

Equal Rights

Friends,

Several people have been misinformed about my position on equal rights and civil unions.

I HAVE ALWAYS SUPPORTED EQUAL RIGHTS

This does not mean however that a rational approach which includes working together, debate, amendments and conversations with all parties should be neglected. There really was very little agreement on the Civil Union issue in Hawaii as of May 7th, 2009. I would like to see people on both sides of any issue this controversial find some common ground.

What happened:

HB444 passed the House 33-17. It was sent to the Senate.

The measure (HB444) was deadlocked in the 6-member Senate Judiciary Committee (which I am not a member) 3-3, with good people on both sides of the vote. Under every circumstance in the last 10-20 years this means that it needed to be amended before progressing. This is the regular process of government.

Some people asked that the bill be pulled from committee (requiring 9 votes).

I do not ever support pulling deadlocked bills because it can result in an abuse of power. The only time a bill should be pulled is if a Committee Chair refuses to hear a bill that has very widespread support.

Because I do support equal rights, when the bill did come to the floor, I worked to reach meaningful compromise on the issue with my colleagues, almost all of whom would like to see a bill on this matter passed.

The bill was pulled without my vote on 5/7. Again, I believe it would have been better to amend the bill in committee like we always do and the Judiciary chair worked hard to achieve this.

Immediately an amendment was floated which unfortunately would stall it for the year based on administrative rules and protocols. The amendment is not a bad recommendation and may ultimately be of significant help. It is actually the language of the strongest supporters of true Civil Unions and diffuses some of the disagreement people have based on religious views.

The advocates of HB444 were consulted and they asked us to vote AGAINST this amendment because they preferred some resolution to the matter this session.

After considering this advice, I was among 10 Senators to vote against this amendment. Senators who voted against the amendment were essentially, but not exclusively, those who voted for a pull.

In spite of my opposition to the amendment, it passed 15-10, effectively ending the debate on the issue until next session. After the amendment passed, 19 out of 25 Senators, including myself, voted to move this draft forward with the hope that common ground can be found for all involved.

This is a good sign that well-intentioned people will work on a solution to this impasse in the next several months.

The session ended and the 3rd and final required floor vote on HB444 HD1 SD1 will occur when scheduled by the Senate President, likely next January.

At that point I hope a balanced bill will be agreed to with the House after we have had more input from both sides on the matter, pro and con.

Some important things to consider:

1. If any bill is too controversial or divisive, backlash against those who want it often occurs, 2. the original Civil Unions bill was sure to be vetoed by the Governor/Lt. Governor and there are not veto-override numbers on this issue. Historically a veto sets back any progress many years, 3. honest compromise, however difficult, on emotional issue like civil unions, is the only way to improve society and bring people together, which is my ultimate goal.

I hope this helps you understand my position. Please contact me with your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Josh

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