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S. Fla. gays cheer Supreme Court rulings, conservatives object

By [Anthony Man](#), Sun Sentinel

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The U.S. Supreme Court delivered historic rulings advancing same-sex marriage on Wednesday, but they won't send couples shopping for rings, cakes and flowers for weddings in the Sunshine State.

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For gays and lesbians in Florida who hope to marry, the law is unchanged, with a ban on same-sex marriage enshrined in the state Constitution. And gay couples who married in states where it's legal and now live in Florida aren't suddenly better off.

"I'm sorry to say that it means that we still have quite a bit to fight for here in the state of Florida," said Elizabeth F. Schwartz, president of the Miami Beach Bar Association and chairwoman of the Gay and Lesbian Lawyers Association of Miami.

"This victory is a step in the right direction," she said. "However, we still have a ban against marriage equality in the state of Florida. And this court decision doesn't change that."

Next up could be a contentious campaign to legalize same-sex marriage in Florida when the state's voters elect a governor in 2014 or in the 2016 presidential election. Gay-rights advocates are engaged in a heated debate over when and how to make their next move.

But all day Wednesday, gays and lesbians cheered throughout South Florida.

"Overjoyed," said Stephen Muffler, a Fort Lauderdale lawyer, who married Lisandro Depaula, his partner of 12 years in New York City last year.

"It's a joy to see," said H. Joan Waitkevicz, 67, of West Palm Beach, who has been with her partner, Shirley Y. Herman, 71, for 40 years. The retirees married in Massachusetts in 2010.

"Amazing," said Rand Hoch, founder and president of the gay rights group [Palm Beach County](#) Human Rights Council.

"A joyous day," said Robert Boo, chief executive of the Pride Center in Wilton Manors.

Eyes were glued to TV news reports in the morning at the Java Boys coffee shop in Wilton Manors, the unofficial capital of the gay and lesbian community in South Florida. At the end of the day, more than 200

people gathered for a rush-hour rally at the Federal Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale to cheer the Supreme Court and demand legalization of same-sex marriage in Florida.

"It's inspiring. It gives hope that in the next couple of years it'll all change," said Kyle Baker, 25, a student from Plantation. Within the next year or two, Baker said he and his partner of two years plan to move to California and get married there.

He's glad that the cause of same-sex marriage was advanced by the nation's high court, but disappointed that the court didn't go farther and legalize it everywhere.

Nate Klarfeld, 62, a retired dentist in Fort Lauderdale, would have preferred a ruling that would have allowed him to marry Grover Lawlis, his partner of 10 years, so the couple's three grandchildren could "grow up and look at our relationship the same way they look at their other grandparents.

"The Supreme Court decision fell short," he said. "This was a huge call to action. We've got a lot of work to do."

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Herman said the court should have gone further, issuing a ruling that would have given her marriage recognition in Florida.

She said the couple wouldn't leave Florida, even though they'd enjoy benefits in a state where same-sex marriage is legal. It would be a mistake to leave "rather than duke it out. Because I think it will change here. Leaving won't change things, where as staying and talking to people will."

Conservative Christians were even more unhappy with the Supreme Court, which Pastor Mark Boykin of Church of All Nations in [Boca Raton](#) said "usurped the will of the people" by overturning the Defense of Marriage Act and effectively overturning the California referendum that banned same-sex marriage in that state.

"That boggles the mind," Boykin said.

The Rev. O'Neal Dozier, pastor of Worldwide Christian Center in Pompano Beach, said he was dumbfounded.

"What in the world is going on with the U.S. Supreme Court? They have lost their ever-loving mind," Dozier said. "It's a sad day for us because marriage has always been, ever since the beginning of time from the Garden of Eden, been between one man and one woman. ... What the U.S. Supreme Court has done is that they have called God a liar."

John Stemberger, the Orlando lawyer who led the effort that won passage of the anti-gay marriage

amendment to the Florida Constitution in 2008, saw some good news in the rulings. "Florida's marriage amendment will not be disturbed in any way. This was not the grand decision some people thought it would be."

For example, Hoch and Schwartz said, the rulings do nothing to affect gay and lesbian couples who married elsewhere and live in Florida today.

"Those marriages are not anymore valid today than they were yesterday," Schwartz said. Legally, Hoch said, "they're still roommates."

Still, South Florida's Democratic politicians praised the rulings.

U.S. Rep. Lois Frankel, D-West Palm Beach, was outside the Supreme Court building Wednesday morning to show her support for same-sex marriage; U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch, D-[Boca Raton](#), called it "an enormous step forward;" and U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Weston, chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, said the rulings bring "our nation one step closer to realizing our Constitution's promise of equality for all Americans."

State Sen. Chris Smith, of Fort Lauderdale, the Democratic leader in the Florida Senate, called it a "great day for human rights" and posed this question to the Supreme Court: "What took you so damn long?" Jeri Muoio said she hopes someday to marry a gay couple, acting in her official capacity as mayor of West Palm Beach.

Wilton Manors Mayor Gary Resnick, who rode Saturday in his city's gay pride parade with partner Eric Bucher at his side, described himself as "thrilled." Fort Lauderdale City Commissioner Dean Trantalis called June 2013 "best gay pride month in history."

At the same time, the Supreme Court illustrated a fault line in the Republican Party.

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a possible 2016 presidential candidate, said in a statement that "marriage is a unique historical institution best defined as the union between one man and one woman" and the court made "a serious mistake."

But other Republicans, ranging from U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Miami, to Coral Springs Commissioner Dan Daley praised the court.

The gay community is also divided over what to do next in Florida, where voters added the ban on same-sex marriage less than five years ago.

Already, some gay rights activists are gearing up for a push to get a referendum on the November 2014 ballot to remove the ban from the Constitution. Others are more cautious, arguing they're unlikely to win voter approval next year.

Odds for winning a referendum "are extremely, extremely, extremely remote," Hoch said.

Hoch, 58, started his gay rights activism in Florida in 1979, said it's likely to be a long time before same-sex marriage comes to Florida.

Boykin said Hoch is correct. The Supreme Court action will "galvanize conservatives," he said, adding he's optimistic. "Traditional values have survived 6,000 years."

But Patty Harris, 49, of Oakland Park, said she thinks she'll some day be allowed to marry Carol Lambert,

her partner of 28 years.

"The Supreme Court has made a fair and just ruling," Harris said. "I feel elated for the moment. However I feel as if the journey isn't over, the fight isn't over, the struggle isn't over."

Staff writers Adam Sacasa and Jeff Kunerth contributed to this report.

South Florida political leaders analyze court rulings on gay marriage at SunSentinel.com/BrowardPolitics.

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