

# Newsday

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## Activists differ on gov's efforts

■ **As Paterson set to introduce marriage bill, some ask whether his efforts will advance rights movement**

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With Gov. David A. Paterson set to introduce a same-sex marriage bill to state lawmakers today, activists differ on whether the effort from an unpopular executive will help the cause of marriage equality.

The issue will hinge on whether Paterson and his allies can win the votes of enough Republican state senators to offset opposition from conservative Democrats such as Sen. Ruben Diaz Sr. of the Bronx.

Alan Van Cappelle, executive director of Empire State



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**Can Gov. Paterson and his allies win enough votes?**

Pride Agenda, a gay-rights group, didn't directly answer questions about whether failure in the Senate following Paterson's high-profile support would constitute a setback for the same-sex marriage movement. "We are closer than peo-

ple think, but we're not there yet," Van Cappelle said.

After Vermont and Iowa legalized gay marriage this month, New York could add to the momentum or halt it, said Suffolk County Legis. Jon Cooper (D-Lloyd Harbor).

"It doesn't make sense to bring it to a vote and have it fail," said Cooper, who has plans to marry his longtime partner in Connecticut on April 29. "It could potentially have national implications — the opponents of same-sex marriage could say even in liberal New York, this couldn't pass."

The bill is expected to mirror one from former Gov. Eliot Spitzer that passed the Assembly in 2007, only to die without a Senate vote. Though Democrats have since wrested control of the upper chamber, their two-seat majority requires GOP support for any bill that

has even a single Democratic opponent.

Senate Minority Leader Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) opposes the bill and no member of the GOP conference has publicly broken from the party's position on any issue this year. With conservative Democrats like Diaz in vocal opposition, the bill will require GOP support to pass.

Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith (D-St. Albans) said Tuesday he won't call a vote on the bill unless he's sure it will pass.

C.W. Post political science professor Stanley Klein said Paterson is making a transparent effort to boost dismal approval ratings. Klein predicted the move will backfire.

"Being the flag bearer for gay marriage when you know it can't pass the Senate doesn't do you any good," said Klein, who

is also a Republican committeeman in Suffolk. "The Republicans are still stung by the fact that they lost the majority, so they're going to vote unanimously against anything he brings up."

Van Cappelle, a Commack native, pointed to the 2007 Assembly vote to legalize same-sex marriage. Then, in a matter of weeks, and with help from then-Lt. Gov. Paterson, the bill went from three dozen co-sponsors to 85 votes in the 150-member chamber.

But if Paterson can't move enough of his former senate colleagues to support the marriage equality bill, it will add to the perception that he is weak, said Christopher Murray, president of the New York Civil Liberties Union Nassau chapter.

"If he can't get this through ... it could be a real disaster for him," Murray said.