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Teaching of gay contributions

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By Kelly Puente

BILL: Area lawmakers among sponsors of FAIR Education Act.

LONG BEACH - A bill passed by the Senate Judiciary Committee this week and supported by local lawmakers would require schools to teach about the contributions of gay, lesbian and transgender Americans.

Senate Bill 48, known as the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act, was authored by Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, and includes among its co-authors Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, and Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach.

The proposal, which Leno believes will help address the issue of school bullying, would require that school textbooks be revised to include the role and contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans and people with disabilities.

"Most textbooks don't include any historical information about the LGBT movement, which has great significance to both California and U.S. history," Leno said in a statement. "Our collective silence on this issue perpetuates negative stereotypes of LGBT people and leads to increased bullying of young people."

The push has divided religious leaders, educators and lawmakers.

Critics including the California Catholic Conference and a number of conservative groups say the bill undermines parental authority and aims to impose the beliefs of the LGTB community on children.

"Values education including teaching on sexual ethics has been and ought to be left to the

parents," Emmett McGroarty, director of the Preserve Innocence Initiative, said in a statement. "History and social studies should focus on the achievements of great men, not what they did in the bedroom."

Supporters, such as the California Teachers Association and Equality California, say the long-overdue legislation will help promote tolerance and safety in schools.

"This might be the best anti-bullying approach there is. After all, hate thrives on ignorance," Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal said in a statement. "What could be wrong with knowing about gay and lesbian people who have helped our society? It's just about telling the truth."

Leno has said the proposed law will cost nothing because the information would be added to textbooks during a routine revision in the next few years.

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 3 to 2 on Tuesday in favor of the bill, which will now be considered by the full Senate.

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