

# High school votes on gay issue



BREMERTON, Wash. (AP) — Students at Bremerton High School began voting Monday on an amendment to the school's constitution that would allow pupils to kick

their openly gay classmates off the student council.

The proposal, which supporters say was merely intended to prolong debate at the school's annual constitutional convention, has polarized the student body and attracted national attention since the student congress approved it 49-47 last week.

"It started as a reason to get out of class and turned into an issue that people could debate passionately on," said Mike Mercer, a staunch proponent of the amendment who spoke to reporters with a Bible open on the table in front of him.

He said the message of the proposal is simple: Homosexuality is wrong.

"I am a Christian. I believe in this book, the Bible, and it says homosexuality is wrong," Mercer said.

Students voted Monday in their homerooms, and votes will be tallied Tuesday. If two-thirds of the homerooms reject the measure — based on majority votes within each homeroom — an overall majority vote of the full, 1,350-student body will be taken Wednesday, said Principal Marilee Hansen.

Meanwhile, mobs of reporters descended on Bremerton High, a school with tall evergreens and the snowcapped Olympic Mountains for a backdrop. Bremerton is 15 miles across Puget Sound from Seattle.

Cameras dotted the lunchroom and lawn as students lined up to be interviewed about their views on the controversial proposal.

Walter Brown, 17, said he found the amendment "very childish and ignorant."

"I ain't got nothing against gays, as long as they keep their hands to themselves," he said.

Each year, the high school takes the unusual step of calling a one-day constitutional congress to make amendments to school rules. The congress and the student council are one and the same.

Until last Wednesday, the subject of homosexuality had never come up at the annual convention.

The congress usually votes on rules governing such things as disciplinary appeals and the minimum grade point average for athletes.

The anti-gay measure would make it possible for students discovered practicing "immoral behavior" to be impeached from elected office by their peers on the council "in order to preserve the integrity and high moral standards that BHS is built upon." Immoral behavior, according to the amendment, includes sexual harassment, indecent exposure, sodomy and homosexuality.

It's unlikely the rule would actually go into effect, Hansen said. She said administrators, who have the power to override proposed constitutional amendments, seem to be against this one.

Hansen said the measure was brought by a politically savvy group of right-wing Christian students who dominate the student council.

One of them, Mercer, said he's been taunted at school since he spoke in favor of the proposed measure before the congressional vote last Wednesday.

"I've been called 'Hitler reborn' and 'vice president of the Fascist Club,'" he said.

Another supporter, Andrew Ledbetter, 17, said the measure was not meant as an outright ban of gay people from the council. It was meant, rather, to "empower the majority" to remove such people from office.

"All I want to do is bring these people to heaven with me," Ledbetter said of gays. He wore a T-shirt bearing the image of former President Ronald Reagan that read, "Remember When America Had a Real President?"

J.J. Hewitt, 17, the student council's vice president-elect, said he was shocked when the congress passed the proposal.

"In a public high school, to make a political statement like this, it's just disastrous," he said. "They're using a high school as a platform for their political platform."

Despite their willingness to grant interviews, school counselor Dorothy Ghylin said students have expressed frustration at all the attention.

"I've had quite a few of the students come up to me and say, 'This is chaos, this is ridiculous,'" she said. "Most have expressed frustration with the publicity."

# Unified House passes stalking bill

SALEM (AP) — Stalkers could face prison terms as long as five years under a bill unanimously passed today by the Oregon House.

The measure, HB2412, goes to the Senate where a similar bill is being considered.

Several House members told of personal knowledge of stalkers.

"The experience with a stalker is horrific, to say the least," said Rep. John Watt, R-Medford. He said his family was followed by someone for a time.

"I cannot begin to tell the fear that went through our family," Watt said.

Rep. Kevin Mannix, D-Salem, sponsor of the bill, said victims of stalkers now "have no recourse through the law."

"Many of these obsessive

**'Many of these obsessive individuals will stop if someone in authority steps in.'**

— Rep. Kevin Mannix, D-Salem

individuals will stop if someone in authority steps in," he said.

Thirty states have passed anti-stalking laws, Mannix said.

The measure would make it a crime to engage in "repeated and unwanted contact" that puts someone in fear of his or her personal safety.

A police officer getting a stalker complaint would issue a stop-stalking order to the suspect directing him or her to appear in court. The court could issue a

similar order of its own after a hearing.

A victim could go directly to court to seek a stop-stalking order when law enforcement authorities would not act.

Stalking would be a misdemeanor with a jail term of up to one year and a maximum \$2,500 fine. A repeat conviction for stalking or violating a stop-stalking order would be a felony with maximum penalties of five years in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

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