

November 7, 2013 Thursday

**'I know my son was proud';**

**Love and loss in epic vote**

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SECTION: NEWS PAGE; Pg. 8

LENGTH: 994 words

SPRINGFIELD - The historic Statehouse push to legalize same-sex marriage in Illinois was bookended by two stories of love - one involving the euphoria of a wedding proposal, the other involving a legislator's dying son.

The two storylines represented dramatic postscripts to passage of the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act, legislation that was delivered Wednesday to Gov. Pat Quinn and that he promised to sign.

During the run-up to Tuesday's tight vote in the Illinois House, state Rep. Naomi Jakobsson, D-Urbana, was not in attendance. That was a blow because she was a co-sponsor of the bill and her vote figured to factor into the razor-thin margin needed to pass it.

Jakobsson was away from the Capitol on a weeklong vigil with her dying son, Garret, who suffered from Pick's disease, a rare neurodegenerative disease that destroys brain cells and is fatal.

When state Rep. Greg Harris, D-Chicago, decided to put his legislation to a vote, word was sent to Jakobsson, and she left her 46-year-old son's bedside to drive the 90-mile trip from his hospice in Downstate Mattoon to the Capitol.

Jakobsson, a six-term lawmaker, got to the House just as debate was underway, listened for two-and-a-half hours, cast her vote in favor, then headed back to be with her son.

But her trip ended in tragedy.

"Everything was a little surreal," said state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, one of Jakobsson's close friends in the chamber.

"She had left this environment that she'd been in, kind of a waiting vigil at her son's bedside, to come here," Feigenholtz said. "When she looked at me [Tuesday], she said, 'He could die while I'm here,' and that's exactly what happened.

"He passed away, from what I heard, 10 minutes prior to her arriving back at his nursing home," she said.

Garret Dick Jackobsson's death was announced early Tuesday on the House floor by House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, D-Chicago, stunning the chamber.

"Naomi and I talked about this. She had been sitting vigil for a week and had talked about that," said Rep. Robyn Gabel, D-Evanston, who is Jakobsson's seatmate. "She said, 'Garret would want me to be doing my job,' and I think that gave her a sense of peace."

The representative spoke to a few colleagues privately on Wednesday about her family's tragedy and issued a short statement through her office about her compelling act of sacrifice.

"Equal protection under the law is important to everyone in my family, including Garret," said Jakobsson. "This was a vote that was important to my whole family, one that I felt I could not miss, and I know my son was proud of my decision."

Harris, like other friends on the House floor, heaped praise on Jakobsson for making passage of the same-sex marriage bill a priority despite the overwhelming crisis facing her family.

"The fact Naomi Jakobsson left, made a decision to travel to Springfield, when something like she was dealing with was going on, is just a testament to how strongly she believes in this legislation and how important she believes it is for every family in Illinois to have equal rights," Harris told the Chicago Sun-Times. "I take my hat off to her, I admire her, and I give her nothing but respect for the courage it took to come to Springfield."

While Jakobsson was mourning her son, state Rep. Sam Yingling, D-Round Lake Beach, embodied the celebration being felt across the state by gay and lesbian couples eagerly awaiting the right to marry.

Yingling, who is openly gay, proposed to his partner, Lowell Jaffe, in front of their two sons, Gov. Pat Quinn and other same-sex marriage supporters gathered at the Executive Mansion after Tuesday's vote.

"I know that when I saw you, it was really love at first sight," Yingling told Jaffe in a video posted at Buzzfeed.com. "I love everything about you, and I'd go through a whole list that would take hours."

Yingling, a co-sponsor of the Harris bill, ribbed Jaffe for being late to the party, praised him for caring about other people, then pulled a ring out of his pocket.

"I love you so much, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you," Yingling said to the delight of the crowd.

Stunned, Jaffe said three words: "Oh my god."

Later, in an interview with the Chicago Sun-Times, Yingling said he had been contemplating popping the question for a year and had been traveling back and forth from Springfield with the ring in the lining of his suitcase.

And Jaffe, son of Illinois Gaming Board Chairman Aaron Jaffe, said he had no inkling his partner planned to propose.

"We both had been pretty resolute that we wouldn't make a commitment like this until it was the law in the great state of Illinois, but I was so surprised," he said. "I had no idea it was going to happen."

No date has been set for their ceremony, and that may hinge on new developments that cropped up Wednesday even before Quinn had time to review and sign Harris' legislation that is to take effect June 1.

Sen. Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, proposed legislation that would move up the effective date of the bill to perhaps as early as January. The General Assembly would not vote on his bill until January, because a vote taken on the proposal after the first of the year would require lower, simple-majority vote thresholds that should be possible, given Tuesday's roll calls.

"We were in a difficult spot. There were compelling reasons to take up marriage equality now, and I'm very glad we did. But the consequences are that its effective date is delayed until June. It seemed to me to be a reasonable response to file legislation that we could take up in January if the mood is right to make marriage equality effective immediately," Harmon told the Sun-Times.

Harmon said the timing would hinge on when lawmakers are scheduled to be in session next spring. A calendar won't be revealed until Thursday.

"I would love to see some April and May weddings," Harmon said.