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## California's Gay Marriage Rush

By Michael Lindenberg

To his regular duties as mayor of Palm Springs, California, Steve Pougnet can add this one beginning Tuesday: Marrier-in-chief. Tuesday is the first day gay marriage licenses can be issued in California, and as one of three city council members deputized by Riverside County to perform weddings in this gay-friendly resort town, Mayor Pougnet's schedule already is filling up. "I am going to be very busy," Pougnet told TIME. "I have a wedding scheduled at 8 a.m. Tuesday, and it's the first one of many who have called to reserve a time. We've had couples call from Arizona, Texas and New York," he said, naming only a few of the places he expects couples to arrive from.

Similar stories are being told across the Golden State, with officials in San Francisco and Los Angeles telling TIME their cities are readying for a wedding surge. (The Mayor of L.A. has promised to officiate as well.) There are two causes for [the urgency](#). Come November, California voters will cast ballots on a constitutional amendment that, if passed, will bar gay marriage in the state, despite the Supreme Court decision. If so, that gives gay couples who wish to marry barely five months to do so. Secondly, because California's rules do not make residency a requirement for a marriage license, out-of-staters want to take their new marital status back home and try to sue for recognition, widening the legal and constitutional battle over same-sex marriage.

How many gay couples will tie the knot? A report released by the Williams Institute at UCLA law school says fully half of the state's 102,000 gay couples could wed in the next three years. UCLA law professor Brad Sears told TIME that the number is in keeping with experience in Massachusetts, where gay marriage is also legal, and Vermont, which permits civil unions. Another 67,000 or so are expected to arrive from other states, says Sears, the report's co-author. Those couples and their guests will spend some \$680 million in tourism dollars, a welcome boost to a state whose hard-hit economy could use all the help it can get.

Dean Logan, acting registrar-recorder and county clerk in Los Angeles County, says it's impossible to know for sure how many couples will show up at his offices next week. Logan told TIME: "We've been told that in San Francisco they are expecting at least 500 appointments already, and given the size of L.A. we are going to be ready for thousands of couples in the first two or three days" Just in case of such an onrush, county offices will be open late and on Saturdays for at least the next two weeks, and maybe longer. And while there have been no threats, he said his office has partnered with state and local police to provide extra security to make sure any protests by opponents don't get in couples' way.

The bigger impact and controversies, however, will likely take place beyond California. When the out-of-staters return to places where gay marriage is not allowed, some will go to court to try to enforce their marriages. This week, a coalition of gay rights legal groups urged caution, however. Forcing the issue in courts that aren't friendly to gay rights, the warning said, could backfire. "Claim the name and act like what you are — married. But don't go suing right away. [Most lawsuits will likely set us all back.](#)" said the advisory.

It's unlikely the advisory will stop the suits across America, but in any case the bigger threat to gay marriage is a more immediate one: the November referendum. Two major polls have given each side of the question hope for victory in the fall. The well-respected Field Poll says voters have come to accept the idea of gay marriage in California, where about 50,000 couples are already in formally recognized domestic partnerships. But a Los Angeles *Times* poll predicted the anti-gay marriage amendment has enough support to pass. The only safe prediction, Sears told TIME, is that November's results will be close. Says he, "I think with time people come to accept gay marriage. That has been the case in Massachusetts, where acceptance has grown after people there realize the sky hasn't fallen. But we're just going to have six months, and I am not sure that is enough time for people to get used to the idea."

Sears and other legal experts on both sides of the marriage question have said it's unclear what will happen to the marriages performed between now and November if the amendment passes. Many say the amendment would not be applied retroactively, but even Sears concedes that's far from certain. "It would be a novel question for the courts," he says.

But in Palm Springs, long known as a popular wedding locale for heterosexual couples, the amendment hasn't cast a pall over the celebratory mood, says Mayor Pougnet, who has been with his male partner for 14 years. "People here are ecstatic," he said. "And we've had calls from people from all over. Everyone knows we have a five-month window before the vote on the ballot initiative. They

know these marriages will be legal, and they're planning to celebrate." He says he plans to marry, too, though not right away. "It's going to be this fall," he says. Presumably before November.

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