

# CQ TODAY

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**A switch:  
On some  
bills, House  
is telling  
Senate to  
go first**



**Northup  
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**Note to readers:** With Congress in recess, CQ Today will next publish Monday, April 4.

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## CONGRESSIONAL AFFAIRS

# House Social Conservatives Set to Move Their Legislation Incrementally

By **SUSAN FERRECHIO**, CQ STAFF WRITER

In a conference room at the Library of Congress, House and Senate GOP leaders met earlier this month with dozens of socially conservative activists and lawmakers to talk about what to expect in the next few months and beyond.

Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., and Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., did not promise action on the full conservative agenda, according to those present. But the leaders said Congress will take up some of the right's legislative priorities, including bills aimed at preventing gay marriage (HR 1100) and limiting abortion — the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act (HR 356, S 51), and the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act (HR 748).

"I feel like the leaders are very sympathetic to our concerns and priorities and we will get action in a timely manner on them," said Rep. Joe Pitts, R-Pa., chairman of the House Values Action Team, a group of about 60 social conservatives co-founded in 1997 by Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas.

"I'd say the pro-family members and pro-family groups are very pleased with the attendance. House and Senate leaders are paying attention to the pro-family agenda," said an aide who was part of the meeting with lawmakers and groups including Focus



Joe Pitts

CQ PHOTO / SCOTT J. FERRELL

on the Family and American Values.

Pitts and other social conservatives showed their muscle March 21, when the House voted 203-58 to clear Senate-passed legislation (PL 109-3) bring-

ing the federal courts into the Florida dispute over whether to reconnect a feeding tube that had been sustaining the life of Terri Schiavo.

"We played a role in that, in urging the leadership to act," Pitts said. "They were very responsive."

### Picking the Targets

Pitts and his like-minded colleagues had reason for optimism about their prospects in the 109th Congress after last fall's elections, when voters increased the Republican majorities in both the House and Senate and re-elected President Bush.

"There were some members who were not as responsive in the past who, after looking at the election results, are more responsive," said Tom McClusky, director of government affairs for the conservative Family Research Council.

Particularly noteworthy, he said, was the fact that congressional Democrats were restrained in their opposition to the Schiavo legislation and stayed away in large numbers when the House voted in the middle of the night. The tally was 102 Democrats along with independent Bernard Sanders absent, 53 voting against the bill and 47 supporting the legislation.

Social conservatives are trying to move their agenda slowly but steadily, picking targets and working with GOP leaders who face conflicting pressures.

"There has been a maturing in the movement," said an aide to a conservative House member. "There is a much more realistic set of expectations of the legislature."

Although a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as a union between one man and one woman tops many of the conservative groups' priority lists, Republican leaders may first move on incremental abortion restrictions or other less ambitious measures, a Republican leadership aide said.

"The left for a long, long time has understood incrementalization, that you do this by baby steps," a House aide said. "If you try to make it a watershed event, you shock and upset people. Conservatives have only learned this in the last 10 years. The left is now starting to forget it." ♦