex marriage throughout the country.

The law helped bolster a rush of marriages, many of them between gays from the United States, where same-sex marriage is legal only in Massachusetts. U.S. couples face no residency requirements to be married in Canada.

Same-sex marriage activists said Canada's law stands in stark contrast to the battle over the issue in the United States, where 27 states have passed constitutional amendments banning such marriages.

"Canada, Spain, Belgium, Holland are ahead of the U.S.," said David Buckel, a civil rights lawyer and head of the marriage program for Lambda Legal, an American gay rights organization based in New York. "Consistently, Canada sets the better example for how the democracy should work than does the United States."

During his campaign before January's national election, Harper promised to try to reverse Canada's same-sex marriage law by reopening the debate in Parliament.

Opponents in the legislature called Harper's move an empty gesture. The prime minister expended little visible effort to try to win the vote, and political commentators suggested that he simply wanted to put the issue behind him before another national election was called.

Harper, who skipped the debate on the motion Wednesday, commented before the vote Thursday that the issue was "a matter of personal conscience."

On the House floor Thursday, Liberal member Belinda Stronach said that "the prime minister and his government owe it to Canadians to state definitively today: Is this the last time" Parliament will have to vote on the issue? "We are talking about people, our friends, our neighbors, our fellow citizens, people who love each other and want to spend their lives together."

Joseph Ben-Ami, director of the Institute for Canadian Values, which opposes same-sex marriage, said, "We're not taking this vote too seriously." But he promised, "It will be an election issue when the next election happens."