

Vote on state gay marriage bill halted

Democratic tactic sets off partisan fight in House

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By TOM LOFTUS
tloftus@courier-journal.com
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FRANKFORT, Ky. — House Democratic leaders yesterday thwarted Republican attempts to force a floor vote on an amendment banning same-sex marriage, setting off a bitter partisan exchange.

After a quick parliamentary maneuver blocked the vote, House Republican Leader Jeff Hoover of Jamestown said, "It's a shame that Democrat leadership will not allow members to vote on this issue, to follow the rules, and to represent the people in their districts."

House Speaker Pro Tem Larry Clark, D-Okolona, accused Republicans of trying to force a premature vote on House Bill 95 for political reasons. Shouting into his microphone on the House floor, Clark said, "This ain't about public policy." The bill would have placed a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to ban same-sex marriages in Kentucky. The bill was filed on Jan. 6 and has been sitting since then in the House elections committee.

But 26 House Republicans on Tuesday signed a petition to release the bill from that committee and send it to the Rules Committee, which could schedule it for a House floor vote.

Under House rules, the House must vote on such a "discharge" petition the day after it's filed. But before the matter came up for consideration yesterday, House Majority Floor Leader Rocky Adkins, D-Sandy Hook, moved to withdraw the bill at the request of its chief sponsor, Rep. J.R. Gray, D-Benton.

House Speaker Jody Richards, D-Bowling Green, quickly ruled in favor of the motion and slammed his gavel, eliminating the bill from further consideration this session.

Hoover, recognized to speak, told his colleagues, "We have just seen an abuse of the rules of the House of Representatives." He said, "The institution of marriage was not created by government and it should not be redefined by government, and the majority leadership — the Democrats in this body — do not have the will and the desire to let the people of Kentucky have representation on this issue."

HOUSE BILL 95

Sponsor: Rep. J.R. Gray,
D-Benton (jr.gray@irc.state.ky.us)

Clark, however, said the House passed a bill to ban same-sex marriages in 1998. And he said the new bill was not being blocked in the elections committee because the committee intended to hear all constitutional amendments after Monday — the deadline for filing bills this session.

Then Clark blasted Republicans for what he said were lies used against him in past re-election campaigns.

"They call themselves Christians. Christians!" Clark shouted. "... They want to lie during campaigns. And they go to church on Sunday and say I love my brothers and my neighbors."

Afterward, Gray said he had asked

the leadership to withdraw the bill after he learned the discharge petition had been filed. Gray said he does not believe a bill should be taken from the control of a committee chairman.

"I can't support that. I'm a committee chairman myself," said Gray, who leads the Labor and Industry Committee.

Richards said in an interview that he supported the bill and would vote for it if it comes to the floor.

"But we've never taken a bill away from a committee. I've never seen that in my 50 years of watching the legislature," Richards said. "This was just politics today — just pure, raw, dirty politics."

Hoover said the fight is not over. He noted that House Republicans have until Monday to file a new version of the same-sex wedding ban, and he hinted at more unusual maneuvers to bring the issue back before then. "You ought to be here tomorrow," Hoover told reporters.