

"Gov. Owens definitely supports a ban on gay marriage and will sign that bill if it reaches his desk," spokesman Dick Wadhams said.

Opponents of the ban say it is driven by bigotry and a desire to demonize gay men and lesbians.

"If you have a relationship based on love, I don't think you should ban it, you should embrace it," said Rep. Tom Plant, D-Nederland.

The measure narrowly passed in a 33-32 vote.

MAINE

A state senator is sponsoring legislation that, if passed, would place a gay rights initiative on the November ballot.

Sen. Joel Abromson's bill is currently before a legislative committee. It is expected to move through the committee and be passed by both houses, reports PlanetOut.

If the Portland Republican's measure does make it to the ballot, it will be the third time Maine voters have faced the issue of sexual minority civil rights at the polls.

In 1995, voters rejected a measure that would have forbidden the addition of any more protected categories to the state's civil rights law. Then, in 1997, civil rights protections for gay men and lesbians were approved by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Angus King; however, a special election in 1998 repealed the legislation.

The new measure would make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation in employment, credit, housing and public accommodations.

"I am here because, following the people's veto, nothing has changed in Maine," said Abromson. "It is still legal to discriminate against job and mortgage applicants because of their sexual orientation; it is still legal to deny people rental units or to charge them more because of their sexual orientation; it is still legal to keep Maine people out of public accommodations based on their sexual orientation. And that is just not acceptable. It is just not the Maine way."

Speaking at the committee hearing, Christian Civic League leader Michael Heath warned that the measure would lead to same-sex marriages and "the affirmation of homosexuality as morally normal, and perhaps inevitable for some, in our schools."

Both the governor and state Attorney General Andrew Ketterer support the bill, which has also garnered the support of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland.

NATIONAL

The Human Rights Campaign, a national gay and lesbian political organization, has endorsed Vice President Al Gore, a Democrat, for president.

The announcement came Feb. 11 at a West Hollywood press conference attended by Gore.

Said HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch: "Al Gore understands that words create dreams, but actions create results. He has demonstrated a thorough understanding of our issues, not just rhetorically, but historically. He has a long, tangible record of support and has championed our quest for freedom in both word and deed."

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She cited Gore's lobbying support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a federal bill that seeks to bar sexual orientation discrimination in employment.

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation representatives met with executives of Paramount Television on Feb. 14 to discuss an upcoming series featuring the controversial radio personality Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who has maligned homosexuality on air.



The parties issued a joint statement: "The meeting created a dialogue that is expected to continue. In the meeting, Paramount discussed the format of the television show, which will vary from Dr. Laura's radio show, in that there will be many points of view derived from a variety of sources, guests and a studio audience."

"The ground rules for the meeting included not discussing who was in attendance nor the specifics of the conversations. The reasons for this were to bring the conversations over the next months to a more focused and direct exchange of information and viewpoints. This was to minimize each of the interested parties 'speaking' to each other through the media. We agreed to talk openly during these early discussions of the television show's format development, so that our community's concerns will be heard by the show's decision makers."

GLAAD is a watchdog organization dedicated to promoting and ensuring fair, accurate and inclusive representation of sexual minorities in all types of media.

VERMONT

On March 1, the Vermont House Judiciary Committee voted 10-1 to approve a bill that would create "civil unions" for same-sex couples.

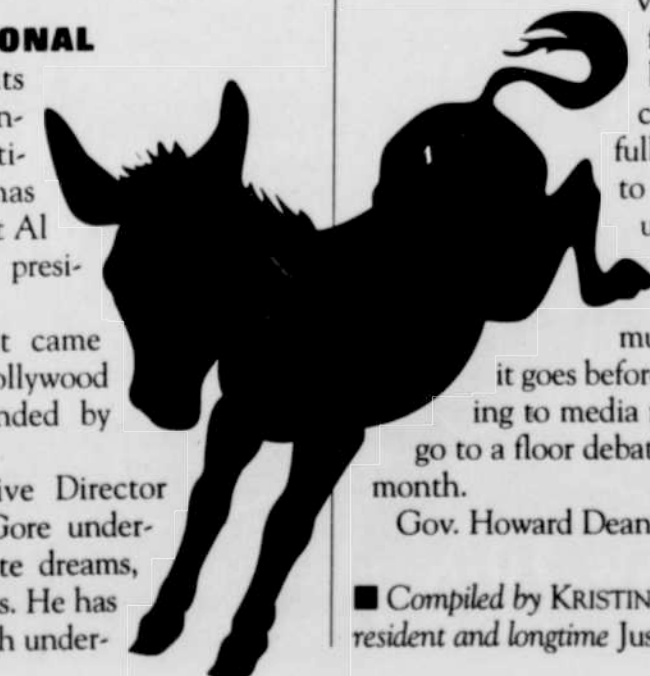
The measure grants all the benefits and rights of marriage the state can legally offer, but it cannot grant the tax advantages and hundreds of other benefits that the federal government provides.

According to The Associated Press, the only vote against the bill came from a committee member who argued same-sex couples should be granted full marriage rights—equal to what married heterosexuals receive.

The Ways and Means Committee still must review the bill before it goes before the full House. According to media reports, it is not likely to go to a floor debate until the middle of the month.

Gov. Howard Dean supports the measure.

■ Compiled by KRISTINE CHATWOOD, a Portland resident and longtime Just Out contributor.



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