

*****CAR-RT LOT**COUN

000087 02/01/2006

COUNCIL ON AGING

26 ALDEN ST

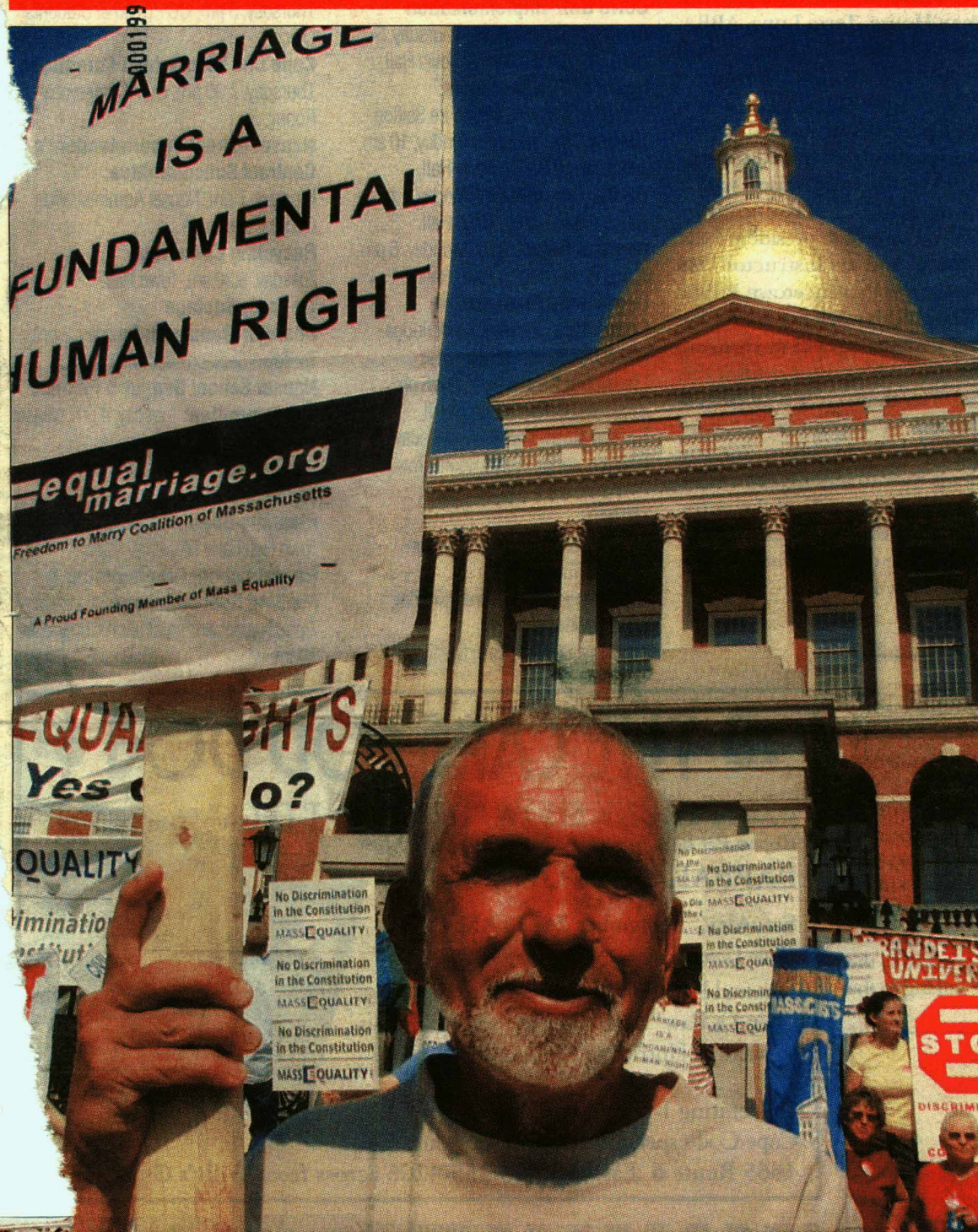
PROVINCETOWN MA 02657-1444

PROVINCETOWN

BANNER

Serving the Communities of Provincetown, Truro, Wellfleet and Eastham

Volume Eleven, Number Twenty • Three Sections • One Dollar • Thursday, September 22, 2005



Amendment to ban gay marriage fails

Gomes reverses stance on amendment given little support

By **Mary Ann Bragg**

BANNER STAFF

BOSTON — A constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage and create civil unions took a nosedive last week as expected at the constitutional convention here on Beacon Hill. In a surprise vote Rep. Shirley Gomes, whose district includes the Outer Cape, reversed her vote from last year, saying there was little support for the legislation from either side.

“In what we were able to shape in March of 2004, the amendment recognized and respected traditional and non-traditional marriage, with all equal benefits in the state of Massachusetts, as it was worded,” Gomes said on

Tuesday. “Over the last year, support from both sides has eroded. I still believe in civil unions. At that time [last year], as I mentioned, I heard from over 3,000 people, with strong support for both sides. That was not the case in 2005. It didn’t make sense to me to vote for something that I didn’t have strong support for, even though I thought it was a good amendment. ... We serve our constituency to the greatest degree possible.”

Gomes said in the weeks prior to the convention she received phone calls and e-mails from about 30 people in her 4th Barnstable District, with only one person in favor of the amendment. Sen. Robert O’Leary, a Democrat whose district includes all of Cape Cod and the islands, voted against the amendment, as he did last year.

