

Nevada contemplating redefining marriage

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – By a party-line vote, the Senate Committee on Legislative Operations and Elections has approved a proposed constitutional amendment to permit same-sex couples to marry.

The resolution passed April 11 would repeal the state's ban on gay marriage and sets out that Nevada would recognize marriages, regardless of gender.

The resolution would have to be approved by this session of the Legislature and again in 2015 before the proposed change could be placed on the 2016 election ballot for voters to decide. It now goes to the full Senate.

"All people in Nevada deserve the freedom to marry," said Laura Martin with Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada.

The original proposal sought only to repeal language in the state constitution that defines marriage as between a man and a woman. But a late amendment adopted by the committee adds that the state "shall recognize marriages and issue marriage licenses, regardless of gender."

"We felt it would be cleaner to both eliminate the current prohibition and make it clear Nevada does not discriminate in any way," said state Sen. Tick Segerblom, D-Las Vegas, who introduced the bill.

The amendment drew opposition from Republican Sen. James Settelmeyer of Minden. Settelmeyer said he gave Segerblom his word that he would vote for the original bill, but withdrew his support because of the new wording.

"I don't think the subject of marriage should be in the

Constitution,” Settelmeyer said. “This is adding something else in, and I can’t support that.”

He was joined by state Sen. Barbara Cegavske, R-Las Vegas, in opposing the measure, SJR13.

In support were Las Vegas Democrats Patricia Spearman, the committee chairwoman, and Mark Manendo and North Las Vegas Democrat Kelvin Atkinson.

Voters in 2002 approved an amendment to the Constitution that “only a marriage between a male and female person shall be recognized and given effect in this state.” The vote was 337,197 to 164,573.

The Legislature later approved a law allowing same-sex couple to register as domestic partners with the Secretary of State’s Office but did not convey the full benefits of marriage.

As of April 1, there were 4,157 registered domestic partners in Nevada, but a spokeswoman for the office said some of them were male-female couples.

Janine Hansen, president of the conservative group Nevada Families for Freedom, called the committee’s vote a “kick in the teeth” of voters who approved the Protection of Marriage Act in 2000 and 2002, defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

“It makes same-sex marriage the standard in Nevada,” she said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.