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Volume Nine, Number Forty • Three Sections • One Dollar • Thursday, February 12, 2004

Gay marriage supporters rally at State House

By Mary Ann Bragg

BANNER STAFF

Whooping and hollering from the crowd inside the State House on Tuesday, in support of same-sex marriage, resounded all the way upstairs to state Rep. Shirley Gomes' office on the fifth floor, where her assistant Patricia Johnson sorted through more than 100 e-mails that had arrived overnight.

Most of the e-mails were about the Constitutional Convention that would convene in Boston on Wednesday, Johnson said, where Gomes, state Sen. Robert O'Leary and every other state legislator would decide whether to approve a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.

In theory, an amendment to the state Constitution requires a simple majority vote in 2004 (one legislator, one vote), a second vote in 2005, and a ballot vote in 2006. The ballot question is what Gomes said on Tuesday is important to her, to let voters participate in any potential change in the definition of marriage, and she plans to vote in favor of the amendment.

At the rally downstairs in the State House, though, Mass Equality speakers said the expansion of the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples — a matter of equality, they said — is for the courts to decide, "not the ballot box." State Rep. Byron Rushing of Boston, of African-

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Pier Gustafson of Somerville outside the State House in Boston on Tuesday.

PHOTO MARY ANN BRAGG



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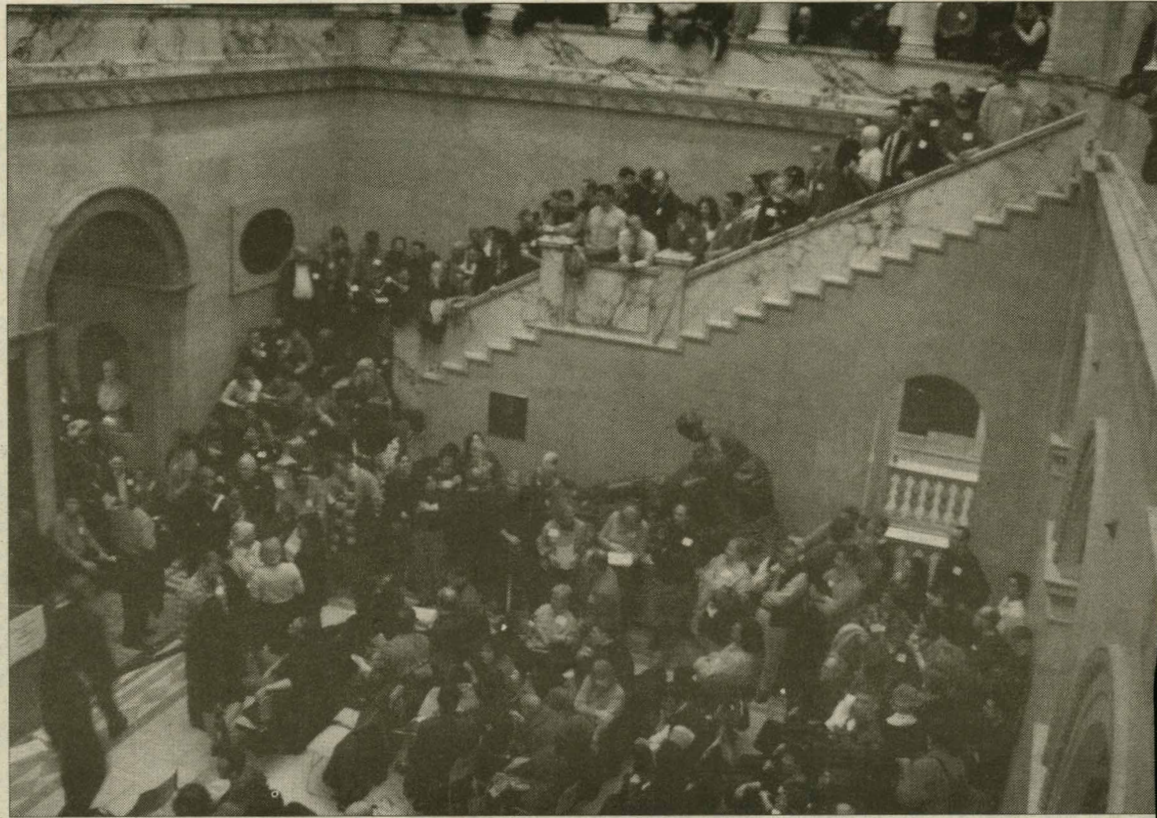
GLAD attorney Mary Bonauto speaks to Tuesday's rally.

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American descent, joked with the crowd that "of course" the creators of the state Constitution didn't envision same-sex marriages, just as they didn't envision an African-American state representative.

State Sen. Dianne Wilkerson of Boston, also of African-American descent, seemed to take di-

rect aim at a joint statement issued by black clergy, reported by the Boston Globe on Tuesday, disapproving of same-sex marriage. Wilkerson called herself "a practicing Christian of the Baptist persuasion who is in regular contact with God." Explaining that her family had moved north from Arkansas in order to be free citizens, Wilkerson told the crowd, "we're in this together."



Supporters of the Supreme Judicial Court's ruling on the unconstitutionality of the state's marriage laws gather in the State House.

