

'Historic day' for gay rights in America

DANIEL BATES
IN NEW YORK

THE US Supreme Court has handed a significant victory to gay rights campaigners by ruling that married gay men and women are eligible for federal benefits and paving the way for same-sex marriage in California.

America's most powerful court ruled that a law, the Defence of Marriage Act or Doma – which denied government benefits to same-sex married couples and said that marriage should be between a man and a woman – was unconstitutional.

It also effectively overturned a ban on gay marriage in California – meaning that same-sex marriages can resume there.

The rulings made yesterday the most important day for gay rights in the US in a generation.

They open the door to challenges in the remaining 38 states that have banned gay marriage and will make it far more likely that they will be a success.

President Barack Obama said that the court's decisions were a "historic step forward".

He said: "This was discrimination enshrined in law. It treated loving, committed gay and lesbian couples as a separate and lesser class of people.

"The Supreme Court has righted that wrong, and our country is better off for it."

Mr Obama said that the ruling applies only to civil marriages and that how religious institutions define and consecrate

marriages has always been up to those institutions.

Among the celebrities who expressed their pleasure with the ruling was *Star Trek* actor George Takei, an outspoken gay rights campaigner, who wrote on his Facebook page: "Today marks a watershed moment in history and a tremendous victory for the principle of equality."

Ben Affleck Tweeted: "Big news from the Supreme Court. Goodbye #DOMA #Prop8. Hello #equality."

Gay rights campaigners cried and hugged outside the court and said that the decisions were on a par with Civil Rights era victories.

They also vowed to use them to overturn the remaining bans across the US.

The Supreme Court's rulings were on Doma, which was signed into law in 1996 under then president Bill Clinton, who has subsequently called it unconstitutional.

By striking it down, the court has now allowed gay people access to more than 1,100 federal benefits and rights, including when their spouse dies.

The majority decision by justice Anthony Kennedy, supported by four liberal judges, read that Doma "violates basic due process and equal protection principles".

The case was brought by Edith Windsor, 83, from New York, who was forced to pay a £236,000 inheritance tax bill when her partner of 42 years



Wendy Davis celebrates after her ten-hour filibuster speech against abortion reforms Picture: Getty Images

Ms Davis goes to Austin and wins abortion battle

TEXAS Democrats have blocked a drive for new state abortion restrictions, after a marathon speech in the capital Austin caused some Republican supporters of the bill to cast votes past a midnight deadline.

Democratic Senator Wendy Davis spoke for more than ten hours on Tuesday to run out the voting window on a measure that would place a

ban on abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

The bill called for stricter standards for abortion clinics. Republican backers said it would protect women's health and that the ban on late-term abortions would protect fetuses, based on disputed research that suggests they feel pain by 20 weeks of development. Opponents said that it would force nearly all

Texas abortion clinics to close or be rebuilt.

Ms Davis, who began speaking at 11:55am local time, was prevented by procedural rules from deviating off topic or taking a break by eating, leaning against her desk, sitting down or using the toilet.

She later hailed it "an incredible victory for Texas women and those who love them".

Thea Spyer died. If she had been in a heterosexual relationship, then she would have come under a federal estate tax deduction law.

After the Supreme Court ruled in her favour, Ms Windsor will now get a rebate.

The second case involved Proposition 8, which was a law passed in California banning gay marriage after it was legalised for five months in 2008.

The court ruling was more complicated and said that opponents had not had the right to appeal a lower court ruling that overturned the ban.

This effectively removes any legal obstacle to same-sex couples marrying in California.

Rising star of NFL arrested over the murder of semi-professional player

MICHELLE SMITH

AARON Hernandez, an up-and-coming American football player was taken from his home in handcuffs yesterday morning, more than a week after a Boston semi-professional player was found dead in an industrial park a mile from Hernandez's house.

Less than two hours later, the New England Patriots announced that the 23-year-old had been let go from the team.

Odin Lloyd, 27, a semi-professional football player for the Boston Bandits, was found dead on 17 June. Police ruled the death a homicide, but did not say how he died.

Lloyd's relatives said he was dating the sister of Hernandez's



Aaron Hernandez was a friend of the dead man, Odin Lloyd

fiancée, that the two men were friends and that they were out together on the last night of Lloyd's life.

Hernandez's arrest is a setback for the National Football League. Despite efforts to protect itself

from controversy, the league has been dragged into a string of scandals by players stretching from OJ Simpson's murder trial in 1995 to more recent cases involving dog-fighting rings, injury bounties, spying and gambling.

In a separate case, Hernandez has been sued by Alexander Bradley, a Connecticut man who said he shot him in the face after the two left a Miami strip club in February, causing him to lose an eye. A Florida police official said last week that law enforcement had investigated the shooting, but abandoned the case after Mr Bradley refused to co-operate.

Hernandez had emerged as a potent tight-end in the NFL, earning him a \$4 million (£2.7m) a year contract.

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