

House approves ban on same-sex marriage

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — After grappling for nearly five hours with an abortion bill, the House tackled a second social issue last night: a bill that says Kentucky would not recognize same-sex marriages if such unions are legalized in other states.

The measure, House Bill 13, passed 84-9 after a debate of about 45 minutes. It now goes to the Senate.

Floor Leader Greg Stumbo of Prestonsburg said last week he would not call the bill for a vote, but he relented yesterday after a closed-door caucus with fellow Democrats.

If Stumbo had held firm, Republicans planned a rare procedural move to take the bill from Stumbo's control, putting Democrats in the position of opposing their leader or casting a vote that could hurt them politically.

"When you start trampling on the rights of the minorities, you have taken the first step in destroying America," Stumbo said. "It's a disgrace."

But Republican Leader Danny Ford of Mount Vernon, said, "I think we have said tonight we don't think Kentucky should recognize same-sex marriage."

The U.S. Constitution requires each state to give "full faith and credit" to the "public acts, records and judicial proceedings of every other state" and gives Congress authority to determine their effect. In 1996 Congress allowed an exception for same-sex marriages, and 27 states

have passed laws similar to the bill the House passed last night.

Rep. Mike Bowling, D-Middlesboro, said the Constitution holds the country together, and "I will never, ever stand for or support any law that allows this nation to become divided."

Joining Bowling and Stumbo in voting against the bill were Republican Rep. Steve Munn of Glasgow and Democratic Reps. Eleanor Jordan, Porter Hatcher and Mary Lou Marzian of Louisville; Ruth Ann Palumbo and Kathy Stein of Lexington; and Joe Barrows of Versailles.

Not voting were Democratic Reps. John Adams of Hopkinsville, Tom Burch of Buechel, Joe Clarke of Danville, Jesse Crenshaw of Lexington, Jim Lovell of Paris, and Susan Johns and Jim Wayne of Louisville.

Johns said she didn't vote because her East End constituents had told her that the General Assembly should be dealing with more important issues. Wayne said the bill was driven by "homophobia" and reminded him of racism, and he objected to opponents' citation of Scripture as their justification for it.

Jordan made similar points, tearfully recounting discrimination when she was a girl. She is an African American. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Sheldon Baugh, R-Russellville, asked that he and other backers of the bill not be held accountable for others' past discrimination.

"This bill is not about homophobia," Baugh said. "This bill is about the family."