

Council Backs Gay Marriage

In a symbolic gesture, members unanimously pass a resolution in support of a state bill that would legalize same-sex partnerships.

By Steve Hymon
Times Staff Writer

July 13, 2005

A resolution supporting a state bill to give gays the legal right to marry was unanimously passed Tuesday by the Los Angeles City Council, with members saying the issue was an extension of both the civil rights and women's suffrage movements.

"Some of us feel very deeply and spiritual about this, but that's not what this vote is for today," Councilman Eric Garcetti said. "This is a vote that makes sure that government is neutral, that it doesn't discriminate against any class of people, no matter how God created them, no matter who they are."

But the resolution in support of the state bill is only symbolic.

The Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday passed the gay-marriage bill 4 to 1. The measure now goes to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The bill would make California the second state — Massachusetts was the first — to legally recognize same-sex marriage.

The Canadian Parliament passed a law allowing same-sex marriage in late June.

Currently, gays in California can participate in domestic partnerships, which confer many of the rights of marriage. But partnerships granted in California are not recognized in other states, and participants do not receive federal privileges that married people receive, such as the right to inherit a partner's Social Security benefit.

Immediately after the 11-0 vote in the council, the resolution was walked over to the office of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who signed it and then had it faxed to Sacramento.

"This is the second-largest city in the country that just weighed in on this," said Jason Lyon, co-chairman of the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council. "It has national implications."

The Los Angeles council resolution started in the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council, and the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Gay and Lesbian Caucus pushed it. Garcetti put the matter before the council, and his colleague Jan Perry seconded it.

The issue especially hit home with Councilman Bill Rosendahl, who took office July 1

and is gay. Rosendahl tried to avoid making his sexual orientation an issue during the campaign, saying it wasn't relevant to solving Westside problems such as traffic and overdevelopment.

On Tuesday, he gave a speech similar to one he gave Friday to the council, and brought along his Bible to make a point.

"This is my Bible; I've had it for 35 years," Rosendahl said. "There are tears in this Bible from me as I was struggling with my sexuality."

He also said, "We don't choose sexual orientation. It is not a choice or moral issue — we either accept ourselves or suffer."

Councilmen Bernard C. Parks and Greig Smith were in the council Tuesday, but both left the chamber before the matter was debated and voted on.

Such "walks" have historically allowed elected officials to avoid voting. They also are a way for council members to give their peers the chance to see their legislation pass unanimously.

"It's not my issue," said Smith, who added that he doesn't agree with gay marriage, but didn't vote so the matter could be passed unanimously.