

### **Illinois Set To Be 15th State To Allow Gay Marriage** **News**

Posted by : Randy

Posted on : 2013/11/6 4:49:05

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) -- With Illinois set to become the 15th state nationwide to legalize same-sex marriage, Chicago couple Theresa Volpe and Mercedes Santos finally began planning the wedding they'd started thinking about more than two decades ago.



After months of arduous lobbying in President Barack Obama's home state, Illinois lawmakers passed a measure Tuesday that would legalize same-sex marriage. Under the legislation, which Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn has vowed to sign, couples could start tying the knot in June.

Fourteen other states and Washington, D.C., allow same-sex marriage.

The road to the Illinois vote was long and included a stalled attempt earlier this year, frustrating activists in a state where Democrats lead the House, Senate and governor's office. Chicago Democratic Rep. Greg Harris, who is the main sponsor, decided not to bring the bill for a vote in May, saying he didn't have the support.

Then the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to strike down a provision of the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which Harris said resonated with lawmakers. Backers also launched a furious campaign, hiring a union lobbyist, the former head of the Illinois Republican Party and field organizers statewide.

"To treat all our citizens equally in the eyes of the law we must change this," Harris said on the floor. "Families have been kept apart."

Debate lasted more than two hours, and the final roll call was met with cheers. Supporters' speeches echoed themes of equality and civil rights, with mentions of Obama and Martin Luther King Jr.

The measure had backing from both of Illinois' U.S. senators and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. It also got a last-minute boost from longtime House Speaker Michael Madigan, who serves as chair of the state's Democratic Party. The Chicago Democrat said he used the "art of persuasion" to bring on more than five votes in the last week.

Opponents, including some of the most powerful religious leaders in Illinois, have said marriage should remain between a man and a woman. A group of Chicago-area pastors vowed to line up primary challengers against some lawmakers who voted yes.

The bill first cleared the Senate on Valentine's Day. Backers expressed confidence that the bill would be approved by the House in mid-March. But it took the supporters months to secure votes.

Although Illinois once appeared poised to become the first Midwestern state to approve gay marriage in the Legislature, Minnesota did it sooner and started holding its first same-sex weddings over the summer. Iowa allows gay marriages too, because of a court ruling, not a legislative vote.

For months, the leaders of several black mega-churches lobbied the districts of black House members with an aggressive robocall campaign against gay marriage, placing the Democratic members of the caucus in an uncomfortable spotlight. Many remained undecided until the vote

neared.

But for couples such as Volpe and Santos, Tuesday marked the start of a new chapter.

The couple had a civil union ceremony in 2011, when Illinois approved them. But now they hope their wedding will include their new baby.

"Some people didn't even know what that meant. Some of them didn't come because they didn't know - what does that mean?" Volpe said. "When you say `We're going to have a wedding,' for sure people will come now."