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NATIONAL news



U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., wanted to prohibit federal funding for contraceptive distribution

Hall of Texas, Collin C. Peterson of Minnesota and Mike McIntyre of North Carolina. Several of these members co-sponsored the bill last year. There is no Senate companion measure.

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce defeated May 16 an amendment offered by U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., that would have prohibited funding for contraceptive distribution.

The amendment to House Resolution 1925—the Runaway, Homeless and Missing Children Protection Act—was defeated by a vote of 12-29, with seven Republicans and 22 Democrats opposed. However, in a separate voice vote, the committee approved an amendment offered by Musgrave to prohibit the use of funds from the bill for needle-exchange programs.

The freshman sponsor has a history of anti-gay bias. As a state legislator, Musgrave led efforts to pass Colorado's Defense of Marriage Act, which sought to bar same-sex couples from marriage rights.

TEXAS

Republican Gov. Rick Perry signed the Texas Defense of Marriage Act into law May 28.

The bill defines marriage as reserved for a man and a woman and allows Texas to deny recognition of same-sex civil unions entered into in other states.



Rick Perry

Having passed the state Senate, the act overwhelmingly passed the Texas House by a 118-9 vote April 30. The Senate accepted House amendments May 16.

The bill was authored by Sen. Jeff Wentworth, R-San Antonio, and sponsored by Rep. Warren Chisum, R-Pampa. Chisum, from the floor of the Statehouse, blatantly admitted the prejudicial nature of the act.

"I've never made any statement that this bill did not discriminate," he said. "This bill does discriminate. It allows only for a man and a woman to be married in this state and be recognized in marriage in this state. This bill does discriminate against any other kind of marriage."

Randall Ellis, Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas executive director, added: "From the onset, the new leadership in Texas has placed this bill on the fast track, pushing its social agenda despite a \$10 billion deficit, insurance crisis and school finance crisis. GLBT Texans are denied hundreds upon hundreds of rights because they are not allowed to marry the person they love. The time for demanding equality is now. This is not the end of this issue."

A violent attack on a gay Houston high school student is breathing new life into legislation aimed at preventing discrimination against queer students in Texas.

The student, who has asked to remain anonymous, is recovering from injuries he sustained when a teacher's aide at Westbury High School reportedly slammed him to the ground, breaking his arm in two places. Police say as many as eight other students witnessed the attack.

The student alleges he was harassed throughout the year by the teacher's aide, who is also an assistant coach at the school. But the attack still took the boy by surprise.

"He proceeded to wrap some plastic around his hand and wrapped it around my neck and pulled me up out of my desk and slammed me to the floor," the student said. "I'm terrified of that man."

NATIONAL

The Federal Marriage Amendment was introduced May 21 in the U.S. House of Representatives. The measure seeks to deny marriage to same-sex couples and to circumvent state and federal courts from hearing cases on marital benefit issues.

A 1997 study by the General Accounting Office listed more than 1,000 federal rights, benefits, obligations and protections associated with marriage that gay and lesbian couples have no access to, including tax benefits, inheritance rights and even privileges as basic as being able to make decisions for a partner in the hospital.

A recently released Gallup Poll indicated six in 10 U.S. citizens support giving same-sex couples the same legal rights as married heterosexual couples regarding health care benefits and Social Security survivor benefits. The poll also showed that the country is evenly split, 49 percent in favor and 49 percent against, on allowing gay and lesbian couples to form civil unions, giving them some of the legal rights of marriage.

A recent study of the 2000 census by the Urban Institute indicated the average same-sex couple is, statistically speaking, a mirror image of the average married couple. For example, the average same-sex couple with children in Ohio is raising 1.79 children, while the average heterosexual couple is raising 1.93 children. Also in Ohio, 75.1 percent of same-sex couples own their homes, and 82.2 percent of other couples own their homes, which have the same median value of \$112,500.

The amendment states: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution nor the constitution of any state, nor state or federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried coupled or groups."

Passing a constitutional amendment is, by design, a complex process. First it has to be introduced as a joint resolution in the House and Senate. The amendment must pass both houses by a two-thirds majority vote. It then must be ratified by three-quarters of states.

Last year, during the 107th Congress, a similar resolution was introduced in the House but never in the Senate. It did not receive any legislative action and subsequently died.

The amendment is sponsored by Republican U.S. Reps. Marilyn Musgrave of Colorado, Jo Ann Davis of Virginia and David Vitter of Louisiana and Democratic U.S. Reps. Ralph M.



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