

WEB EXCLUSIVE

By Amy Yarbrough

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MONTEREY - When they met here last week, the Conference of Delegates of California Bar Associations passed resolutions on a wide array of subjects, from the financial bailout to the death penalty.

But the subject that drew the most emotion involved two words: I do.

Speaker after speaker on Saturday, the second day delegates met during the State Bar's annual meeting, got up to say why they supported a resolution backing the California Supreme Court's decision overturning a ban on same-sex marriage.

Overwhelmingly approved by delegates, the marriage fairness resolution also expresses the conference's opposition to Proposition 8, the initiative on the November ballot that would add to the Constitution a definition of marriage being a union between a man and a woman.

James J. Brosnahan, a delegate representing the Bar Association of San Francisco, spoke of the need to win "not only in this hall, we need to win this in November."

In an impassioned speech, Brosnahan spoke of how marriage law was used for hundreds of years as a tool to oppress people, like in Ireland, for example, where Catholics and Protestants weren't allow to marry.

"Haters in California, step back from our Constitution, you will not take over our Constitution," he said. "There's not enough love in the world, but what there is the government needs to get out of the way."

"This is a very, very important right gays and lesbians now have, and we shouldn't take it away," said Matthew St. George, at-large director of the Los Angeles County Bar Association's delegation.

With the right to marry also comes the right not to marry, St. George said, in a lighthearted reference to him and his partner.

"We're working on it," he said.

Jeffrey Erdman, who did take the plunge and married his same-sex partner, shared his personal story.

Erdman, also a member of the Los Angeles delegation, traveled with his now-husband to Monterey in 2007, and the couple rushed up to San Francisco to get married.

Erdman said he and his partner soon discovered what a difference being able to refer to each other as husband made to them and to the rest of the world.

"They recognize and validate our relationship in a way we never experienced before," he said.

Proponents were, by and large, preaching to the choir. Of the hundreds of delegates who packed the three-day conference, only a few raised cards to oppose the resolution.

Resolutions passed by the conference can lead to rules and policies put in place by the State Bar's Board of Governors and to legislation. Among the other resolutions passed was one recommending changing the penal code to allow those who have been convicted, but later found to be factually innocent, to seek compensation and have their records expunged.

Also passed was a resolution - one of several related to capital punishment - that would limit the death penalty to the "worst of the worst," those previously convicted of first-degree murder or those who have committed multiple murders.

Not faring so well was a resolution recommending that Congress sponsor legislation to "require full and open hearings into the causes and need for any financial bailout program."

St. George questioned how, as attorneys, the delegates were qualified to get involved in economic issues.

"Please don't stick our noses where we have no business," St. George said.

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