

Hot-Button Issues: Texas doesn't need these laws

By EDITORIAL STAFF

April 29, 2005

Dallas Morning News

The culture war is surfacing in Austin. The big national debates over gay marriage and abortion have arrived in the form of three controversial bills in the Legislature:

Parental approval of an abortion

The House State Affairs Committee voted Monday to require a pregnant teenager to secure her parents' consent before getting an abortion. This newspaper supports requiring teens to notify their parents before having an abortion, but requiring a parent's consent goes too far. Whether or not any of us likes it, desperate teens will get abortions, and some will go straight to the back alley if they must get their parents' permission.

What's more, the legislation would make it a crime for anyone to coerce a child into an abortion. If this provision passes, parents could get hauled into court for strongly urging their child to end a pregnancy. How can the state demand that parents be responsible for the choice, and then penalize them if they make a particular choice? That, in effect, coerces teens to bear unwanted children.

Pharmacists' conscience clause

The House State Affairs Committee also has considered legislation to let pharmacists opt out of filling a patient's prescription for birth control or the "morning after" pill. We respect pharmacists who face this dilemma, but they could remain true to their beliefs by simply allowing a colleague to fill the prescription. "Texans won't benefit if they have to worry whether their pharmacist's values clash with their prescriptions," we wrote last year. We still think that, and urge the committee to stop this bill.

Gay marriages and civil unions

Like many Texans, legislators are uncomfortable with the state approving marriages among gay and lesbian couples. It was no surprise then that 101 House members voted Monday for a constitutional amendment to ban such marriages.

The surprise was that the amendment also could forbid civil unions. When the Senate takes up this proposal, the chamber should make sure the amendment doesn't do so. Civil unions allow gays to do practical things like make medical

decisions for their partners without granting their unions the same sanctity as marriage.

We hope the Senate thinks practically here. If a gay man goes into a coma because of a stroke, it makes sense that his committed partner has the legal right to guide his care.

We understand why these bills are moving in Austin. Many Texans feel strongly about these issues. But they don't make for good law.