

CONGRESSMAN FAVORS MARRIAGE EQUALITY

GOP challenger says marriage 'is not a civil right'

by M.L. Madison

A Vancouver congressman has joined a handful of U.S. representatives who support marriage equality.

"If two consenting adults want to get married, I don't believe it's the government's place to say they can't," said U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., in an interview with *Just Out*.

A former psychologist and college professor, Baird, 48, is seeking a fourth term in Congress. He said he is strongly opposed to a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

"The Constitution has never in history been amended to take away the rights of an individual," he said. "It's always existed to protect the rights of the people from an intrusive government. For me, if I don't want the government telling me who I can live with and love—and we're talking consenting adults—why would I want the government to tell someone else?"

Baird's opponent, Republican Tom Crowson, 52, states on his Web site that all families, including "the unions of two men or two women with or without children...are welcome in America and should be protected by law."

Yet the Olympia homebuilder, who declined to speak to *Just Out*, has accused queers of "trying to destroy marriage" and supports the Federal Marriage Amendment.

"I do not believe that all families are entitled to be married," Crowson states on his Web site. "Marriage is not a civil right. It should be limited to a union of one man and one woman.... This view recognizes the historical purpose of marriage as a social contract between a man and a woman with the view towards procreation."

Baird countered that he didn't "in any way, shape of form see how gay marriage threatens" his marriage.

He noted that several prominent Republicans, including former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, "have had a host of marital difficulties" that had nothing to do with same-sex marriage. "There are a lot of people in glass houses throwing stones," he said.

He also criticized Republicans for running on platforms of "less government" while pushing for a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. "You can't on the one hand say you want less government, and then ask the government to dictate who you can marry," he said.

Baird said he thought most Americans "would be outraged" if the government didn't recognize their marriages or let them visit a



U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, D Wash., supports same-sex marriage

loved one in the hospital. "But that is the position our state government puts people in every day, and it's wrong."

Last month, The Associated Press reported that a newly formed group opposed to same-sex marriage, Allies for Marriage and Children, had announced a drive to add a ban on same-sex marriage to the Washington Constitution.

But opponents, including openly gay state Rep. Ed Murray, D-Seattle, told the AP the ban was doomed to fail.

Last month, two superior court judges found Washington state's Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman, unconstitutional.

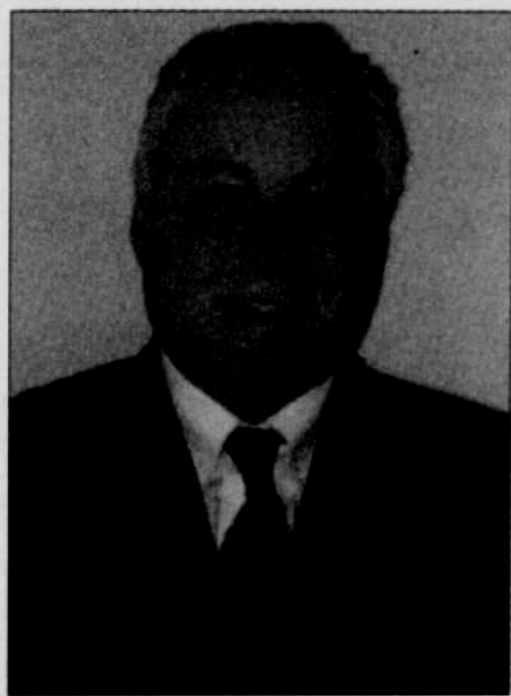
Baird said his support for minorities, "be they sexual minorities or ethnic minorities, is based on my upbringing in church, where I was taught the golden rule." He criticized "the people who have chosen to make this a political issue."

"We have more than 1,000 soldiers dead in Iraq, we have 45 million Americans with no health insurance, we have a \$600 billion deficit—and Congress of the United States is focusing on [banning] gay marriage," he said. "It's not going to put anyone back to work, it won't help anyone get health insurance, and it's not going to balance the budget."

Baird received an 83 percent approval rating from the Human Rights Campaign during the 107th Congress (2001-2002) and a 100 percent rating in the 106th Congress (1999-2000). **J**

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—Brian Baird

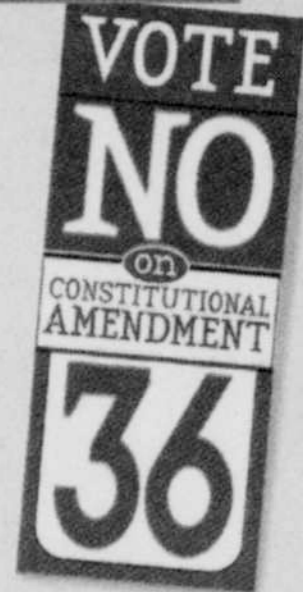


Republican challenger Tom Crowson wants a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage

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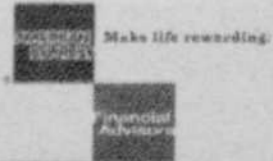


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