



Governor Signs Domestic Partnerships Law for Gay Couples and Equality Act

May 9, 2007 – “Oregon is a land of equal opportunity for all our citizens” – words that could well have been heard by adventurous American pioneers of the 19th century at the end of their 3,500-kilometre journey west along the Oregon Trail.

But it was the words used by modern-day pioneer–Governor Ted Kulongoski who this morning signed two bills into law ensuring that all Oregon families are treated with basic fairness and that all Oregonians can live and work free from the sting of discrimination, regardless of sexual orientation or gender.

More than 100 legislators and citizens were on hand to watch as the Governor put pen to paper on the West Steps of the State Capitol to approve House Bill 2007 (Oregon Family Fairness Act) which introduces ‘domestic partnerships’ and Senate Bill 2, a measure which adds sexuality to the State’s existing discrimination laws.

“Our hope is simple,” Basic Rights Oregon’s executive director John Hummel told the crowd in a passionate speech at the signing ceremony adding that “today was a proud day to be an Oregonian”.

“It is for the day when Oregon families will no longer be forced into uncertainty in times of crisis, and when no Oregonian will be fired from their job, denied housing or denied an education – simply because of who they are or who they love. Today marks a moment in time when Oregonians proudly made hope a reality, and created a fairer, more equal Oregon.”

House Bill 2007, the Oregon Family Fairness Act, creates legal recognition for same-sex couples and their families through Domestic Partnerships.

These Domestic Partnerships provide some – but not all – of the protections, rights, and responsibilities afforded to straight couples through marriage contract. But it is different from marriage in several important ways, including the lack of portability to other states and lack of more than 1,100 federal rights like Social Security survivor benefits.

“This pro-family bill will bolster family security by providing critical protections in times of crisis,” Mr. Hummel said.

“It is a tremendous step toward equality.”

Senate Bill 2 outlaws discrimination based on sexual orientation in areas such as employment, housing, public accommodation, public education and public services. Religious employers, organizations and institutions are exempt.

“After 34 years of working to end discrimination, this law was long overdue,” commented Mr. Hummel.

“The Oregon Equality Act creates uniform law across Oregon so that protection from discrimination doesn’t depend on one’s zip code and the rules for employers, landlords and business owners are clear and consistent.”

The passage of these two bills in Oregon also carries national implications.

According to an analysis released today by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, recent passage of anti-discrimination legislation in four new states, including Oregon, has resulted in “the percentage of the U.S. population living in a jurisdiction protecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people from discrimination [to] rise to 52 percent, crossing the halfway mark for the first time”.

The study also noted that: “Five years ago (in 2002) just one state, Vermont with 0.2 percent of the [U.S.] population, offered broad protections to same-sex couples. When the bills passed this session take effect, seven states (California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon and Vermont), with 20 percent of the population, will offer broad protections to same-sex couples.”

It is illegal under current law in Oregon to refuse to employ or otherwise discriminate against a person because of race, colour, national origin, sex, religion, age and mental or physical disability.

Thirty-seven years ago, a young and up-coming politician introduced legislation in the Oregon House that would have added sexual orientation to the list. The 1975 proposal failed.

His name? Ted Kulongoski.