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Online Extra: Political Notes: Stanford grad calls on Congress to pass LGBT omnibus bill

NEWS

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Juan Ahonen-Jover, shown here at the White House, continues to push for an omnibus LGBT rights bill. (Photo: Courtesy Juan Ahonen-Jover)

Stanford graduate **Juan Ahonen-Jover**, Ph.D., is pushing Congress to introduce an omnibus LGBT rights bill in 2013 rather than introduce pro-gay legislation piecemeal.

He published a book last year, titled *The Gay Agenda 2012: All Out*, and embarked on a speaking tour to promote the legislative solution for granting LGBT Americans all of the same rights and responsibilities afforded to their heterosexual counterparts.

"The main function of an omnibus bill is to serve as the gold standard of what it means (to have) legal equality for the LGBT community. It shows that we do not want any special right," explained Ahonen-Jover. "It also serves to check whether individual bills get watered down in compromises that really diminish our legal equality."

Ahonen-Jover, 55, graduated from Stanford in 1985 with a doctoral degree in electrical engineering. Last fall he returned to the campus to discuss his book and stopped by the offices of the *Bay Area Reporter* for an interview.

"The book is trying to be a very comprehensive guide to achieving LGBT full equality," explained Ahonen-Jover, who is a registered Green Party member.

With Republicans remaining in control of the House through the midterm elections in 2014, Ahonen-Jover is not optimistic about seeing any LGBT bills be sent to President **Barack Obama** over the next two years. Already, it appears uncertain if pro-gay language will survive in a comprehensive immigration reform effort that was announced last week.


Senator **Dianne Feinstein** (D-California) is expected to reintroduce this month her bill to repeal the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act. But with the House GOP defending DOMA in federal court – the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in two same-sex marriage cases in March – there is no hope of seeing legislative action be taken on the bill.

Nor would it appear there is much chance this year for the LGBT community's long sought for passage of a federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act barring LGBT bias in the workplace.

Nonetheless, Ahonen-Jover would like to see a comprehensive LGBT bill covering more than a dozen areas of federal law, from employment and housing to education and civil marriage, be introduced into Congress. In an email last week, Ahonen-Jover wrote that he hopes gay Congressman **Jared Polis** (D-Colorado) will introduce such an omnibus LGBT bill this year.

"Jared Polis is now the senior LGBT member of the House. I hope that he will introduce an omnibus bill since he has been researching the issue," wrote Ahonen-Jover.

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As for its chances of passage, however, he sounded a pessimistic note.

"In fact, I think that we should be concerned about the progress that our house seems to be very entrenched and unlikely to bring up equality legislation unless legislation may have," wrote Ahonen-Jover.

In 2009. Two years later on his website for the Fearless Campaign – to gather public's feedback on what such legislation should include.

Polis said his office had never introduced an omnibus bill was ever officially introduced in 2012.

He is now urging the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus to introduce an omnibus bill to gather public support for the

They are seeking its adoption no later than 2014, which will be the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It is unclear, however, if Polis intends to be the lead sponsor of such a bill this year.

On his congressional website's LGBT section, nowhere is the omnibus bill mentioned. Asked for comment Friday, Polis' legislative director **Eve Lieberman** over the weekend said to send the questions to the congressman's spokesman, **Chris Fitzgerald**.

In a reply Monday afternoon, Fitzgerald wrote that Polis has not abandoned the idea.

"It's something that we've looked at. We need consensus from all the advocacy groups on whether this is the best approach moving forward for the pursuit of LGBT equality. It's something we are still looking at," he wrote.

In an email Polis sent supporters in early January about the new congressional term, he did not list any LGBT issues among his top legislative goals.

"My own priorities remain what I campaigned on: Creating jobs and expanding opportunity for all, improving our schools and replacing No Child Left Behind with an education law that works, replacing our travesty of a broken immigration system with a system that fulfills our values and makes our country stronger, protecting our environment and restoring fiscal integrity to our nation and reducing the national debt," wrote Polis.

A long sought goal

The LGBT omnibus bill is an idea that Ahonen-Jover, who lives in Florida's famous South Beach neighborhood with his partner of 26 years, Dr. **Ken Ahonen-Jover**, has been promoting for years. The Miami Beach couple have used their website <http://www.eQualitygiving.org>, which they founded in 2005 to help elect pro-equality politicians, to bring attention to the proposal.

In May 2009 they gathered a number of LGBT activists from across the country in Dallas for an invite-only meeting where they unveiled their Omnibus Equality Bill.

Writing that year in her syndicated Political IQ column, **Diane Silver** voiced support for the all-encompassing legislative push and noted that **David Mixner**, a former Democratic National Committee member and onetime **Bill Clinton** confidant, had also voiced support for the creation of an omnibus civil rights bill. Silver quoted from one of Mixner's blog posts in which he wrote that, "If we take our rights one piece of legislation at a time, the process could take forever."

Backers of the strategy argue that in one fell swoop Congress could enact pro-gay policy covering such things as employment discrimination; immigration rights for same-sex spouses, Social Security benefits, and a number of spousal and marital rights.

Acknowledging in his book that the omnibus legislative route would be "difficult," Ahonen-Jover argues it is still a worthwhile pursuit.

"The LGBT agenda is the American agenda – full equality under the law," said Ahonen-Jover, who was born in Spain and became an U.S. citizen in 2004.

For more information about the LGBT omnibus bill, visit <http://www.equalitygiving.org/blueprint-for-lgbt-equality>.

Keep abreast of the latest LGBT political news by following the Political Notebook on Twitter @ <http://twitter.com/politicalnotes>.

Got a tip on LGBT politics? Call Matthew S. Bajko at (415) 861-5019 or e-mail <mailto:matthew@ebar.com>.



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