

Report: Same-sex marriage could bring Arizona \$62 million

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE SO FAR

Here is a closer look at the economic impact of same-sex marriage in eight U.S. state and the District of Columbia.



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Several high-profile Phoenix residents are working to help the city legalize gay marriage soon.



(Photo: David Kadlubowski/The Republic)

Several high-profile Phoenix residents are working to help the city legalize gay marriage soon.

Former Phoenix Councilman Tom Simplot and Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., recently attended a gathering at Phoenix's Royal Palms Resort about the Marriage Opportunity Project.

The October event will bring national leaders to Washington, D.C., to make proposals to "deepen the meaning of 'marriage equality' ... to include social class as well as sexual orientation."

Simplot, who represented central Phoenix, was the first openly gay person elected to the Phoenix City Council. And Sinema, who represents part of central Phoenix, was the first openly bisexual person elected to Congress.

Both officials have been vocal about their desire to see Phoenix legalize same-sex marriage.

Among other things, organizers of the Marriage Opportunity Project point to the economic benefits of extending same-sex marriage to gays.

A recent report indicated that if Arizona legalized same-sex marriage, it could bring nearly \$62 million to Arizona over three years.

Gay-marriage advocates say the move could boost tourism, sales tax and other industries.

However, opponents say keeping marriage between a man and a woman serves the economy better.

Potential impact

The Williams Institute, a national think tank at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Law, conducts research on sexual-orientation and gender-identity law and public policy. It released the study last month.

There are 15,817 same-sex couples living in Arizona, according to the 2010 U.S. census. If the state legalized same-sex marriage, the Williams Institute estimated that about 50 percent of them would marry within three years based on patterns in other states.

The report estimates that spending on wedding arrangements and tourism by resident same-sex couples and their guests would add an estimated \$61.9 million to Arizona's economy over three years, with a \$39.6 million boost in the first year.

"This study confirms that all Arizonans benefit from marriage for same-sex couples, not just the LGBT community," said M.V. Lee Badgett, a UCLA law professor who co-authored the report.

The institute used state-level, census and American Community Survey data to estimate the economic impact. Researchers did not include out-of-state same-sex couples who might travel to Arizona to marry.

Cathi Herrod, president of the Center for Arizona Policy, a socially conservative Phoenix-based think tank, dismissed the validity of the report.

"Instead of relying upon conjecture and economic speculation when discussing marriage, we should look at the facts and our own history," she said. "It's the time-tested definition of marriage that provides the best outcomes for men, women, children and our society as a whole."

The advocacy group lobbied successfully for the passage of Proposition 102, a voter-approved amendment to the Arizona Constitution recognizing only

unions between one man and one woman.

"Arizonans strongly voted to protect marriage just six years ago because they recognized that marriage between a man and a woman is what's best for our state," Herrod said.

Good for business?

Same-sex marriage supporters say changing the law would attract more businesses to the state.

"Part of continuing the momentum forward is we're starting to see with businesses coming out in support of marriage equality is it's helping to start a lot of conversations with business leaders who are conscious of their bottom lines," said Jeremy Zegas, project director of Why Marriage Matters Arizona, a Phoenix-based public-education campaign advocating same-sex marriage.

Same-sex marriage also could lead to happier, healthier and more financially successful couples, which benefits society, said Jonathan Rauch, author of "Gay Marriage: Why It is Good for Gays, Good for Straights and Good for America." Rauch, a Phoenix native, is an organizer of the Marriage Opportunity Project.

"They are (each other's) first line of support in a crisis," he said. "And they are that much less likely to rely on public support."

"The much larger impact of marriage equality and the one that society really needs to care about is the benefit of marriage itself," said Rauch, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

Consequences

Joseph Gesullo, chairman of the Greater Phoenix Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, said reluctance to legalize same-sex marriage might have a detrimental effect on Arizona's economy.

"When you travel outside of Arizona and talk to people that live in other parts of the country and world, and they hear you are from Arizona, they think at times that we live in some kind of police state and we're very discriminatory here," he said. "But when you actually live here and see how close knit this community is, those things aren't true."

Rocco Menaguale, an artist/designer in downtown Phoenix, said some local residents in the architecture and interior-design industry have missed out on business opportunities because of perceptions that the state is not gay-friendly.

Menaguale said passing same-sex marriage sooner than later could help speed up Arizona's economic recovery.

"The architecture, interior-design and even construction industries are just starting to bounce back from the recession," he said. "Supporting marriage equality would start to attract more people to Arizona who want to live here, buy stuff here and come in for travel. It really would effect the whole creative community."

By the numbers

The Williams Institute, a national think tank at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Law, released a study on the potential economic impact of legalizing same-sex marriage in Arizona.

- The report estimated same-sex marriage would bring \$5.1 million in sales-tax revenue to Arizona.
- Average spending on weddings in Arizona in 2012 was \$24,009, according to the Wedding Report.
- Because researchers believe gay couples are less likely to get financial support from family and friends than straight couples, the report assumes that same-sex couples will spend an average of \$6,002 per wedding in Arizona.
- Researchers estimated same-sex couples would generate \$47.5 million in direct wedding spending over the introductory three-year period.
- Spending on wedding ceremonies and other celebrations could bring nearly 520 jobs to Arizona, researchers said.

Economic impact after legalizing same-sex marriage

Massachusetts

Population: 6,693,000.

Legalization date: Nov. 18, 2003.

Economic impact: More than \$111 million over 4½ years.

California

Population: 38,333,000.

Legalization date: Aug. 4, 2010.

Economic impact: \$63.8 million over three years.

Connecticut

Population: 3,596,000.

Legalization date: Oct. 10, 2008.

Economic impact: \$9.3 million over three years.

Iowa

Population: 3,090,000.

Legalization date: April 3, 2009.

Economic impact: More than \$12 million in one year.

Vermont

Population: 627,000.

Legalization Date: April 7, 2009.

Economic impact: \$30.6 million over three years.

New Hampshire

Population: 1,322,000.

Legalization date: June 3, 2009.

Economic impact: \$500,000 annually.

District of Columbia

Population: 646,000.

Legalization date: Dec. 18, 2009.

Economic impact: \$52.2 million over three years.

Washington

Population: 6,971,000.

Legalization date: Nov. 6, 2012.

Economic impact: \$88 million over three years.

Maine

Population: 1,328,000.

Legalization date: Nov. 6, 2012.


Economic impact: \$60 million over three years.

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