

NATIONAL news

Mayor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, had sat in the U.S. House of Representatives as a guest when President Bush delivered his State of the Union address in January. He seethed at Bush's remarks on same-sex marriage.

Back in San Francisco, on Newsom's direction, the wording on marriage licenses was changed from "bride" and "groom" to "first applicant" and "second applicant." California had adopted model gender-neutral marriage language in the 1970s, as had many other states, but that was changed back when anti-gay zealots pushed through Proposition 22 in 2000 to ban same-sex marriage. The city's lawyers believe the equal protection section of the state constitution renders Prop. 22 invalid and justifies their issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Shortly before noon Feb. 12, San Francisco lesbian icons Del Martin, 83, and Phyllis Lyon, 79, became the first couple granted a marriage license in City Hall. It was just in time for the pair to celebrate their 51st year together, on Valentine's Day.

Their celebratory photo was splashed across the front page of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and the floodgates opened. Gay and lesbian couples, many with kids in tow, rushed to City Hall to get married. Many of them had been together for decades.

Two groups of homophobes went to court Feb. 13 seeking an injunction to stop the marriages. Judges denied both requests Feb. 17 and set later hearing dates.

The mayor's planning paid off: A window of opportunity remained open. He announced that the city bureau would stay open during the long weekend to conduct marriages, and gay couples lined up by the hundreds.

"We normally do about 20 to 30 couples a day, but we're doing about 50 to 60 an hour," said Mabel Teng, San Francisco's assessor-recorder,

who supervises that office. She began turning away couples Feb. 14 when it became apparent the office could not handle the load and asked them to come back Feb. 16.

Thousands would wed before the weekend was through.

"This is a Valentine's Day weekend for the history books," said Jon Davidson, an attorney with Lambda Legal, which vowed to defend the marriages in court. "The long lines outside city offices all day show that lesbian and gay couples need the protections marriage provides."

Gay conservative Andrew Sullivan wrote on his blog: "Something is happening out there. Instead of begging for the basic right to marry, gay couples are now demanding it. This will alter the debate...and when the religious right try to strip us of those marriages, and force us back into second-class status, then we will see something else: resistance."

While most gay men and lesbians were elated by scenes from the marriages being played out in San Francisco, that reaction was not universal.

Openly gay U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., found out about the plans ahead of time when Newsom shared them with a few California political leaders. According to the *Chronicle*, the veteran gay congressman called the mayor and told him to "drop the idea—the time wasn't right."

A reported pending endorsement of the Federal Marriage Amendment by Bush again failed to materialize, as predicted by social conservatives. The leading Democratic presidential contender, U.S. Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., continued to do his own shuffling on the issue, suggesting his position on the Massachusetts amendment might depend on the final language that is proposed. He remains opposed to the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Political talk show host Bill Maher wrote in the Feb. 14 *Globe*: "The greater shame in this story goes to the Democrats, because they don't believe that homosexuality is an 'abomination,' and therefore their refusal to endorse gay marriage is hypocrisy. The right are true believers, but the Democrats are merely pretending that they believe gays are not entitled to the same state-sanctioned misery as the rest of us. The Democrats' position doesn't come from the Bible, it's ripped right from the latest poll, which says that most Americans are against gay marriage." □

BOB ROEHR is a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.



Gavin Newsom



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Openly gay Massachusetts state Sen. Jarrett T. Barrios cited the "basic human rights" that would be denied to his family if a constitutional amendment passed

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