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# Gay marriage debate stirs anew in Legislature

**By Daniel Scarpinato**

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PHOENIX — If you thought the failure of Proposition 107 in November was the end of Arizona's gay marriage debate, think again.

Though official action may still be a year away, efforts to put another ballot measure before voters are already brewing, and foes of a constitutional amendment are bracing for another fight.

State Rep. Russell Pearce, R-Mesa, signed on to a bill this month calling for a ballot measure asking voters to define marriage in the state constitution as between a man and a woman. But this week he back-pedaled, calling the move a mistake.

"Not that I'm not in favor of it," he said, promising the bill will be back. "We'll do it somewhere along the line. You bet. But not from me this year."

Pearce said he's awaiting word from the Center for Arizona Policy, a lobbying group that authored Prop. 107.

That proposition, the first of its kind in the country to fail, was more restrictive than the bill introduced by Pearce this month. If passed, the proposition would have outlawed civil unions and state domestic-partnership benefits as well as defined marriage.

While opponents of Prop. 107 were able to shift the debate away from gay marriage and focus on the impacts the law would have had on straight couples, polls show support for a more limited definition of marriage.

Gay marriage has already been ruled illegal in Arizona.

"Right now, we're evaluating our options," said Cathi Herrod, president of the Center for Arizona Policy. "The Protect Marriage Arizona Coalition is staying intact, and we continue to believe Arizona needs a comprehensive marriage amendment."

Groups who opposed 107 say they are following the issue closely and anticipate a campaign in 2008.

"They shouldn't be surprised when they lose again," said Amy Kobeta, spokeswoman for the Arizona Human Rights Fund, which lobbies for gay and lesbian issues. "I think it's insulting to voters to assume they could not detect how broad 107 was.

"We've been talking to legislators for the past eight weeks," she said. "Many of them, from both sides, expressed interest in not having to deal with this this year. Perhaps those legislators expressed their concerns to Pearce."

While the Pearce bill was less restrictive than 107, Herrod says her group doesn't believe a simple definition of marriage would protect it from court rulings.

• Contact reporter Daniel Scarpinato at 307-4339 or [dscarpinato@azstarnet.com](mailto:dscarpinato@azstarnet.com).

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