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TODAY'S TOP STORY » LEGISLATION

Gay-rights activists contemplate strength of D.C. Council's same-sex marriage bill

By **Michael Neibauer**
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Gay-rights activists in the District are exploring whether a same-sex marriage bill initiated by the D.C. Council could survive the trek through a Congress narrowly controlled by Democrats.

"Every member of this council supports that type of action, but we need to get a better appraisal of the congressional situation, which is currently being made," said Ward 1 D.C. Council Member Jim Graham, who is openly gay. "People are look-

ing at this to see just how receptive Congress would be to a D.C. marriage bill."

For the time being, gay marriage in the nation's capital isn't a front-and-center issue, said one congressional aide. Adam Sharp, spokesman for U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., who is likely to chair the subcommittee with oversight of District affairs, said there is "no expectation right now" that the issue would come before the committee.

The District has adopted a slate of gay-rights legislation in the last year, including a bill affording gay couples unprecedented legal rights and obligations in addition to pow-

er of attorney. Last week, a council panel agreed that registered domestic partners should be allowed to jointly file their D.C. incomes taxes.

Congress has 30 days to review and challenge every law passed by the District government. And while federal lawmakers have been receptive to the city's recent actions on behalf of same-sex couples, legalizing gay marriage is another matter entirely.

"The 110th Congress may find us better able to block anti-gay measures, but we still have a long way to go before the District will be safe from congressional meddling," Bar-

rett Brick, president of the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, wrote in a letter to the Washington Blade. "Democratic congresses have shown no greater respect for D.C. Home Rule than Republican ones."

Brick urged caution: Move forward only after consulting allies, getting the lay of the land in the new Congress and adjusting strategy accordingly.

On the congressional front, Democrats say a gay marriage bill is unlikely to win the party's favor. Hot button social issues don't play well in "purple states" — the voters the Democrats will need most in 2008.

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