

Groups Slam 'Deal' On ENDA

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Deep divisions remain with the LGBT community over how best to proceed with the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and a Friday meeting between Speaker Nancy Pelosi and representatives of several groups appears to have done little to heal the wounds.

Following the meeting the Human Rights Campaign said a commitment was made to send the stripped down version of bill - with the exclusion of protections for transsexuals or sexual identity - to a committee vote next week with a House floor vote to follow and that Pelosi had given assurances that as soon as there is enough support for amendments adding back in the protections for transsexuals that version would also be presented.

The bill was to have come before the Committee on Education and Labor last week but was pulled as opposition to the inclusion of transsexuals mounted. ([story](#))

In its original form the bill, known as ENDA, would have provided protections for workers across the country based on sexuality, gender, and perceived gender.

Its sponsor, Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) one of only two openly gay members of Congress, removed the protections for transsexuals saying it was the only way to get any portion of the bill passed. ([story](#))

Frank last week said once the gay and lesbian portions of the bill were passed he would work to have transsexuals added. Only the Human Rights Campaign supported the tactic.

Nine other major LGBT groups announced their opposition ([story](#)) and by the end of the week the number had grown to almost 300.

The agreement worked out Friday between Pelosi and the HRC does little more than reaffirm Rep. Frank's earlier commitment to work for trans rights once the rest of ENDA is passed.

And it drew the immediate ire of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"We completely disagree with this proposed strategy – it simply makes no sense," said executive director Matt Foreman in a statement.

"If the goal is moving an ENDA that protects all of us, passing a flawed, gay-only bill utterly undermines that objective. The notion that the House of Representatives will be willing to revisit a different ENDA before the end of the calendar year – when it has been unwilling or unable to take up a single pro-gay matter over the last 34 years -is more than implausible."

Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, also attended Friday's meeting with Pelosi but declined to sign on to the agreement reached with the HRC.

No matter which version of ENDA is passed by Congress it is likely to be met with opposition at the White House.

The Bush administration has been silent on the legislation, but on another LGBT rights bill - the Matthew Shepard Hate Crime Act - it has threatened a veto.

That measure has passed the House. The Senate version passed as an amendment to a military spending bill. The two versions are now in conference.

The feuding over ENDA comes at a difficult time for Democrats heading into the 2008 election where it is counting on the LGBT vote, and has divided community leaders more deeply than any issue in more than a decade.