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Hundreds of opponents and supporters of the Iowa Supreme Court's *Varnum v. Brien* decision legalizing same-sex marriage descended Thursday on the Iowa Capitol and watched as House Speaker Pat Murphy declined twice to call up a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a legal union between a man and a woman.

"Let us vote! Let us vote! Let us vote!" supporters of the Iowa Marriage Amendment shouted after the first attempt to bring the issue to the House floor was ruled out of order.

Advocates on both sides of the issue watched at about 9:30 a.m. as House Minority Leader Kraig Paulsen made an attempt to bring House Joint Resolution 6 to the House floor.

Hundreds of supporters of the amendment filled the House galleries wearing red shirts, while opponents wore white One Iowa shirts with a big blue dot on the front. After a more-than-half-hour conference in the House well, Murphy said the motion was out of order.

"That bill was filed late. It didn't meet any of the rules to get out of committee," Murphy later told reporters. "We are not going to take that bill up this year because Republicans didn't get their act together and file the bill in a timely fashion."

Paulsen indicated the fight was not over. He told reporters he planned to make another attempt to debate the marriage amendment, which if passed by two consecutive General Assemblies would go to a vote of the people. "We've got a distinct difference here between two branches of government, and the right people to resolve that are the citizens of Iowa," he said.

At 3 p.m., state Representative Christopher Rants (R-Sioux City) tried to bring up the Iowa Marriage Amendment as an amendment to the human-services budget bill on the House floor. Rants said lawmakers not only have the right but the obligation to revisit court decisions that strike down laws as unconstitutional.

"If it is the will of the people in this state that marriage be an institution between a man and a woman, then it is this body that should reflect the will of the people to do that - and we have, not once in this chamber, but twice," Rants said. "Today is the day for this body to speak again and to express the will of the people. It is not only right to do so under the constitution; I would argue that it is our obligation to do so."

This time, all Republicans in the House chamber and dozens of those supporting the Iowa Marriage Amendment in the House galleries stood as a show of support while legislative leaders gathered in the well to discuss whether the amendment would be taken up.

At 3:48 pm., the House fell silent as Murphy allowed a vote to suspend the rules and change the human-services budget bill into a House joint resolution on marriage as proposed by Rants. The motion failed on a 44-54 vote. Democratic state Representatives Geri Huser of Altoona and Dolores Mertz of Ottosen voted with Republicans in favor of the rules suspension.

"I'm very encouraged. Extremely encouraged," said Iowa Family Policy Center President Chuck Hurley, a key backer of the marriage amendment. "I would anticipate that as long as this legislature continues to deliberate, that people who want deliberation on a marriage amendment will continue to be here. I can't imagine them going away. I think we're on a roll. I think that people are energized. They understand what's at stake."

Justin Uebelhor, a spokesperson for One Iowa, the state's largest gay-rights organization, said thousands of people have joined in celebration of the Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriages. He said Iowa faces more important challenges than passing a constitutional amendment banning gay marriages.

"We want our legislators to focus on those challenges and work hard to address the economic issues that we're facing, work hard on issues of health care and education to really improve the state," Uebelhor said. "Pushing this divisive agenda is something that's really not helpful."

Culver Reluctant to Amend the Constitution on Marriage

Four days after the landmark Iowa Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriages, Governor Chet Culver, a Democrat, said he "must respect the authority of the Iowa Supreme Court" and is "reluctant to support amending the Iowa Constitution to add a provision that our Supreme Court has said is unlawful and discriminatory."

Culver emphasized that he is opposed to same-sex marriages but said the question before the Iowa Supreme Court was one of civil marriage only - a state-recognized legal status constituting a civil contract. The ruling will take effect April 27, three days later than expected because courthouses across the state will be closed April 24 due to budget cuts.

"I personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. This is a tenet of my personal faith," Culver said. "Yet the Supreme Court of Iowa, in a unanimous decision, has clearly stated that the constitution of our state, which guarantees equal protection of the law to all Iowans, requires the state of Iowa to recognize the civil marriage contract of two people of the same gender.

