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S.C. lawmakers consider constitutional gay marriage ban

A South Carolina house bill that would let voters decide next year whether the state constitution should be changed to ban same-sex unions headed to the senate judiciary committee on Thursday. Two senators on opposite sides of the legislation told a crowd of nearly 100 opponents that they need to face the reality that the issue will be on the ballot in November 2006 and devote themselves to fighting the amendment then.

Clemson economist Holley Ulbrich told the panel during the more than four-hour public hearing that the state will lose money, talent, and opportunity if it gains the reputation of being less tolerant. Ulbrich pointed out that a study showed that a 1993 Cincinnati law banning enactment of pro-gay antidiscrimination measures cost that city \$46 million in convention business alone. "Passing the amendment has an effect on how South Carolina is perceived," Ulbrich said.

Amendment supporters said gay marriages upend tradition and undermine heterosexual unions. "Marriage is always heterosexual" and is a way of protecting women from exploitive males, containing male sexuality and aggression, and giving children the best opportunity to thrive, said Oran Smith, president of the Palmetto Family Council. "There is no public need for a same-sex family," Smith said.