

S.C. Constitution officially bans gay marriage 8:05 AM

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By SEANNA ADCOX / Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. -- South Carolina officially banned gay marriage Thursday as legislative leaders ratified a constitutional amendment approved by voters in November.

The state was among eight others with similar bans on the ballot last year. Only Arizona defeated such an amendment.

House Speaker Bobby Harrell and Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell met Thursday to officially ratify the act. The constitution now reads, "a marriage between one man and one woman is the only lawful domestic union that shall be valid or recognized in this state."

It prevents the state and local governments from legalizing any sort of domestic union of gay couples or recognizing those made in other states.

"The people of the state believe the word 'marriage' means one man and one woman. To change that definition changes the whole nature of it," said Oran Smith, president of the conservative Palmetto Family Council. "It's all about being secure in the definition."

The state already had a law against same-sex marriages, but proponents of the amendment said it was needed to prevent judges from opening the door to gay unions.

Smith noted three of South Carolina's Supreme Court judges will retire within the year, and that makes him nervous. "I think now even more so that the amendment was a good thing," he said.

Nearly four out of five South Carolina voters approved the amendment during the vote last year. The ratification passed the House 92-7 in January, then cleared the Senate last month on a voice vote.

"A quarter-million people in South Carolina now are relegated to a status of being unequal to the rest of its citizens, even though we pay taxes and contribute to the community," said Warren Redman-Gress, executive director of Charleston-based Alliance for Full Acceptance.

The amendment is personal to Redman-Gress, who in 2003 married his partner of 19 years in Canada in a ceremony that included their adopted son, now 7.

"It's now written into the constitution the state won't recognize it," he said. "That's a clear statement the government of South Carolina has no intention of ever recognizing a relationship we've worked 23 years to build. It's a statement about our life we've worked hard at."

In the United States, only Massachusetts allows gay couples to marry. Vermont, Connecticut and New Jersey allow civil unions, and California has domestic partnerships that offer similar benefits.