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New Jersey expected to approve gay marriage; Christie vows veto

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New Jersey lawmakers are expected to pass legislation Thursday that would legalize same-sex marriage, but Gov. Chris Christie's vow to veto the measure could force a drawn-out battle similar to those that have roiled California and other states that have recognized gay unions.

The state Senate approved the proposed Marriage Equality and Religious Exemption Act on Monday. The measure was likely to pass in the Democratic-controlled Assembly during Thursday afternoon's session.

A Rutgers-Eagleton poll released Tuesday indicated that a majority of New Jersey voters support the right of same-sex couples to marry. Christie, a Republican who has been mentioned as a possible future presidential contender, opposes same-sex marriage and has said that if New Jersey is to become the latest state to recognize such unions, voters -- not politicians -- should decide the issue. He has said he'll veto the bill if it comes to him and back a November referendum on the matter.

Despite the veto vow, Steven Goldstein of Garden State Equality [told the Star-Ledger](#) newspaper that the state was on a clear path toward guaranteeing same-sex marriage, and he noted that advocates of the measure had until the end of the legislative session -- in January 2014 -- to muster enough votes to override Christie's veto.

"Look how the world has changed since Jan. 7, 2010," Goldstein said, referring to the last time lawmakers took up same-sex marriage. Then, the Senate voted down the act with 14 "yes" votes and 20 "no" votes. On Monday, it voted 24-16 in favor of same-sex marriage.

"We're talking about at least a 50% increase in support" since 2010, said Goldstein, adding that activists' next goal was to build Republican support to override Christie's veto.

One Republican who joined Democrats in voting for the legislation earlier this week was Sen. Diane B. Allen. "I look at this as just another venue where discrimination has occurred and where we must right a wrong," she said after the vote.

But Sen. Christopher Bateman, also a Republican, said he [supported Christie's call](#) for a referendum. "An issue of this importance, I think really should be decided by all the voters," he said.

Washington became the seventh state in the nation to recognize same-sex marriage when the governor signed a bill into law Monday, but conservatives have said they will collect signatures to put a referendum on the ballot to overrule the decision. Opponents of gay marriage in California put the brakes on same-sex

unions with a ballot measure, but an appellate court last week threw out that proposition.

Other states that have approved same-sex marriage include New York, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont, as well as the District of Columbia.

-- Tina Susman in New York

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Photo: Members of Garden State Equality watch as the New Jersey Senate on Monday approved a marriage equality measure. Credit: David Gard / Associated Press

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