"As governor, I must respect the authority of the Iowa Supreme Court, and have a duty to uphold the constitution of the State of Iowa. I also fully respect the right of all Iowans to live under the full protection of Iowa's constitution," Culver said.

Republicans blasted Culver's statement, calling it a flip-flop and a failure to keep his promise to protect traditional marriage.

"Chet Culver's inaction and self-serving political double talk on one of the most fundamental issues in our state - the definition of marriage and the defense of our culture - is truly one of the most astounding political reversals I've ever seen in my life," said Republican gubernatorial candidate Bob Vander Plaats. "It's time for Chet Culver to get out of the way and let real leaders take charge so Iowans finally have a voice in this matter."

Former state Representative Danny Carroll (R-Grinnell), board chair of the Iowa Family Policy Center, said Culver has "cozied up with the legal elite, the homosexual lobby" and "should resign or be replaced."

Senate Minority Leader Paul McKinley (R-Chariton) said Culver failed to keep the promise he made last year to "do whatever it takes to protect marriage as between one man and one woman."

"I believe Iowans should have the final vote on this very important and emotional issue," McKinley said. "Governor Culver has chosen to stand with seven elite justices and deny the 3 million people of Iowa the right to vote on this significant issue. This marriage flip-flop is just the latest example of Governor Culver not providing the leadership that every Iowan deserves."

During a public bill-signing at the Capitol, Culver defended his position on marriage and maintained that he did not flip-flop.

"The court very eloquently talked about the importance of protecting religious marriage and that was very important to me," he said. "I think that's critically important to most Iowans. That right was reaffirmed in this court decision. I believe marriage should be between a man and a woman. That will remain the case in a recognized religious marriage."

Iowa Democrats Unveil Amended plan for Income-Tax Reform

A newly revised bill eliminating federal deductibility is no longer revenue-neutral and would now mean a $55-million tax cut for Iowans in the first two years. But Democrats did not indicate where the money would come from to pay for the plan, and Republicans pointed out that the plan would turn into a tax increase in future years.

"This would be a $55-million tax cut for hard-working Iowans," Culver told reporters. "I would think that Republicans and Democrats would support a tax cut of that size. It's no longer revenue-neutral, this is going to be a very favorable thing for the taxpayers of Iowa overall."

An analysis by the Iowa Department of Revenue shows the revised proposal to eliminate federal deductibility and lower tax rates will result in a net tax reduction of $20.2 million in tax year 2009 and $34.9 million in tax year 2010. But the analysis showed increased taxes of $154.1 million in 2011, $157.1 million in 2012, and $149 million in 2013 in anticipation of the federal government ending the Bush tax cuts.

The amended plan would also increase the standard income-tax deduction from $1,780 to $2,710 for a single person and from $4,310 to $5,420 for a married couple, and would establish a new Refundable Iowa College Student Credit of $100.

But Paulsen said Republicans remain opposed to the revised income-tax-reform bill, which raises taxes starting in 2011 and still has "losers" - people who end up paying more taxes - in every tax bracket, including those making less than $20,000.

"It's a slight tax reduction for the first two years, and [then] it's a tax increase," Paulsen said. "You're at a quarter-billion tax increase by the time you get to the fourth year. This is why Iowans and the electorate citizens get skeptical when politicians say they're going to provide tax relief. Because this isn't tax relief. This is raising $150 million a year so the state has more money to spend. ...

"If you look at tax year 2013 ... you've still got losers," Paulsen said. "You've got winners making

over $250,000, and you've got losers making less than $48,000."

Iowans for Tax Relief said calling the bill a tax cut "is certainly imaginative."

"Iowa taxpayers are tired of being bullied into paying more and more taxes," said Ed Failor Jr., president of Iowans for Tax Relief. "The net result of this bill over the next five years is a more-than-$400-million tax increase on Iowans. How on earth is that a tax cut?"

Budget Cuts to Spur Layoffs; Republicans Offer Cost Savings

After a week of debating budget bills, the Iowa House on Thursday night debated and approved 55-42 the biggest one of all: a $1.2-billion health and human-services budget bill that cuts $112 million and could lead to as many as 500 layoffs among the 5,700 workers at the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS).

