

Same-Sex Marriage Faced a Serious Test this Week in the United States

From VOA Learning English, this is IN THE NEWS.

Thousands of peaceful demonstrators gathered outside the Supreme Court in Washington, DC this week. They were there to show their support for or opposition to same sex marriage. They hoped to have an effect on the justices inside who spent two days listening to arguments.

One case seeks to block California’s 2008 ballot measure known as Proposition 8. The measure banned same sex marriage in the state.

The second case involves a 1996 law known as the Defense of Marriage Act. It defines marriage as only between a man and a woman. It also denies same sex couples certain federal benefits that married heterosexuals receive. They include Social Security survivor payments and certain tax deductions.

Attorney Ted Olson represented California gay couples who want to marry. He spoke after the hearing.

“The broadest that argument we made is that it is just wrong. It is not consistent with the ideals, and the laws and the constitution of this country to take our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and put them in a class and deny them rights that we give to everyone else.”

Attorney Charles Cooper argued in support of the ban against same sex marriage.

“We believe that Proposition 8 is constitutional and that the place for the decision to be made regarding redefining marriage is with the people, not with the courts.”

John Lewis opposes the ban. He wants the court to settle the issue once and for all.

“We are Americans. And we are here on the steps of the United States Supreme Court because every single American, without exception, should have the freedom to marry the person that they love.”

Gay rights activist Michelle Bailey was also there.

“I was born here. I pay taxes. I deserve equal rights.”

Dominic Parisi and his husband Dan Zimmerman also came out to show their support for same sex marriage. Mr. Parisi said the show of support in front of the Supreme Court sends a message to government leaders.

“I see the country going much faster than the court. We have been together for 29 years. Actually, I’ve been going faster than the court for many years, so I think it’s time for the court to catch up.”

Dan Zimmerman said the push for gay rights is a grassroots effort led by the people.

“I think basically the people are going to have to drag the politicians after them. I am surprised that the country has reached this point, but proud that we have.”

Recent public opinion studies show a major change in attitudes towards gay marriage over the past several years. Some reports put support for gay marriage at more than 50 percent. Nine states and Washington, DC currently recognize same sex marriage.

But even with the change in public opinion, a large number of Americans still resist same-sex marriage. Peter Sprigg is with the Family Research Council, a conservative activist group in Washington.

“Society needs children. Children need a mom and dad. That is why we think marriage should be defined as the union of one man and one woman.”

Shirley Phelps-Roper belongs to an anti-gay church in Kansas. She also made the trip to Washington to show her opposition.

“When the Supreme Court does this thing, it’s going to be the last straw. This nation’s destruction is imminent.”

Andrew Pugno is with the Protect Marriage Coalition. He worries that the court could rule in such a way that would open the way for gay marriage in all 50 states.

“A victory here for us means that this issue returns to the people and their legislatures and their elected representatives where the debate belongs.”

Several members of the high court are considering the issue with care, including Justice Samuel Alito.

“You want us to step in and render a decision based on an assessment of the effects of this institution, which is newer than cellphones or the internet?”

Rulings in both cases are expected at the end of June. No matter the decision, supporters of same sex marriage outside the court said this week will be remembered as a historic moment in the struggle for equal rights for gay and lesbian Americans.