

Virginia legislators back marriage ban

by Brian O'Connell

The Virginia legislature passed the midpoint of its 1997 session on February 4 with each chamber voting overwhelmingly to ban recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states.

Two other anti-Gay measures and five pro-Gay measures have been killed in this year's session of the General Assembly.

The House also took action on seven AIDS-related bills and drastically reduced a budget request seeking additional funds for HIV medications.

"Some bills did better in committee than we expected but on the whole, it's disappointing," Sen. Mary Margaret Whipple (D-Arlington) told the *Blade*. "It's important to bring these issues forward and try to make progress with people. In that sense, you could call it a 'building year.' I'm afraid we're going to have several building years ahead of us, though."

The session's midpoint requires the House and Senate to finish action on bills that were introduced into their own chamber and send those which pass to the other chamber for consideration, a legislative milestone called "cross-over day." Any bills that have not been acted upon by cross-over day are automatically killed without a vote.

By a vote of 37 to 3 in the Senate and 87 to 9 in the House of Delegates, legislators on Tuesday passed identically worded bills (SB 884 and HB 1589) that seek to prohibit Virginia from recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states or jurisdictions. Virginia law already prohibits same sex marriages from being performed in the state.

Gay activists present at the state capitol for the votes said no debate took place before the votes were taken. Whipple, who represents Arlington, was the lone legislator to rise to condemn the measure and equate it to Virginia's ban on recognizing interracial marriages prior to 1968.

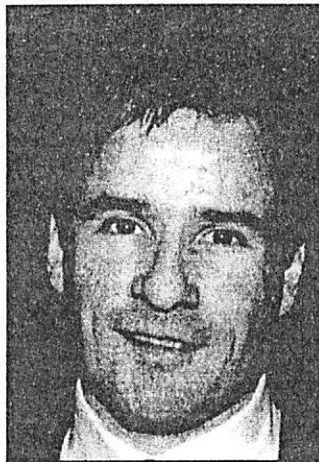
Now the House and Senate must each formally vote on the bill sent from the other chamber. A spokesperson for the Legislative Information Service said a

Virginia Gay organization seeks Democratic delegates

The Virginia Partisans Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club is making a push to elect as many Gay-supportive delegates as possible to this year's Democratic State Convention.

The party gathering May 9 and 10 in Richmond will choose Democratic nominees for governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general. Additionally, the convention is often used to pass resolutions expressing Democratic Party positions on various issues.

"The presence of Partisans-endorsed delegates ensures support and visibility for Gay and Lesbian issues, and gives the delegates experience and influence



by Clint Steib

"The presence of Partisans-endorsed delegates ensures support and visibility for Gay issues," said Michael Perez.

in the political process," said Michael Perez, club president. He said there were about 60 openly Gay delegates at the 1996 state convention.

People interested in becoming delegates or attending the local caucuses in March can learn more about the process at Virginia Partisans' February meeting. That will be held Wednesday, Feb. 12, at 7:15 p.m. in the community room of the Auburn Village Condominiums, 101 E.

Glebe Rd. in Alexandria (between Route 1 and Commonwealth Avenue). For more information, contact Michael Perez at (703) 521-0721.

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joint bill would then be sent to Republican Gov. George Allen for his signature.

In other legislative action:

- HB 2639: Sought to add sexual orientation to the hate crimes law, allowing for increased penalties in crimes where the victim was targeted because of sexual orientation. The House Courts of Justice Committee let this bill die by not taking action on it. Instead, a House commission established to study a number of possible revisions to the hate crimes law has been instructed to consider whether to add sexual orientation.

- SB 1157: A Senate version of the hate crimes bill was defeated in the Courts of Justice Committee 8 to 6 on Jan. 29 when Sen. Jackson Reasor (D-Bluefield) joined the committee's seven Republicans in voting against the measure.

- HB 2718: Sought to repeal the sodomy law as it pertains to consensual sex between adults. The bill died in the House Courts of Justice Committee when the committee took no action.

- SB 1079: Sought to prohibit discrimination in employment and housing on the basis of sexual orientation. It was defeated by a 9 to 2 vote in the Senate General Laws Committee on Jan. 29.

- SB 1078: Sought to allow the domestic partners of state employees to be eligible for the same health insurance benefits as legal spouses of heterosexual married state employees. It died in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee.

AIDS-related action by the House of Delegates included:

- A budget amendment submitted by Del. Marian Van Landingham (D-Alexandria) requested an additional \$1.5 million to cover increasing costs of HIV-related medication for people with AIDS who have low incomes. The House Ap-

propriations Committee instead placed a request for only \$100,000 in additional funds in the budget sent to the Senate.

- HB 2013 sought to continue the use of public funds to pay medical insurance premiums for people with HIV in order to keep them from needing to turn to Medicaid. This bill was defeated in the House Appropriations Committee on a vote of 21 to 1 on Jan. 31.

- HB 1912 sought to define as a new crime of "infected sexual battery" any incident in which a person transmits the HIV virus to a sex partner without having previously informed the sex partner "of the offender's diseased status." The House Court of Justice Committee allowed this bill to die by taking no action.

- HB 1621, which seeks to outlaw the ability of medical professionals to prescribe marijuana for medical purposes, on Jan. 30 passed the full House 86 to 13 and was sent to the Senate.

- HB 871 seeks to increase the power of the state to regulate the viatical industry, whereby a person with a terminal illness sells his or her life insurance policy to a company which pays a portion of its worth in cash to the person while he or she is still living. It passed 95-0 on Jan. 13 and was sent to the Senate.

- HB 2416, which seeks to require HIV antibody testing of anyone who may have exposed a law enforcement officer to their bodily fluids, passed unanimously on Feb. 4 and was sent to the Senate.

- HB 1608, which seeks to allow medical records of prison inmates to be circulated among correctional facility personnel, was approved 97-2 on Jan. 28.

- HB 2733, which seeks to establish regulate access to the medical records of health care providers, passed 98-0 and was sent to the Senate. ▼