

NORTHWEST BRIEFS



One key factor to the success of REF.71's passage was the visibility of supporters. There were many small stations around the Seattle area, from which volunteers passed out information regarding the measure.

The hearing, held in front of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, was the first on ENDA since 2002—and the first hearing for a gender-inclusive ENDA bill. Witness testimony from victims of workplace discrimination included that of Colonel Diane Schroer, a transgender woman and 25-year veteran of the U.S. Army, and Mike Carney, a gay police officer from Massachusetts.

Tom Perez, the Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, indicated that a major challenge for the bill's passage was educating the American public about discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace. Sen. Merkley praised the leading practices of larger corporations like Nike, which have set education precedents for non-discrimination policies in the business community.

"The Attorney General noted how a big part of their [office's] responsibility is to reach out and educate businesses about how non-discrimination works in the business place," said Merkley. "That has really helped them to understand the law, be comfortable with the law, and be in compliance with the law. I think that will be a big piece of it."

Perez also noted during the hearing that the passing of ENDA was a "top legislative priority" for the Obama administration. Additionally, Committee Chair and Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) stated it was his full intention to try to move the bill to the Senate floor next year.

"I do feel it's inevitable we will win this battle," said Merkley, "but we don't want to win it 30 years or 20 years from now; we want to win this battle of non-discrimination in this two-year legislative cycle."

Merkley expressed his chagrin at the absence of a single Republican senator during the hearing, but promised to take the information shared during witness testimony to his Republican colleagues.

"We will take the case. We will ask them to meet with folks who have gone through discrimination," said Merkley. "We will carry this conversation to them."

Referendum 71 Approved in Washington: Clark County Vote Exceeds Expectations

Washington State voted to approve Referendum 71 on Tuesday, November 3, becoming the first state in the country to support a domestic partnership law by popular vote. The approval for the referendum upholds a state law that provides important legal protections for gays and lesbians and seniors in registered domestic partnerships.

At press time, a statewide Washington poll, overseen by University of Washington political scientist Dr. Matt Barreto, predicted that R-71 would approve same-sex partners' rights by an eventual margin of 81,529 votes out of 1.75 million cast. The projection of King County's 168,866-vote victory was largely credited as the carrier of the referendum's eventual approval.

The projection also stated that R-71 would carry only 9 of the state's 39 counties, and that though 66 percent of voters supported some form of same-sex union, the referendum would be narrowly approved by 52 percent of the vote.

In Clark County, the Approve 71 Vancouver campaign actually exceeded its early expectations for the voter approval of R-71. The county, widely considered one of the most conservative in the state, posted 46.74 percent to approve, and 53.26 percent to reject the referendum. Despite the obvious failure to generate a majority approval, Approve 71 Vancouver team captain and ACLU board member Rory Bowman remained optimistic about the outcome.

"In the face of a confusingly worded measure and an extremely abbreviated campaign in an off-year election, we exceeded our early expectations by voting almost 6 percent more than expected to approve Referendum 71," said Bowman.

NW NEWS BRIEFS continue on 8

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