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Ann Wynne, guest column: Equal rights for us in Texas

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ANN WYNNE Guest column

Saturday, April 18, 2009

This has been an absolutely historic past couple of weeks for those of us who want to see equal rights for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) brothers and sisters.

The Iowa Supreme Court decision striking down a ban against same-sex marriage, plus Vermont passing same-sex marriage legislation by a two-thirds majority in both houses, indicates we are in a more hopeful and equitable place than we were even this past November when it comes to gay rights.

Some wonder why this is such an important issue for the LGBT community. Marriage affords those who love each other and wish to pledge their lives to one another a number of legal rights. For LGBT families, issues like hospital visitation and health insurance and what happens to children when one or both parents unexpectedly die are major issues.

Marriage rights simply give LGBT families the same protections that married heterosexual couples currently enjoy.

In Iowa, the state's Supreme Court recognized that any statute limiting marriage to heterosexual couples is unconstitutional, affording rights to some but not all.

In Vermont, the legal status from same-sex marriage came not from a court order but through the efforts of democratically elected officials. Because of Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas' promise to veto such a bill, both the Vermont House and Senate had to pass the measure by a two-thirds majority.

Despite these triumphs, there's still a lot of work to do, and that includes us in Texas.

This legislative session, five bills were introduced that would advance the rights of LGBT people in Texas. There's nothing quite as dramatic as the Vermont gay marriage saga, but the bills do afford important protections to some of our fellows.

One bill seeks to offer competitive insurance benefits in our state university systems.

Another would prohibit insurance discrimination, provide health care rights for domestic partners and prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.


Those of us working for LGBT rights understand that we are in the midst of a years-long civil rights movement that will be built victory by victory, state by state. The bills before the Legislature address fundamental needs for our fellow Texans. I don't anticipate passage of these bills would make the splash that the news from Iowa and Vermont has.

What it would do is make a statement that we support basic rights for all our citizens and get us one step closer to where we need to be — a society where everyone is truly equal.

Anne Wynne is the founder of Atticus Circle, a national gay-rights organization based in Austin.

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