

POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS

Not ready for ENDA

It doesn't look as though three will be a charm for Oregon ENDA, an employment nondiscrimination bill that has been introduced this session in a trio of slightly varying versions.

The most recent rendition, Senate Bill 1217, introduced a couple of weeks ago, appears to be one vote short of majority support, prompting leadership to all but kill the measure.

"We're not ready to give up until the gavel falls," says Barry Pack, executive director of Right to Pride, a statewide gay, lesbian and bisexual rights group that has lobbied for ENDA throughout the quickly winding-down session.

"But I have to admit things aren't looking good," concedes Pack.

SB1217, which would bar employment dis-

crimination in some cases on the basis of sexual orientation, is cosponsored by state Sens. Kate Brown (D-Portland) and Jeannette Hamby, (R-Hillsboro).



Chuck Carpenter makes a final plea for ENDA on the House floor in April; the bill passed by a 40-20 vote

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According to RTP, "things aren't looking good" because the group can't prove to leadership it has the necessary 16 votes in the 30-member, GOP-dominated Senate.

"It's a very fluid situation. If it could get to the floor we may have the votes," says Pack, adding that RTP believed it had the backing "but some arm twisting changed that."

He specifically points to Sen. Tom Hartung, a Portland-area Republican, who Pack says previously signaled support for ENDA but has since wavered. "And I'm not sure why," Pack says.

To get Hartung on the ENDA bandwagon, Pack says RTP is trying to rally influential constituents in District 3, which covers portions of Portland, Beaverton and Hillsboro, to press the lawmaker to back the bill.

Matthew Lowe, a senator's aide, says Hartung has received "a few" calls asking him to support the bill.

SB1217, meanwhile, has been assigned to the not-so-ENDA-friendly Senate Livability Committee, inhabited in part by anti-gay rights Republicans Eileen Qutub of Beaverton and Bob Kintigh of Springfield.

Livability is the same spot House Bill 3719, the previous version of ENDA, landed. SB1217 basically models HB3719, which cleared the Republican-controlled House on April 29 by a 40-20 vote.

(HB3719 in turn mirrored HB2734, the first introduced ENDA, which had languished in the House Judiciary Committee.)

HB3719 crossed over to the Senate, where it was assigned to Livability.

Pack had thought RTP could gather the 16 votes for that version if some adjustments were made to the bill.

Leadership, however, refused to allow any amendments to "social issues" bills, forcing the birth of SB1217, which is basically the same as its predecessors minus changes pertaining to a religious exemption and attorneys fees—adjustments designed to entice.

As of press time, it wasn't enough. "But it's not over until it's over," says Pack, though clearly bowing to the notion that ENDA's passage is a long shot.

He adds, "I think we have to take a moment to reflect on how far we did come this session. Our two-thirds vote in the House was historic—and if it hadn't been for Senate leadership always changing the rules, well, there's a good chance things would be different."

Crossing our fingers...

The frenzied push toward adjournment—coupled with lawmakers' struggle over big budgetary matters—could land the Oregon Defense of Marriage Act in a legislative dumpster, too.

"That's certainly what we're hoping for," says Pack.

DOMA, a.k.a. Senate Bill 577, sponsored by state Sen. Marilyn Shannon (R-Brooks), defines marriage as the union between a man and woman. It also says same-gender marriages performed elsewhere will not be recognized in Oregon.

In late May, DOMA flew through the Senate by a 20-7 vote. Nineteen Republicans and one Democrat, Mae Yih of Albany, approved the bill.

The measure now sits in the House Judiciary Committee, chaired by the less-than-gay-friendly John Minnis (R-Wood Village).

It seemed as though DOMA was on the fast track toward passage, but Pack says legislators are so wrapped up in other issues that DOMA may ultimately fall by the wayside.

"Just hope time runs out," he says.

It's a test for parents

House Bill 2569, sponsored by state Rep. Ron Sunseri (R-Gresham), passed the Senate on June 12 by a 26-4 vote. The bill was earlier approved by a 25-23 House vote.

That measure initially barred school administrators from administering tests, surveys, psychological or psychiatric exams, or evaluations that address, among other things, sexual behaviors, orientation or attitudes unless parental/guardian consent is obtained.

The bill was amended, however, to remove sexual "orientation," though it still includes the phrase "sexual behavior and attitudes."

In its original form, Pack worried HB2569 could negatively impact queer youth who might, for example, seek school counseling services.

However the bill, which now heads to Gov. Kitzhaber, also stipulates that school districts make "instructional materials that are part of any program available for inspection by the parents or guardians of any student."

Those materials "may include teachers' manuals, films, tapes or other supplementary material that will be used in connection with any survey, analysis or evaluation as part of any program."

Reported by Inga Sorensen



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