

Scotland Signing up to save marriage



Politicians from across the spectrum join campaign to save traditional marriage

SENIOR Scottish politicians from all the main political parties this week joined the campaign to save traditional marriage, as the 50,000th supporter signed up to the Scotland for Marriage campaign.

SNP MSP John Mason, Tory MSP Murdo Fraser and Labour MP Michael McCann appeared together at a Scotland for Marriage event on Wednesday in a rare coalition to warn of the dangers of redefining marriage. Several hundred people attended the meeting, one of many planned over the next few months as the Scottish Parliament prepares to consider proposed legislation to change the law.

The SNP Government published the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill two months ago but the Scotland for Marriage campaign now has more supporters than there are members of the four main Scottish political parties and has pledged local campaigns in all 73 Holyrood constituencies.

Politicians

Scotland For Marriage has repeatedly warned that if the Scottish Government's planned same-sex 'marriage' legislation passes there will be catastrophic consequences for civil liberties.

Explaining his opposition to the current proposals, Mr Mason, who has spoken out in the past against his own party's support for homosexual 'marriage,' said he was very worried about the impact on workers who refuse to endorse same-sex 'marriage.'

“As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee I think my main aim will be to examine what protections are in place for celebrants, denominations, public sector workers, third sector volunteers and others who do not agree with same sex marriage,” he said. “So far we have had assurances on this from both Scottish and Westminster governments but I remain far from convinced that these ‘guarantees’ are actually deliverable.

In a rare display of cross party unity Tory MSP Mr Fraser agreed with Mr Mason.

“I simply cannot see how it is possible to create ‘equal marriage’ without interfering with the religious liberties of those who take a contrary view,” he said. “What will it mean for those working within the public sector who take a traditional view of marriage, whether they be in education, the health service or elsewhere?”

He also warned that the Church may be forced into participating.

“What will it mean for the Church, which, whilst perhaps not forced in law to have a celebration of same-sex marriage, will find that it has no alternative but to make its premises available for such events?” he said. “Scottish ministers will tell us that the bill being brought before Parliament will have all the necessary safeguards in place. That is exactly, of course, what they told us in relation to previous legislation to legalise adoption of children by same- sex couples. We were assured that there would be no threat to faith-based adoption agencies, which took a different view. We see today that these promises were utterly worthless.”

Labour MP Mr McCann, who also spoke at the rally, said he prayed the Scottish Parliament did not repeat the mistakes of Westminster, which recently legalised same-sex ‘marriage.’

“I hope the Scottish Parliament learns lessons from the mistakes made on same-sex marriage legislation in the UK Parliament,” he said. “It is a very sensitive issue but what became clear to me is that while people claim that everyone desires a sane and rational debate on the issue there are people on either side of the issue that hold extreme views. My opposition to the bill in the UK Parliament was based on my opinion that it was a poorly constructed piece of legislation, capable of being challenged in the courts with the result that churches could be compelled to marry same-sex couples.”

He also warned that gay activists were already planning to use the courts to force church involvement in same-sex 'weddings.'

"I thought that challenge may have taken a few years but already a couple from Essex, Barrie Drewitt-Barlow and his civil partner Tony, have announced that they will go to court to force churches to host gay weddings," he said.

"That is unacceptable and I fervently hope that Scottish politicians have the wisdom to draft a law which separates Church from State."

A Scotland for Marriage spokesman said this rare coalition was evidence of the seriousness of the issue.

"A broad section of the Scottish public opposes politicians meddling with marriage at all," he said. "In addition, there are genuine civil liberty concerns that have not been taken seriously.

"Our national petition continues to grow with more than 50,000 now having signed," he said. "Our movement is gaining momentum, and we will continue to press our case with the Scottish Government and with individual MSPs."

50,000 supporters

The 50,000th signatory to the Scotland for Marriage campaign was Falkirk student Iain Donoghue, who argued there was no need to change the existing law.

"I feel it is entirely unnecessary to change the existing law," he said. "Marriage is between one man and one woman to the exclusion of others with a view to the procreation of children."

John Deighan, the Catholic Church's parliamentary officer, said defenders of traditional marriage had really struck a chord with the public.

"I think it shows the level of grass roots support our campaign really has," Mr Deighan said. "Everyone thinks the political parties overstate their membership level so I think in reality we have many more members than the combined membership of the main political parties."

Although unlike political parties membership of Scotland for Marriage does not require a membership fee, Mr Deighan said the support it had attracted was indicative of broader public opinion.

"Despite the media suggesting this is a marginal interest I think actually ordinary people are the ones who have clarity on this issue, and we have the numbers on this when people are serious engaged," he said. "The other side has the support of celebrities and the media, people who are likely to be detached from reality."

Scottish MSPs will hold their Stage 1 inquiry into the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill next month with a Stage 2 debate likely in December and the final vote early in the New Year.

Scottish Catholic Observer