

Marriage amendment dead—for now: Conservatives promise new vote in House

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A constitutional amendment to outlaw same-sex marriage died in the Senate this month despite intense pressure from President Bush, prominent religious leaders and a host of conservative activists.

The amendment, which would have limited marriage in the U.S. to “only the union of a man and a woman,” gained one vote since 2004, the last time the Senate took up the measure. On June 7, the vote was 49-48.

The measure required 60 votes to end debate and 67 votes to pass.

Senator Judd Gregg (R., N.H.), who voted for the amendment in 2004 but rejected it this time, said in a statement that “the past two years have shown that federalism, not more federal laws, is a viable and preferable approach.”

The amendment may not stay dead for long. It will be revived in the House of Representatives later this summer, promised majority leader John Boehner (R., Ohio). “This is an issue that is of significant importance to many Americans,” Boehner told reporters. “We have significant numbers of our members who want a vote on this, so we are going to have a vote.”

Opponents of the amendment, including Senator Edward Kennedy (D., Mass.), labeled it “bigotry.” Baptist pastor C. Welton Gaddy, president of the Interfaith Alliance, went further, arguing that the amendment “discriminates not only against people who want to be married, but also against the faith traditions” that regard homosexual marriage as consistent with their religious ideals.

Washington was a virtual rotating pulpit in early June, as religious advocates on both sides of the debate held media events in various places in the Capitol.

According to a Gallup Poll conducted in late May, while a majority of Americans do not favor legal recognition of same-sex unions, only half believe that the Constitution should be changed to define marriage as solely between a man and a woman.

On June 6, voters in Alabama adopted a state constitutional amendment outlawing gay marriage by an 81 percent margin, making it the 20th state to adopt such an amendment. Similar amendments will be on six state ballots this November.

In addition, 26 states have laws like the 1996 federal Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as a heterosexual union. The federal law allows each state to decide for itself whether to grant legal status to same-sex marriages.

Despite those measures, conservative activists and some religious leaders say a constitutional amendment is needed to keep “activist judges” from striking down the state laws.

“The U.S. Constitution will be amended,” Tony Perkins, president of the conservative Family Research Council, claimed in a statement after the Senate vote. “The only question is whether it will be amended by the courts or by the people through the ratification process.” *-Religion News Service*