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QUESTIONS FOR JOHN BALDACCI

The Wedding March

By DEBORAH SOLOMON

Last spring, you signed a bill that made Maine the fifth state in this country to legalize [same-sex marriage](#). But this Tuesday, in a referendum known as Question 1, the citizens of Maine will be voting on whether to repeal the new law. In what way is this a national issue?

We're not focused on it that way; we're focused on it Maine-specific, why we're going to be helpful to families in Maine who need to make sure that they have equal protection under the Constitution.

So you're not thinking about gay rights in general?

No. Just thinking about Maine.

Isn't that a small way of looking at it?

We're not getting on a pedestal and preaching to others.

What's interesting about this — at least to non-Mainers — is that if voters reject Question 1, Maine will be the very first state in this country where gay marriage was legalized by regular citizens, casting votes by the thousands, as opposed to by a court order or a legislative vote.

Right. While that may in fact happen, it isn't because it was designed to happen that way.

The Roman Catholic diocese of Portland is campaigning against gay marriage in Maine. What is that like for you, as a Catholic?

I respect the church and appreciate their leadership, but my responsibility is for all the people.

Did you have a religious upbringing?

I was an altar boy. My mother was so hoping that somebody would grow up to be a priest.

I didn't realize there were so many Catholics in Maine.

Maine is about 20 percent Catholic. The Franco-Americans immigrated from Canada. They imported Italian labor to help build the paper mills. There's actually a Little Italy in Maine.

Really? It must be a very little Little Italy.

Let me tell you. We had an Italian restaurant in Bangor, Me., named Mama Baldacci's. It was a bar, and my grandmother was worried because they were drinking too much so she started cooking food.

Did you help out as a kid?

I bused tables, I washed dishes, sat parties, tended bar.

Are you a good cook?

I'm actually a pretty good cook. I love to make antipasto. I love the eggplant relish and the provolone and —

But that's not really cooking. You just unwrap the salami and put it out.

There's a lot of creativity and artistry involved in putting together a good antipasto. You finish it with homemade Italian dressing. Add toasted garlic bread and a couple of glasses of good red wine, and then you're in heaven — or in Maine, as I say.

I believe you're related to George Mitchell, the former U.S. senator from Maine?

We're first cousins, once removed. My grandmother on my mother's side and his mother are sisters.

He, too, seems reserved.

He's more of a listener and a researcher and reader. The talking really didn't occur until after he ran for governor.

And you're also related to David Baldacci, the novelist whose books are populated with [C.I.A.](#) operatives and dead bodies?

He is my second cousin. David and I are good friends.

Have you read any of his novels?

All of them.

Have you been a character in any?

I hope not.

Maine is represented by two female senators. Unlike yourself, Olympia Snowe and [Susan Collins](#) are Republicans. Which one are you closer to?

I'm actually close to both.

That's a boring answer.

I know, but it's true.

Have you talked to Senator Snowe about her vote supporting Obama's health care plan?

Yes, I did, but I'm not the only one she talks to.

I'm beginning to think that maybe Maine has outsize political influence because no one there is wasting time talking, yourself included.

Yes. There's a pragmatism that runs through Maine people. It's more about getting the job done than talking about getting the job done.

INTERVIEW HAS BEEN CONDENSED AND EDITED.

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