

Out in the Mountains

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Gay Rights Bills Pass in Connecticut, Hawaii

Both East Coast and West Coast gays and lesbians had reasons to celebrate recently as two more states in the country voted gay rights legislation into law. Hawaii became the third state in the nation to approve the bill, closely followed by Connecticut. Previously, Wisconsin and Massachusetts were the only two states with such measures enacted.

Despite this doubling of states with gay and lesbian rights, Maine experienced an unexpected setback when a similar bill was defeated in that state's House of Representatives. Vermont's gay rights bill, also receiving attention this year, continues to be put on hold due to state concerns over budgetary matters.

In Hawaii, the gay rights bill was signed into law by Governor John Waihee on March 21. The statute, which added sexual orientation to those areas covered by previous laws concerning employment, housing, and access to services, was approved by a large majority of votes in both legislative houses.

Hawaii had been trying to pass a gay rights bill since 1974, but what made things "easy in the islands" this time around was the work done by lobbyist Leon Rouse. In a winning strategic move, Rouse suggested that the bill be introduced through the Senate Employment Committee, thus avoiding immediate attack from fundamentalist groups. Though that criticism

emerged later in the game, the bill had already garnered enough support to carry it through.

A great deal of support for the measure in Connecticut came through the work of Representative Joseph Grabarz. While he has lobbied for the bill since 1984, his announcement last December that he was gay distinguished him as the only openly gay legislator in the state and strengthened his stand on the matter. Grabarz is pleased with the outcome, and claims that Connecticut's bill is "one of the best gay and lesbian rights bills in the country."

Connecticut's House of Representatives passed the bill on April 11 by an 81-65 majority. The Senate followed suit on April 17 with a two-thirds majority of 21-14 to pass the statute. Connecticut Governor Lowell P. Weicker intends to sign the legislation, which will become active on October 1, 1991.

Meanwhile, a surprise statement from Maine Governor John McKernan on April 1 dashed hopes for that state's passage of gay rights legislation. Less than an hour before the bill was first slated to appear before the House, McKernan announced his intention to veto the measure unless one of two conditions were met: the bill should either pass by a significant majority, or it would require an amendment to have it put up to state referendum. Massachusetts lobbyists have been struggling to keep that state's gay rights law from being repealed by referendum.

Such political pressure swayed a number of crucial votes, leading the bill to fail in the House by a vote of 76-51. Ed Shannon, chair of the Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance, said that the overriding atmosphere in the House following the defeat was one of embarrassment on the part of the legislators. The bill will not appear before the legislature again until 1993.

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Gettin' Ready for Gay Pride '91



It's time to air out the banners and start designing placards for Pride Day '91, which will be coming up in Burlington on June 22. Pictured here, one of the Editor's Best Friends previews the offerings from Out in the Mountains.