

Italian American officials and the NY Gay Marriage Defeat: Voting on Conscience, or according to Politics?

Gabrielle Pati (January 03, 2010)



The defeat for the New York gay marriage bill this December was a devastating blow for the gay community in all parts of NYC, upstate and Long Island. Gay activists are now targeting some Italian American officials and criticizing them for voting against the bill due to closeted conservatism or just plain betrayal.

In early December, the New York State Senate, a body of politicians under intense scrutiny for its lack of unity in the Democratic v. Republican scramble for power, met to vote on a gay marriage bill that would have potentially given thousands of citizens the right to get married. The bill was defeated, and many criticizing Queens politicians for their votes against the bill and failure to stand up for the rights of their constituents.

The defeat was painful for the gay rights movement: a clear 38-24 vote proved that some politicians in New York are voting, not on the issue at stake, but on the stake at getting elected in the



future. On Saturday Dec. 12, gay rights activists organized by groups like the LGBT Coalition of Queens and the Western Queens Same Sex Marriage Alliance, marched on Monserrate's office in East Elmhurst Saturday; and Sen. George Onorato's (D-Astoria) office Sunday. The pain of the defeat of the recent gay marriage bill is still resonating in the New York gay community, and the voice of rage intends to be heard.

Queens gay rights activists are up in arms about the recent vote against gay marriage that failed to convert New York to the side of the handful of American states in which gay marriage is legal.

Although thought of as a state infused with liberalism, there are many conservative and anti gay marriage crusaders who represent New Yorkers in the Senate and in the City Council. Some examples are Eric Ulrich, the 24 year old Republican openly opposed to gay marriage who represents Howard Beach and Ozone Park in the Council; and Senator Queens Joseph Addabbo (D-Howard Beach) who voted against the bill even though support from gay rights activists aided in his victory in last year's election. Other senators to vote against it were Shirley Huntley (D-Jamaica), George Onorato (D-Astoria) and Frank Padavan (R-Bellerose).

Joe Addabbo told reporters following a City Hall conference recently that "First and foremost, I am very thankful to everyone who got me to where I am as a state senator. I am grateful to all those in the gay community that supported me - whether it be financially or with the hours of volunteer work. I'm grateful to them, but never once did I say to anyone or any particular entity what my position was on the issue." Although the Senator voted twice in favor of extending rights to same-sex couples, he insists that his "no" vote on the marriage bill was not a betrayal to the Queens' gay community.

Regarding Senator Padavan, a political insider, speaking on condition of anonymity said that "within a year and a half there'll be a senator in that district that supports marriage equality." Yet his vote against the gay marriage bill has lasting effects for the gay community in Queens that he represents. The underlying concern here is that New Yorkers need politicians that will represent their changing needs. Queens is now a county with a growing gay population deserving of the same rights that other citizens enjoy, regardless of sexual orientation. The conservative and/or religious residents of Queens would beg to differ, and the vote against gay marriage is proof of the sway these voters have on their local officials.

Gay citizens in New York feel betrayed by their local politicians, especially by Sen. Addabbo, in the defeat of the gay marriage bill vote this December. Were politicians voting "No" because they were afraid of the clout they might lose? Or did the bill's shut down signify the kind of conservatism hidden in the closets of political figures, a tendency that stays repressed until voting time? In any case, senators who were thought to be on the 'yes' side of the gay marriage equation in New York abandoned ship when the movement was at a critical point, and the voting season next year will unleash the frustration that gay New Yorkers are harnessing, and the change they wish to see.

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