The amendment was defeated 157 votes to 39 after nearly two hours of speeches. Compared to last year’s close vote, 105-92, the large margin of defeat was attributed to two trends: conservative legislators throwing

Provincetown resident Peter Schweizer, a supporter of gay marriage, held signs in front of the State House.

MARRIAGE continued on page 24

MARRIAGE continued from page 1

their support behind a stricter petition initiative amendment in the works and an influx of freshmen legislators who support gay marriage.

Early on Wednesday, members of conservative and liberal organizations both predicted that the amendment would fail.

"After over a year of gay and lesbian marriage under equal marriage rights, there have been well over 6,600 gay and lesbian couples that have been married," MassEquality campaign director Marty Rouse said. "And legislators and the voters of Massachusetts themselves have seen what a joy marriage brings, whether you're gay, lesbian, straight, whatever. Joy is a very powerful emotion, and legislators have seen that joy in the Commonwealth, and they have changed their minds based on that."

Rouse said MassEquality, an umbrella organization supporting gay marriage, has deliberately stood by legislators who voted for "equal marriage rights" at last year's constitutional convention. "Every single legislator that voted for equal marriage rights last year was re-elected with a very large margin," Rouse said. "We have to make sure that anyone that votes for equal marriage rights today is also protected and thanked properly. And that's what we have done. We have built a politically powerful

movement for equality in this state and we are flexing our political muscle. And the Legislature pays attention to that."

The amendment had to be ratified by the Legislature again this year, in the same language, to be placed on the ballot in 2006.

The president of Massachusetts Family Institute (MFI), which opposes gay marriage, said his organization had already withdrawn their support for the amendment more than a year ago. "This is a step ahead for the new protection of marriage amendment," Kris Mineau said on Wednesday.

Mineau and MFI are sponsoring a second marriage amendment, a petition initiative that would define marriage as only for a man and a woman, with no provisions for civil unions.

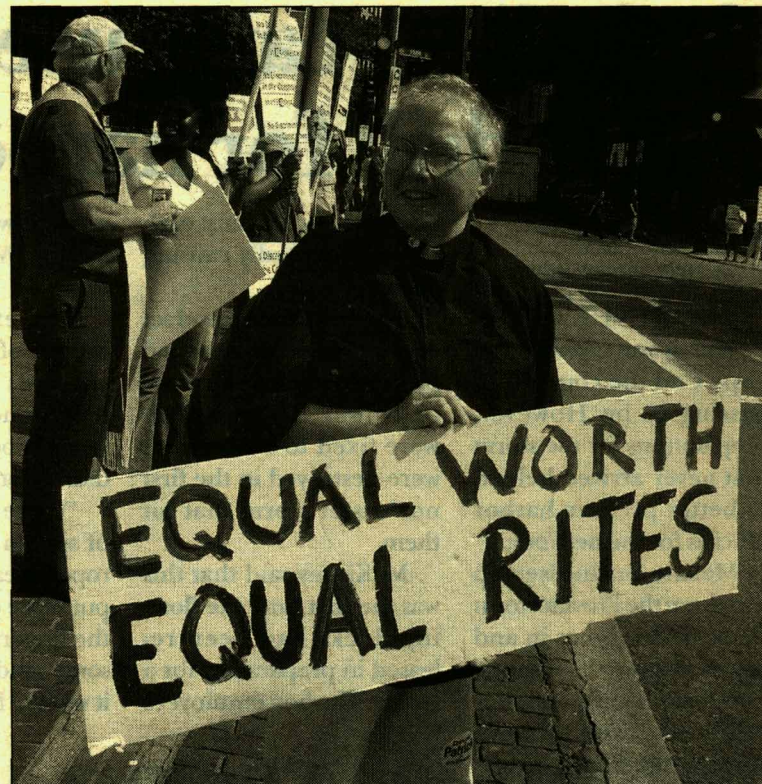
Outside the State House early Wednesday morning, about 30 people in favor of gay marriage held signs and posters, compared to the hundreds that appeared at last year's convention. By noon a handful of opponents of gay marriage were added to the mix. Likewise the hallways of the State House were nearly empty except for two large gatherings of MassEquality supporters, one in a hall where a large television showed the convention proceedings. In that same hall a small group opposed to gay marriage held hands in a circle and prayed.

"I feel very proud to be

a Massachusetts resident," Provincetown gay marriage supporter Jerry Ouellet said outside the State House. Ouellet joined 10 Provincetown residents who either came by bus or on their own to the convention on Wednesday. Ouellet stood on a street curb with the State House dome behind him, alongside Provincetown resident Peter Schweizer and Provincetown Unitarian Universalist minister Alison Hyder. Lorraine Kujawa and Elaine Anderson, Provincetown residents who were married last year, held a banner nearby.

"I'm sorry I had to be here again for another year," Ouellet said. "Because of our attorney general it looks like I will be here for another three years. But I will be here. We aren't giving up our marriage licenses."

mabragg@provincetownbanner.com



PHOTOS MARY ANN BRAGG

Above: The Rev. Alison Hyder of the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House of Provincetown in front of the State House.



Left: Lorraine Kujawa (left) and Elaine Anderson, Provincetown residents who were married last year, stood outside the constitutional convention last Wednesday.