Hawaii rights dies

HONOLULU—Two controversial bills that would have banned discrimination against gays in Hawaii's job and housing markets have been killed in a last-minute move by the House of Representatives and Democratic leadership. The gay rights measures had the majority support of the House Public Employment and Government Operations Committee, according to committee chairperson Rep. Kate Stanley. But neither bill has hit the House floor for a third-reading vote, and both are now considered dead at least this year.

Stanley said House Speaker James Wakahara prevailed upon her to hold the measures "because of the emotional nature." Another top Democratic lawmaker, Minority Leader Henry Peters, said there were problems with the bills' wording.

"Conceptually, I'm in favor of it (gay rights)," said Peters. "And I felt the wording was too restrictive."

The dissidents note—and Stanley confirmed—that there were enough signatures on the committee reports to move both bills to the House floor for a vote.

Salem bill dies too

SALEM—A measure that would have prohibited discrimination against gays in state employment died last month in the Senate Aging and Minority Affairs Committee.

The measure, Senate Bill 599, was the first piece of gay rights legislation to be acted upon in the 1979 Legislature. Several other gay rights bills are pending in committees.

The committee voted 4-1 to table the bill, effectively killing it. The measure would have prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in state service, as long as the person's sexual preference and conduct do not bear a demonstrable relationship to his effectiveness on the job. The bill also would have prohibited the disciplining of state employees based on such discrimination.

State law already prohibits discrimination in state service based on race, sex, marital status, religious or political beliefs, and age (between 18 and 65).

Sen. Jan Wyers (D-Portland), who opposed the bill, said an opinion from Attorney General Jim Redden raised the question of whether a bill is necessary to protect people from discriminatory action because of their sexual preference. In a letter to the committee, Redden said he supported the bill.

However, Redden said: "I question whether, under present law, the state of Oregon can discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, where sex or race would not be a demonstrable relationship to the effectiveness of the employment assignment in question. Any attempt at such a law would be unconstitutional."

Wyers said the issue presented in SB599 is one that he finds "very difficult." He said the bill would have been too broad, and that it would not be constitutional to protect gay rights for such racial minorities as blacks and Mexican-Americans.

Keith Baxter (left) and Simon Ward debate Eastern vs. Western mores in "A Meeting by the River"