

GAY MARRIAGE

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 10, 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: LEON PANETTA

FROM: JACK QUINN
GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS
MARSHA SCOTT

SUBJECT: GAY MARRIAGE LEGISLATION

This week, legislation on gay marriage was introduced by Bob Dole and Don Nickles in the Senate, and by Bob Barr (plus five other Republicans and two Democrats) in the House. We understand that there will be joint Senate-House hearings on the gay marriage bills as early as next Wednesday.

The proposed legislation has two parts. The first provides that states need not give "full faith and credit" to other states' recognition of gay marriage -- a provision that appears to anticipate legalization of gay marriage in Hawaii. This provision is of no real substantive significance, however, since the Constitution's "full faith and credit" clause already would permit each state to choose whether to recognize a gay marriage granted by another state.

The second part of the legislation would set forth that under any federal statute, rule or regulation, the terms "marriage" and "spouse" shall only refer to heterosexual marriage. This provision would mean that any federal funds, privileges or protections, including those administered by states, could not be made available to same sex married partners, even if same sex marriages are recognized by the state where they reside. This provision does have substantive significance and may be viewed by the gay and lesbian community as a form of overt discrimination. At least for now, however, it would not alter the status quo, since no state recognizes same sex marriages and neither does the federal government. There are, of course, many difficult issues facing our communities related to what benefits and rights can be associated with same sex partnerships outside the context of marriage. But those difficult issues are not addressed by this bill.

Given your stated and longstanding opposition to gay marriage, we believe there would not be a substantive basis for you not to sign the proposed legislation if it were to be adopted by Congress. **It is therefore our recommendation that you should sign this legislation if it is enacted.**

At the same time, we believe that your willingness to sign this legislation should not be announced until it is absolutely necessary to do so. While it is critical that your position be unambiguous and unwavering, there is a risk that too early an announcement of a willingness to sign the bill could cause Republicans to add even more draconian provisions.

For this reason, we recommend that in the first instance, the White House should state that you are opposed to gay marriage, but that there has not yet been an opportunity to review this legislation. The legislation has not yet even been marked up by committee, and thus it is premature for the White House to comment. If and when this approach is no longer viable, the White House would state that you would be prepared to sign this bill if enacted by Congress.

Assuming your approval of this approach, Marsha, George and others will be talking to key leaders in the gay and lesbian community to explain your position and why it is necessary for you to take this action. We can expect that many gays and lesbians will be hurt, if not offended, by this approach to the proposed legislation.

_____ AGREE _____ DISAGREE _____ DISCUSS