



Atheist Community of Austin
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Why Atheists Care about Gay Rights

Austin Pride Festival, June 5, 2010

The Atheist Community of Austin supports same-sex marriage and opposes legislation that seeks to discriminate against individuals based on race, sex, religious belief, or sexual orientation. We view the freedom to marry as one of many freedoms and rights granted to all citizens as the natural consequence of true equality and the complete separation of church and state. Our nation has made great strides toward ensuring equal rights for women and minorities, yet true equality remains elusive and some segments of our population remain “fair game” for bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination. The text below comes from the ACA Position Statements:

The ACA holds that individual human rights necessarily include the premise of individual sovereignty with regard to decisions that affect one’s person. In support of this premise, the ACA supports:

- The right of all consenting adults, of all sexual preferences, to responsibly manage their own sexual activities without unnecessary interference or restriction
- Robust and properly informative education regarding human sexuality, birth control, family planning, sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy termination

The ACA strongly opposes “abstinence-only” sex education. While abstinence is 100% effective, abstinence-only sex education is a naïve concept, which ignores the reality of human sexuality and fails to properly educate individuals; often resulting in increased rates of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

The ACA strongly opposes the “Global Gag Rule,” and any similar legislation or restrictions that seeks to limit or provide preferential funding to health organizations based on the inclusion of abortion and abortion-education services in their programs. These actions represent the worst sort of manipulation; forcing clinics to jeopardize the health of many patients in order to receive much needed funding.

With regard to same-sex marriage, we have yet to hear of a valid secular reason for barring consenting adults from entering contracts, which is what marriage is. Nearly all of the obstacles to gay rights stem from religious conservatives based on their religious beliefs. While they are entitled to their opinions, the First Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees that the government cannot make laws that favor particular religions, even if they are in the majority. Our Constitution exists to protect the minority from the whims of the majority.

While religious conservatives may think they somehow own the institution of marriage, they don’t. Marriage licenses are granted by the state, not churches. Furthermore, the government has never been in the business of sanctifying marriages—nor should it ever be. That’s the business of churches and nobody is demanding churches to perform same-sex marriages. In fact, the First Amendment also protects them from being forced to perform ceremonies outside the scope of their religious views. The state isn’t meddling in the church’s business and the church shouldn’t be meddling in the state’s business—or yours! For these reasons, we view same-sex marriage as primarily a church-state separation issue. ACA is a proud supporter and defender of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, especially the establishment clause of the First Amendment that prevents religious practices from becoming government practices. Even if you’re religious, we can all agree that any state religion won’t be *your* religion.

The following text is taken from a press release we issued in response to the 2005 Texas same-sex marriage amendment to the Texas State Constitution. We have addressed gay and lesbian rights many times in press releases and on our cable access TV show and Internet radio show over the years.

**From the Atheist Community of Austin Press Release, November 9, 2005
Concerning the passing of Texas State Constitutional Amendment, Proposition 2**

The Atheist Community of Austin is dismayed by the passing of Proposition 2, the amendment to the Texas State Constitution concerning same-sex marriage. The amendment was proposed and championed by Christian conservatives who framed the issue as religious, despite the fact that same-sex, state-granted marriage is a civil rights issue. The State of Texas has never been in the business of sanctifying marriage. Christian conservatives successfully marshaled the votes of believers who were misinformed and manipulated with fear about what was at stake with regard to marriage.

In denying the contractual rights of a minority of Americans, Christians have used their religious beliefs and sheer numbers for the purposes of religious persecution. America is a constitutional republic where the rights of minorities are not appropriate subjects for majority votes. The US Constitution is on the side of same-sex relationships for both equal protection (14th amendment) and the free exercise of their religion (1st amendment). We predict that when prohibitions against same-sex marriage are successfully overturned on constitutional grounds, as were interracial marriage bans in the 1960s, religious conservatives will cry "judicial activism" and persecution of their beliefs. Despite their shrill claims, the religious liberties of conservative Christians have never had their rights threatened by the possibility same-sex marriage. In contrast, minority religions have been adversely affected by same-sex marriage bans through the tyranny of the majority. Religious freedom is a founding concept of this country, but it has been trampled upon.

The benefits of marriage should be available to all consenting adults who desire marriage and who are willing to undertake the rights and responsibilities of marriage. The poorly written amendment is vindictive toward a minority of Americans and their children. Far from being "pro-family," the passage of the amendment will harm the children of gays and lesbians, and it interferes with their earned benefits. The amendment weakens the Texas economy by making it more difficult for Texas business to attract skilled workers. Legal challenges over the vague wording of the amendment will likely waste millions of taxpayer dollars.

The Atheist Community of Austin encourages Christians and other believers to examine their collective impact on the world and focus their attention on issues that are truly disruptive to our nation and the world, such as government corruption, education of our children, addressing poverty and health care, and care for the environment. While fomenting hate is a means of mobilizing the vote and reelecting conservative politicians, it does nothing to improve the world.

Atheism is simply the lack of a belief in gods. It's the sensible position, given the lack of evidence for the supernatural. Atheists value evidence, reason, and scientific thinking. These are without a doubt the best tools we have to make good decisions—both for an individual and for public policy. Atheists value autonomy, having the education to make good choices, and accepting the responsibility for those choices. We see no benefits from religious belief that cannot be attained through secularism, which is free of the divisive baggage that generally accompanies religion. We reject the idea that any religion can serve as the basis for a superior morality or healthy worldview. We wonder why so many gays and lesbians are so attached to religions that persecute them for profit and power.

The **Atheist Community of Austin** is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support the atheist community, to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote secular viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the first amendment principle of state-church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals. We welcome new members! For more information about us, see our web site at www.atheist-community.org.