"I've got concerns that there's 300 to 500 layoffs," said Representative Scott Raecker (R-Urbandale). "We're going to have people that are left waiting for services in Iowa."

The proposed spending plan cuts 12.8 percent to most areas of public health, human services, elder affairs, and veterans affairs. It reduces money for DHS field services by $6.2 million, which translates into a $13-million decrease because of federal matching money.

"Sadly, this bill leaves behind some of our most vulnerable citizens," said Representative Peter Cownie (R-West Des Moines), who said in Polk County there are 522 people on a waiting list for mental-health services.

But Representative Deborah Berry (D-Waterloo) described how difficult it is to find the money. "The needs are so great when it comes to this human-services budget," she said. "I think all of us want to make sure that we can help those in need, but the reality is, when you have to do a 13-percent cut, there are going to be those programs and areas that may not get what they

need."

Republicans offered $152.5 million in savings through amendments to several budget bills this week, but Democrats only accepted about $1 million worth, shutting the door on cost-saving measures such as reducing the state vehicle fleet or cutting office-supply budgets in half.

DHS Director's Confirmation in Trouble

The confirmation of Iowa Department of Human Services Director Gene Gessow is in trouble, and changing DHS directors now will hurt Iowans in need, said Senator Jack Hatch (D-Des Moines) on the Iowa Senate floor this week.

"This is no time to leave the largest department of 5,700 employees and a $4.6-billion budget without a leader," said Hatch, who's chair of the joint health and human-services budget subcommittee. "If Mr. Gessow is not confirmed, we will have an agency without its brains, without its passion, and without a direction."

Hatch said DHS is about to take a major budget cut that he said will cause child-abuse services to suffer, foster care to be in trouble, domestic abuse to increase, and mental-health waiting lists to grow. He said an estimated 185 potential abuse victims will remain at risk each month, and 1,158 children will not get the services they need each month.

"Why would we change directors when the budget is about to be cut by $120 million in the next fiscal year?" Hatch asked. "Why would we change directors when we are being forced to cut 350 to 500 jobs, the largest reduction of employees in one department in our state's history? Why would we change directors when 800,000 Iowans in each and every one of our districts depend on this department, and that number is growing?"

Confirmation of Culver's appointees requires two-thirds of the Iowa Senate, so Gessow needs at least two Republicans to vote with majority Democrats to receive confirmation. Opponents to

the confirmation have declined to outline publicly their concerns, and even Gessow himself said he was in the dark about the reasons he may not get confirmed by next Wednesday.

Rants More Likely to Run for Governor Now

Rants said recent developments regarding the state budget, same-sex marriages, and federal deductibility have made him think more about running for governor against Culver.

"I think this state is crying out for leadership," said Rants, a former House speaker. "If the governor continues to make mistake after mistake after mistake, I think a lot of people will step forward and volunteer their services."

When asked when he would make a formal decision about running against Culver, Rants said, "Let's see how he does this week."

U.S. Representative Steve King of Kiron said this week that he, too, is more likely to run for governor following the Iowa Supreme Court's decision legalizing same-sex marriages.

Actions Finalized Against Bars That Violated Smoking Ban

The state has revoked the liquor license of Otis Campbell's Bar & Grill in West Burlington and has suspended for 30 days the liquor license of Fro's in Wilton for violations of the state's smoking ban. The state decision leaves room for the liquor license to be restored if Otis Campbell's agrees to the follow the law.

The decisions came in orders from Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division Administrator Lynn Walding, who was asked to review decisions made earlier this year by an administrative law judge.

"The huge majority of Iowa businesses are obeying the law, and we will not allow a small, vocal minority to flout the law," said Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller. "There is no doubt in my mind that the Iowa Smokefree Air Act is working, and it is saving Iowans' lives."

"This is a great day for restaurant and bar owners in our community who are playing the rules," said Senator Tom Courtney (D-Burlington). "This law protects the health of employees who don't have a choice when they are forced to work in smoke-filled rooms."

This weekly summary comes from IowaPolitics.com , an online government and politics news service. IowaPolitics.com staff contributed to this report.