



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Stephen M. Saland

Senator Saland's Statement on Marriage Equality

STEPHEN M. SALAND June 25, 2011

In 2009 when the marriage equality bill came before the Senate for a vote, I struggled with the decision. This is an issue which a great many have a deep and passionate interest, both those for marriage equality and those who support the traditional view of marriage. In part, the difficulty in arriving at my decision is that I respect and understand the views coming from both sides of the issue.

In fact, my decision today is rooted in my upbringing. My parents taught us to be respectful, tolerant and accepting of others and to do the right thing. I've received thousands of calls, e-mails, post cards and letters.

Many of them, whether they were from proponents or opponents, concluded by calling upon me to do the right thing. I want to do the right thing, but needless to say, that decision cannot be the "right thing" for both sides of the equation and, whatever my decision, there will be many who will be disappointed.

As a traditionalist, I have long viewed marriage as a union between a man and woman. As one who believes in equal rights, I understood that the State was denying marriage to those in same sex relationships. In 2009, I believed that civil unions for same sex couples would be a satisfactory conclusion.

Since that time, I have met with numerous groups and individuals on both sides of the issue, especially during the last few months. As I did, I anguished over the importance and significance of my vote.

My intellectual and emotional journey has at last ended. I must define doing the right thing as treating all persons with equality in the definition of law as it pertains to marriage. To do otherwise would fly in the face of my upbringing.

For me to support marriage equality, however, it was imperative that the legislation contain all the necessary religious exemptions, so as not to interfere with religious beliefs which I hold as important as equal rights.

I believe this legislation satisfactorily resolves the religious exemptions.

I was part of a trio of Senators that negotiated with the Governor and his staff for greater religious protections in this legislation – vastly in excess of the prior defeated version and substantially more than this year's earlier version. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the important and direct role of the Governor in these negotiations and his genuine sensitivity and concern to the importance of religious freedoms.

While I understand that my vote will disappoint many, I also know that my vote is a vote of conscience. I have contemplated many difficult votes throughout my career and this is by far one of the most, if not the most difficult. Struggling with my traditionalist view of marriage and my deep rooted values to treat all people with respect and as equals, I believe after much deliberation, I am doing the right thing in voting to support marriage equality.