

Opinion: Nev. considers anti-LGBT legislation

By Stephen Peters

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBT civil rights organization, sounded the alarm on anti-LGBT legislation in Nevada – SB272 in the Senate and AB277 in the Assembly – that threatens jobs, the state economy, and undermines the state's civil rights laws. The legislation would allow people to use their religion to challenge or opt out of various laws, including state and local laws, that protect LGBT people and other minorities from discrimination.

“This legislation undermines the enforcement of state non-discrimination protections and will expose Nevada business owners to a wave of lawsuits,” said HRC National Field Director Marty Rouse. “It has the potential to cause serious harm to the business climate in the state, putting jobs at risk, and making major corporations think twice about investing in the state. To put it simply, this legislation threatens Nevada's strong pro-business reputation.”

The legislation will bring harmful and unintended consequences to those who call Nevada home, inviting costly legal challenges and making the Silver State unwelcoming to both residents and visitors. Nearly 500,000 jobs and 29 percent of the state's employment is a direct result of tourism to Nevada. Jeopardizing the state's standing as one of the greatest places for people to live and visit, the harm this bill may cause doesn't end with the LGBT community: an evangelical police officer could feel empowered to refuse to patrol a Jewish street festival; a city clerk could shirk the law and refuse a marriage license to an interracial couple, a divorcee seeking to remarry, or a lesbian couple; an EMT could claim the law is on his side after refusing service to a dying

transgender person in the street; and the enforcement of other key sections of state civil rights law could be dramatically undermined.

Major corporations have spoken out strongly against similar bills in other states. In response to one such anti-LGBT bill threatening economic growth and business in Arkansas, both Apple and Wal-Mart spoke out in opposition to precisely this kind of legislation. And Wal-Mart and Apple are not alone. Last year, major multinational corporations including American Airlines, Marriott, PetSmart and many other companies came out against a similar bill in Arizona, concerned about how it would hurt their business and risk millions in economic activity if it became law.

The bill puts all state non-discrimination laws at risk of being undermined. It threatens not just the LGBT community, but women, members of minority faiths and other minority classes.

Stephen Peters works for the Human Rights Campaign.