

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSSC) represents the Catholic bishops of Washington State: Archbishop Alex J. Brunett of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Bishop William S. Skylstad of the Diocese of Spokane, Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla S.J., of the Diocese of Yakima, Bishop Eusebio Elizondo M.Sp.S., Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle and Bishop Joseph J. Tyson, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle.



REFERENDUM 71 Election: November 3, 2009

“Marriage must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, and as the source of the next generation and the protective haven for children.”

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2007
The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Q: What is Referendum 71?

A: Referendum 71 is a ballot measure that seeks a statewide vote on Senate Bill (SB) 5688. SB 5688 expanded the rights and privileges accorded same sex and senior registered domestic partners so they are equivalent to those of married spouses. The bill was passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor in 2009. Citizens opposed to this legislation filed Referendum 71, and collected signatures to place it on the November ballot in order to block its implementation. A vote to “approve” Referendum 71 would allow the measure to go into effect, and a vote to “reject” Referendum 71 would prevent the implementation of SB 5688.

Q: Is Referendum 71 about “gay marriage”?

A: The Catholic Church steadfastly holds that marriage is the union between a man and a woman, and the bishops of Washington State have consistently supported the state’s Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, reflects the time honored understanding of marriage by both Church and society.

While SB 5688 is commonly identifies as the “everything but marriage” bill, the legislative sponsors of SB 5688 specifically stated that the bill would act as a “bridge” to change the definition of marriage in Washington State to legalize same-sex marriage. The bishops of Washington State therefore opposed Senate Bill 5688 and oppose Referendum 71.

Q: Why would the bishops oppose benefits offered under Senate Bill 5688?

A: The bishops of Washington State do not stand in opposition to legal benefits that promote the common good. The sponsors of Senate Bill 5688, however, have stated publicly that this measure is part of their strategy to redefine marriage and legalize same-sex marriage. The real effect of approving Referendum 71 would begin the process of deconstructing the traditional meaning of marriage.

Q: Doesn’t the bishops’ position discriminate against gays and lesbians?

A: The Catholic Church’s teaching that marriage is the union of a man and a woman does not detract from the dignity of each individual person. We are all loved by God regardless of our family circumstance or sexuality. Discrimination, intolerance or other mistreatment is contrary to Church teaching concerning the dignity of persons.

The bishops of Washington State urge all Catholics to vote after informing their conscience on this issue through prayer, Scripture reading and study.