"I don't care what it costs," she said. "We'll go down fighting."

At times during the rally the crowd sang patriotic songs and an American flag was unfurled from the balcony. Children were encouraged to sit up front and a seeing-eye dog lay at the end of one aisle. The often-photographed lesbian couple, Hillary and Julie Goodridge, two

plaintiffs in the state Supreme Judicial Court case, told the crowd with smiles that they would meet all the rally attendees in Boston City Hall on May 17 to apply for marriage licenses.

Which each successive speaker at the rally, listeners were encouraged to inundate legislators with calls and then encourage friends to do the same.

"We are determined," Arline

Isaacson of Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Caucus said. "We have friends who are determined ... and we're going to keep coming back year after year after year."

Isaacson and others affiliated with Mass Equality, a recently formed local and national coalition of organizations in support

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of same-sex marriage, spoke to the crowd for more than an hour, at times overwhelming the booming echo of "Roll call!" coming from outside the House chamber doors.

Earlier in the day, Sue Hyde of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force had instructed volunteer marshals on how to handle crowds, where to shepherd families arriving for the rally with children. She encouraged the marshals to be affectionate for the media, "cuddle and kisses" for the cameras.

Outside, in what seemed like balmy winter weather, state and Boston police were present in numbers disproportionate to the size and rowdiness of the crowd that crossed over Beacon Street steadily and filed into the State House for the rally. There were no hecklers or people holding signs opposing same-sex marriage, apart from a lone man on the street corner after the rally had dispersed in the late afternoon. Across the street from the capitol, only police cars and barricades dominated Boston Common.

"We think the vote is close," Provincetown resident Lynette Molnar said on Monday of the legislators' votes on Wednesday at the Constitutional Convention. Molnar, who volunteers for the na-

tional Human Rights Campaign, was busy in Provincetown this week raising what she hoped would be \$25,000 for Mass Equality, to pay for expenses related to the group's lobbying efforts on Wednesday.

"The opposition is saying they have the votes," Molnar said. "If we are able to prevail on Wednesday then the fight is over, done, gone. If we lose, there will be a really exhaustive, painful, extensive fight. ... If this amendment passes, we're looking at a house-to-house, two-year battle across the state."

Provincetown Selectman Sarah Peake wrote to Rep. Gomes this week, expressing her "strong negative" feelings about the proposed constitutional amendment "denying marriage equality."

Selectman Cheryl Andrews and her partner Jennifer Germaek filed a notice of intent to marry in Provincetown Town Hall last week. And state Rep. O'Leary said, generally, that his intention is to vote against the amendment. "I personally don't believe we should amend the state constitution to narrow people's rights," O'Leary said. "This is historic, and the state constitution is rarely changed, and it's not common and it shouldn't be common. It should be an extraordinary piece of business." □

Marriage views vary among faithful

By Sally Rose

BANNER STAFF

Because Provincetown has a significant gay population, many people may assume that the whole population must be in support of gay civil marriage. But most residents know the town is home to as many diverse opinions as other places, especially where religion is concerned.

The Episcopal Church of St. Mary of the Harbor and the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House both currently conduct commitment ceremonies. However, the Rev. Deborah Holt of the Methodist Church said she is not allowed to perform commitment ceremonies. And the Catholic Church's official perspective has been made all too clear by recent comments from Archbishop Sean O'Malley during recent demonstrations in Boston in response to the constitutional convention vote that was to take place Wednesday and Thursday by the state Legislature.

The Rev. Henry Dahl of St. Peter the Apostle was out of town and not available to com-

ment. However, a few parishioners were willing to share their perspectives.

Ruth O'Donnell, who will be 90 years old this March and has lived here all her life, thinks some sort of civil union structure should be followed for gay couples. "I don't think they need to get married," she said, but she added that gay couples "have to have something" with which they can get all the benefits of marriage. O'Donnell noted that some members of her family are gay.

A 39-year-old member of St. Peter's, a mother of three children who preferred not to be named, said she hasn't really paid attention to or formed an opinion on the issue because it doesn't really affect her.

However, at 80 years old, Louis Rivers has a live-and-let-live attitude about the issue of gay marriage. Rivers, a life-long member of St. Peter's, said, "If that's what they want, give it to them. Doesn't bother me."

One 69-year-old member of the Methodist Church said she, too, believes, marriage should be between a man and

woman, but added that legislation should be enacted so that gay couples can get the same benefits inherent in a marriage license. "Some of these couples have been together 30 or 40 years and they should be protected somehow," she said.

The Rev. John Nelson, who is ordained as a Presbyterian minister but attends the Wellfleet Congregational Church, said he chaired a task force on gay and lesbian concerns for his church before he retired but described the organization as "homophobic."

"People who deny marriage to gay and lesbian people are, in my opinion, very far from the Kingdom of God, and practicing a Christianity I do not recognize. ... I receive their pension, and I maintain my ordination to be able to do weddings and funerals, but I no longer have anything to do with my old denomination," Nelson said. "As long as my denomination doesn't find out and defrock me, then I am ready and willing to marry people, regardless of their sexual orientation. I will even marry Republicans, so you know I must be liberal." □