



ROD McCULLOM

Minority Report

By reframing marriage equality as a civil right, two African-American governors have become leading voices for gay rights

In order to dispel the notion that gay rights translates into more advantages for privileged white men, the governors have shown how their own families are affected by discrimination against gays. Case in point: This June, Patrick and his wife announced that their 18-year-old daughter, Katherine, is lesbian, a fact they'd known for nearly a year. In talking to reporters, the governor called his daughter's coming-out "no biggie." He added, "You know, it's interesting even just thinking about having this interview. Would we give an interview

to announce one of our kids was straight?"

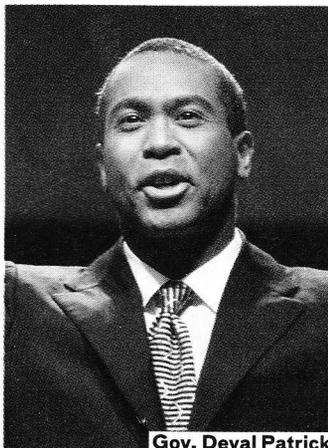
The Patricks' acknowledgment made headlines around the country, creating dialogue where none existed before—on black talk radio and in barber-shops from Cambridge, Mass., to Compton, Calif. When the proud father and his

MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR Deval Patrick and New York governor David Paterson have more than a few things in common. Of course, there's the obvious: Both men are handsome, charismatic, and in their 50s. Both are the first black governors of their states—and only the second and third nationwide since Reconstruction. But less obvious—at least to the average voter—is their similar dedication to pro-gay politics.

Unlike his antigay Republican predecessor, Mitt Romney, Patrick has continually flexed his political muscle to ensure all of his constituents are treated equally. "In Massachusetts equal means equal," he said in late July when he signed legislation that allows out-of-state gay couples to wed in Massachusetts. This repealed an obscure, 95-year-old law Romney had enforced to ensure that Massachusetts, as he explained, would not become the "Las Vegas of same-sex marriage."

Paterson is just as impressive. A soft-spoken, legally blind politico, who represented Harlem in the state senate for two decades before becoming New York's lieutenant governor in 2006, he's been a staunch ally and ahead of the curve on gay issues. One of Paterson's first major acts, after becoming governor in March, was ordering all state agencies to recognize same-sex marriages legally performed in other jurisdictions. *The New York Times* remarked that Paterson has become "something of a celebrity" since making that decision, noting he received "a hero's welcome" while marching in New York City's gay pride parade this June.

Think about it. Of the 50 men and women who occupy governor's mansions in the United States, only two are black. And these two black men are arguably the most gay-



Gov. Deval Patrick



Gov. David Paterson

friendly to ever be governor—including New Jersey's Jim McGreevey, who came around to gay rights only after coming out and leaving office.

Without fanfare, Patrick and Paterson are reframing the struggle for equality as a fight against discrimination. What's more, by being a great source of pride for black people, they're also changing minds within the black community, which historically has been reluctant to accept gay rights and marriage equality. A recent poll by Pew Research found that 49% of the U.S. population is opposed to gay marriage, compared to 56% of African-Americans.

now openly gay daughter marched hand in hand in Boston's gay pride parade this past summer—his second appearance and her first—they presented a poignant picture of a successful black family and a reminder that, indeed, we are everywhere.

Paterson drove that same message home in May when he reminded reporters that gay and lesbian couples were not only in Chelsea but in Harlem too. To prove his point he recounted how his parents used to leave him and his little brother with family friends—called Uncle Stanley and Uncle Ronald—when they went out of town. The older gay black couple helped the future governor with his homework and read to him. "People who live together for a long time would like to be married," Paterson said. "As far as I'm concerned, I think it's beautiful. I was raised in a culture that understood the different ways that people conduct their lives."

Thanks to two popular black governors, we all might finally learn that lesson. ♣

**These two black men—
Deval Patrick and David
Paterson—are arguably
the most gay-friendly to
ever serve as governors.**