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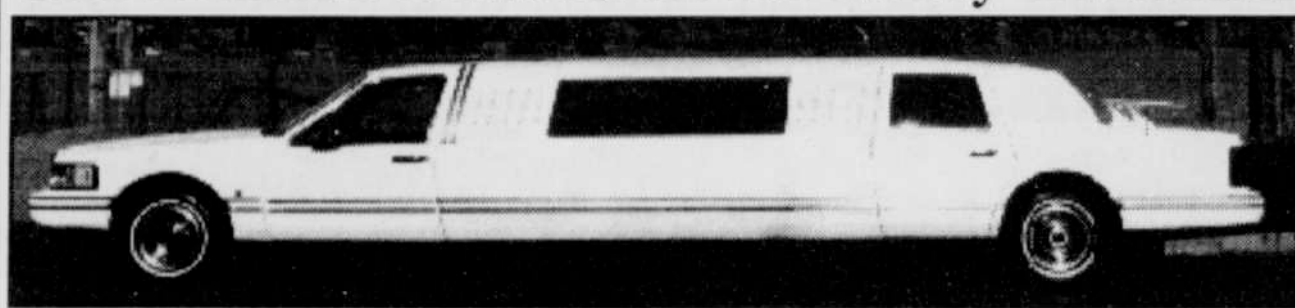


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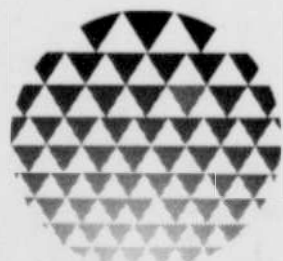
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# local news

## On the ban wagon

Washington appears likely to join the passel of states that have legislated against same-sex marriage

by Inga Sorensen

**J**ohn Wilkinson chooses to embrace the bigger picture.

"We think this is a great opportunity for our community to get proactive," says Wilkinson, the media relations director for the Legal Marriage Alliance of Washington, an organization which advocates for equal marriage rights for same-sex couples.

Though Washington state legislators are currently mulling over three bills that seek to deny equal marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples, Wilkinson believes the public dialogue around the same-sex marriage issue will only be beneficial.

"People are now seeing gays and lesbians as people who are in committed relationships. We are starting to be defined by our relationships rather than what we do in bed, which is a major, major shift in thinking."

LMA, along with the grass-roots civil rights group Hands Off Washington, helped organize testimony before House and Senate committees that held hearings in early February on proposed legislation barring same-sex marriages.

The first anti-marriage measure, House Bill 1130, was introduced by Republican Rep. Bill Thompson in mid-January.

Two dozen GOP co-sponsors have signed onto the bill, which reads, in part: "In the Defense of Marriage Act, Congress granted authority to the individual states to either grant or deny recognition of same-sex marriages recognized as valid in another state. [DOMA] defines marriage for purposes of federal law as a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife and provides that a state shall not be required to give effect to any public act or judicial proceeding of any other state respecting marriage between persons of the same sex if the state has determined that it will not recognize same-sex marriages."

"The Legislature and the people of the state of Washington find that matters pertaining to marriage are matters reserved to the sovereign states, and therefore such matters should be determined by the people within each individual state and not by the people or courts of a different state," the bill continues. "It is a compelling interest of the state of Washington to reaffirm its historical commitment to the institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman as husband and wife and to protect that institution."

Additionally, HB 1130 cites a 1974 case in which the state Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples may not marry in Washington.

According to Wilkinson, a Senate version of the measure, SB 5398, is wending its way through that chamber, as is Senate Bill 5400, which is essentially the same proposal except that it includes a referendum clause, meaning that if passed

it circumvents a gubernatorial veto and goes directly to the people for a vote.

In response, LMA and HOW have sponsored community meetings statewide to strategize about how to respond.

LMA also hosted a recent public meeting with Evan Wolfson, co-counsel in the same-sex marriage battle in Hawaii. Wolfson spoke Jan. 25 at a Seattle church.

State Rep. Ed Murray, an openly gay Seattle Democrat, meanwhile, countered the trio of anti-marriage measures by introducing House Bill 1203, which would extend equal marriage rights to same-sex couples.

That bill was a portion of former Gov. Mike Lowry's final legislative package. Lowry, a long-time gay and lesbian rights backer, collaborated on the proposal with both Murray and LMA.

HB 1203 states, in part: "It is a compelling interest of the state of Washington not to discriminate against otherwise qualified candidates for a civil marriage license on the basis of the gender of the applicants."

It also maintains that "strong, healthy families promote social stability and economic growth, and that these families are supported and protected by the contractual obligations and benefits conferred by civil marriage licenses."

A similar measure was introduced in the Senate.

Those bills are not expected to receive a hearing in the Republican-controlled Legislature. One or more of the anti-marriage bills, meanwhile, will almost undoubtedly pass.

Freshman Gov. Gary Locke, a Democrat, has promised to veto any anti-marriage measure, and there may not be quite enough votes in the Legislature to override him. At that point, the majority Republicans can move to place the question on the November ballot.

"I think this is really galvanizing our community," says Wilkinson. "Like you folks in Oregon, we're tired of being on the defensive. We're looking to do something proactive."

That, he says, may take the form of a statewide initiative protecting gay men and lesbians from employment discrimination.

"Of course our goal is to see equal marriage rights, but that may be simply too much right now," he says. "Protection from employment discrimination will likely have more support and be more palatable at this stage."

Murray has introduced House Bill 1044, which would bar employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Meanwhile, the Lacey City Council voted Jan. 23 to extend its fair housing ordinance to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. The town of Tumwater had acted similarly not long before.



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