Gay marriage debate at Northwood University entertaining, but lacked answers for some

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Those attending a Tuesday evening "Is gay marriage good for America?" debate said it was educational, entertaining, but lacked a concrete answer to the question.

Nearly 200 people attended as Washington-based thought leaders Ryan Anderson and Ilya Shapiro debated the question. With Anderson against and Shapiro for, the two debated their sides of the issue in the Griswold Lecture Hall on the Northwood University campus. The event was part of the university's Forum for Citizenship and Enterprise

"He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that," Northwood Professor Glenn Moots said, quoting John Stuart Mill.

Moots said it seemed the debate was irrelevant as of June when same-sex couples were allowed the right to marry. But he said the debate remained relevant because changing policy doesn't guarantee changed minds.

Anderson is a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, while Shapiro is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and editor-in-chief of the Cato Supreme Court review.

"Marriage is a good thing," Shapiro said in opening the debate. "I encourage all of you to get married, that includes gay people."

He said that the 14th Amendment "undisputedly" protects equal rights. Shapiro noted that our forefathers probably didn't conceive same-sex marriage when they wrote the amendment in 1868.

"That doesn't mean they were against it," Shapiro said. "They couldn't conceive of air traffic either."

Shapiro said attorneys don't look at what the framers envisioned, they look at what the words mean.

"It's a constitutional right for gays and lesbians to get (marriage) licenses as long as everybody else gets them," Shapiro said.

Anderson researches and writes about marriage and religious liberty for the Heritage Foundation.

"What does he mean by everyone else?" asked Anderson in his opening, questioning if "everyone" applied to three-person relationships or open relationships.

"For the past 50 years marriage has slowly been dissolving in America," Anderson said.

He said his fear is re-defining marriage paves the way to redefine other relationships, such as women sharing a husband.

Anderson said it wasn't same-sex relationships that tore apart the marriage fabric, he said it's a combination of the "hook-up culture, non-married child bearing (relationships) and no-fault divorce."

"Gay marriage is a symptom of and further disintegration of marriage," Anderson said.

Shapiro said the 14th Amendment should have never excluded marriage licenses to same-sex couples, because they deserve equal rights. Had they not been excluded, there would be no issue of "re-defining" marriage.

"I actually agree with both of them," said an area pastor attending the debate. "Neither of them have changed my thoughts. I was hoping to be persuaded a bit more."

Northwood English professor Carol Meinhardt said her freshman class often discusses controversial topics and she was interested in having them attend the pro/con forum.

Ira Isaacoff wasn't swayed by the debate.

"I wanted to hear what argument could be made against gay marriage," he said. "I haven't been convinced that there is one."

Student Brittany Bloome previously had a strong opinion for gay marriage and said that after the debate, her opinion wasn't as strong.

"I'm not saying I don't support it," Bloome said. "I just don't think I would encourage it."

Kristen Koltvedt, also a student, wasn't swayed either way, but said the debate was "solid" and offered educated opinions.

"It was a fair debate," said resident Dave Sarafolean. "I don't know that it changed my views on (same-sex) marriage. I was more in favor of (Anderson.)"

The Forum for Citizenship and Enterprise is hosting two more debates. The first is on Nov. 2 and titled "Should the Federal Minimum Wage be $10.10 per hour by 2016?" The second is on Nov. 10 and titled "Immigration: Should we have open boarders?" Both are at 7 p.m. at the Griswold Lecture Hall.