

Same-sex marriage isn't a bargaining chip

Times Union, Albany, New York November 22, 2008

The recent introduction of the same-sex marriage issue as a bargaining chip for control of the NYS Senate is profoundly troubling, because it brings up a controversial religious dogma that discriminates against same-sex couples.

In California, voters this November added a theological definition of marriage to their State constitution, and three other states passed similar restrictions. These laws discriminate against loving, same-sex couples who seek the protections of marriage for themselves and their families. This is a violation of church-state separation.

Let's not allow anything like this to happen here in New York.

The principle of church-state separation requires a distinction between religious marriage and civil marriage. Each religious group should have the right to define marriage in its own way. People of faith and goodwill can and do disagree about what constitutes marriage; however, New York law should not impose a single, religiously-biased definition of marriage on all citizens.

Using the popular vote to enshrine a theological stricture into law is an example of what our founding fathers called a "tyranny of the majority." Democracy requires a delicate balance between majority rule and the rights of minorities, and nowhere is this more so than in matters of religious doctrine.

We live in a multifaith society where freedom of conscience is protected. Denying the legal rights of marriage to same-sex couples on the basis of religion is forbidden by the Constitution.

Robb Smith

Albany

robb@interfaithimpactnys.org

The writer is executive director, Interfaith Impact of NYS