

Voters must speak on gay marriage
By Boston Herald editorial staff
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It's not surprising in the year since same-sex marriage became the law of the land by court fiat that the impact has been felt most directly by the almost 6,200 same-sex couples who were issued marriage licenses and by their families.

Anyone claiming, a scant 12 months later, they can make a crystal ball prediction about the long-term impact such a fundamental change will have on society or on the children of those marriages are fooling themselves, or deceiving others.

No one can know that now.

What we do know is determining the definition of marriage in Massachusetts remains the voters' right. The one sure chance they'll have to exercise that right is for lawmakers to forward the compromise adopted last year by the Constitutional Convention to the ballot in 2006.

Lawmakers must not take that right away, no matter the evolution of their own personal views on the subject.

We're not surprised that some lawmakers' positions have changed in the months after the emotional debate in the Constitutional Convention delivered a compromise measure banning same-sex marriage but supporting a civil union framework which conferred the exact same benefits as traditional marriage.

Nor are we surprised that the extremes on either side are concocting strategies to achieve their original goals.

That's not the job of the Legislature. Their job is to make sure that the voice of the people is heard, as it now has been in 11 other states (all of which banned same-sex marriage in 2004).

What will the outcome be here? We have no idea. But if same-sex marriage advocates are right about shifting attitudes now that the reality of friends and neighbors and co-workers getting married has sunk in, then they have nothing to fear from allowing the question to be asked.

And marriage opponents, who don't like the idea of civil unions either, risk maintaining the status quo if they derail a sensible compromise now.

Compromise, by its nature, is neither side's perfect solution.

But it is a common product of the political process, and the next step of that process is to ask voters if they agree.

To do otherwise reveals an arrogance which will have political repercussions one would need a crystal ball to fully see.