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NATIONAL news

DEAD ON ARRIVAL

Senate defeats procedural vote on Federal Marriage Amendment

by Bob Roehr

The U.S. Senate defeated a procedural measure to cut off debate on the Federal Marriage Amendment on July 14 by a vote of 48-50, well short of the 60 votes required. It effectively ends consideration of the amendment, at least for the moment.

The vote was essentially along party lines, with Republicans voting to end debate and Democrats to keep it open, though a handful of members crossed the aisle in both directions.

The vote does not necessarily reflect the level of support for the amendment, which may well vary depending upon its exact language. Several Republicans known to oppose the substance of the amendment voted with their leadership on the procedural measure. A few Democrats voted to end debate, as electoral protection in speaking with their constituents, but may not support the amendment.

"As many as 60 senators were prepared to vote against the amendment," said Patrick Guerriero, Log Cabin Republicans executive director. "Rather than face certain defeat, the radical right took the easy way out—by turning this into a largely party-line vote. Today they are hiding behind a procedural vote because their campaign to write discrimination into the U.S. Constitution has been an unqualified failure."

Cheryl Jacques, Human Rights Campaign president, added, "This was an attempt to divide Americans that backfired and divided Republicans."

Conservatives opened up debate on the amendment July 9 with what has by now become a hackneyed litany of charges against "unelected judges" undermining "traditional marriage" and claims that the only way to save the country is by amending the Constitution.



President Bush slammed same-sex marriage in his weekly radio address July 10

Democrats responded by saying it was all about politics instead of conducting the people's business such as passing appropriations bills and holding oversight hearings on Iraq. "It's a political exercise carried out on the fly," charged Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., in the closing moments.

The one thing that was lacking throughout the debate, to a largely empty chamber until the last few hours, was much substantive defense of

the queer community or equal access to marriage rights and responsibilities. Republicans and Democrats maneuvered in a political game of chicken designed first to minimize their own risks and then to put the other guys in a bad light.


At one point Democrats and their queer allies considered filibustering to forestall a vote indefinitely. Accord-

ing to insiders, the strategy was based on the premise that Democrats were united in opposition to the amendment as written but that their unity might crumble if the language were to be changed. The strategy aimed not to lose rather than to win.

Then the Democratic leadership had a change of heart, or at least feigned one, by offering to end debate and not filibuster—if the Republican leadership agreed to offer a straight

"I think it is outrageous and frankly surreal that at the 11th hour in this debate, they are literally rewriting the Constitution on the back of a napkin"

—Cheryl Jacques



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