

Senator Maria Cantwell

Respect for Marriage Act Floor Speech

November 16, 2022

CANTWELL: Mr. President, I come to the floor tonight to urge my colleagues to support the Respect for Marriage Act. Today we took an important step by passing the procedural hurdle to make sure that marriage equality is put into law.

This legislation would ensure that both the federal and state governments will continue to recognize all marriages and continue to not discriminate based on gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity, or race. These are strong protections that are long overdue.

I understand some of my colleagues do not see a need for passing this legislation, but I would ask them to stand in the shoes of someone in a marriage that is in danger of being dissolved overnight by a court decision. The same rationale for overturning can be used in the landmark Supreme Court decision we saw that could erode further privacy rights and be used in same-sex marriages.

While marriage equality is constitutionally protected today, the Supreme Court's reasoning in *Dobbs V. Jackson's Women's Health Organization* indicated the court is open to reconsidering cases that determine certain fundamental rights are protected under the Equal Protection and Due Process Clause of the 14th amendment.

I believe it is our job in the senate to represent the voice of our constituents and those voices are loud and clear. An overwhelming majority of Americans support major equality. According to a Gallup poll, 71% of Americans approve of same-sex marriage. In September, over 220 businesses, representing more than 8.5 million employees, called on the U.S. Senate to pass this legislation.

And this was not a bill that garnered support from just a few Republicans for the sake of calling it bipartisan. 40% of Republicans and over 20% of the house GOP members recognized that this should be enshrined into law and supported the legislation. It passed the House by a large majority, 267 to 157. Americans support this bill. Businesses support this bill. And now some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have taken this step to also support this legislation.

The state of Washington was one of the first ten states to legalize same-sex marriage and did so by the vote of the people. I recently received a letter from a constituent from Everett Washington saying that she and her wife moved to Washington in 2016 because, quote, "they needed to be somewhere where our rights would be protected in the event that they would be threatened," end quote. She said as soon as I arrived in Washington, I felt like I had come home.

Marriage equality has been protected under Washington state law for a decade. It has been protected by the Supreme Court for seven years, and yet there are here in the senate -- there are some that don't believe that we need to take further protections.

At least 11.5 million people in this country are in an interracial or same-sex marriage. That's no less than 20% of all marriages in the United States. With a number like that, we all know someone in one of those

marriages, whether they are friends, neighbors, or colleagues, we know that we need to give them the same certainty. And we know that by codifying marriage equality into law, they will not be in jeopardy of losing those rights.

Same-sex and interracial couples deserve the assurance that their marriage will be recognized. They need to know that they will continue to enjoy the freedom and privileges that are afforded to other couples, and we need to make sure that this is for generations to come.

The American people want this legislation passed, and I urge my colleagues to come together and support this very important Respect for Marriage Act. Thank you. I yield the floor.