

NEWS RELEASE
Office of Congressman John Lewis

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**U.S. Congressman John Lewis Testifies
Against Gay Marriage Amendment**

Today Congressman John Lewis registered his opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment before the Senate Judiciary Committee. The Senate committee is holding hearings on the proposed constitutional amendment sponsored by Senator Wayne Allard and Representative Marilyn Musgrave (S.J. Res. 26 and H.S. Res. 56) which would add a permanent definition of marriage into the U.S. Constitution and bar any other interpretation by the states. Following are Congressman Lewis's comments:

Mr. Chairman and Members of this committee, I am delighted to appear before you this morning. Mr. Chairman, I must say from the outset that I am strongly opposed to the Allard amendment. I am opposed to any amendment that seeks to write discrimination into our Constitution.

The Constitution is not the proper place to address the right to marry for same sex couples. It is better left to the states. On the eve of the 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, I ask that supporters of this amendment remember that our history has provided many examples of judges and courts moving this nation toward social justice, often before legislatures were ready to embrace such progressive social change.

I Ask The Question--Where would we be as a nation if Congress in 1954 radically amended our constitution to uphold segregation or the separate but equal doctrine?
I Further Ask-- Where would we be as a nation if Congress in 1967 had made it unconstitutional for interracial couples to marry?

The Constitution is a special, almost sacred document. The Constitution is the document that defines the framework of government and protects our rights. It is NOT a place for mandating social policies on individual states or forcing individuals to reconcile their religious beliefs with such a sensitive and personal issue. This amendment will deny states the right to determine their own marriage laws, assign one group of Americans to second-class status, and deny children of gay parents the stability and legal protections that can only be offered through marriage.

The Allard amendment could potentially deny important state court decisions such as the Vermont civil union decision and the Oregon domestic partnership decision. And restricting rights of certain individuals would set a dangerous and historical precedent.

Since the adoption of the Bill of Rights in 1791, the Constitution has been amended only 17 times. Amendments to the Constitution are very rare and only done to address critical public policy needs such as abolishing slavery and extending the right to vote to women, African Americans, and young people. (more)

I believe amending the Constitution on this issue is an irrational and radical step that seeks to undermine the civil rights of our citizens. It chips away at the foundation of equal protection for all in our society. To amend the Constitution on this issue would be a step backwards.

Mr. Chairman, I ask you and Members of this Committee to think long and hard before altering America's most important document for the sole purpose of restricting the civil rights some of our citizens. I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on same sex marriages.

Some say let's choose another route and give the gay and lesbian community certain legal rights but call it something other than marriage. We have been down this road before in this country. Separate is not equal. The right to liberty and happiness belong to each of us and on the same terms, without regard to either skin color or sexual orientation. But our rights as Americans do not depend on the approval of others or the passion of the times. Our rights depend on us being Americans.

The Allard amendment will divide, rather than unite us as a country. Rather than divide and discriminate, let us come together and create one nation. We are all one people. We all live in the same house, the American house. Let us as a nation and as a people recognize that gay people live in our American house. We need to realize that gay people living in this house share the same hopes, troubles, and dreams. Now is the time for us to finally treat them as equals, as family. We must build the Beloved Community, an all-inclusive community---a community at peace with itself.

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