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PORTLAND

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Oregon Supreme Court Justice Betty Roberts allowed the couple to say their vows and, after an exchange of rings, declared them legally married.

"I must say I am honored to have been asked to officiate these ceremonies," Roberts said. "Over the years I've presided at many weddings and I know from talking with these (couples) that they fully understand the commitment, love and flexibility needed for any successful marriage."

Following the first wedding, Dr. Stephen Knox, an anesthesiologist, and Dr. Eric Warshaw, a gynecologist, were also married by Roberts. The Portland couple, who have been together for 10 years and have three children, expressed elation about joining the ranks of married people.

"We're a family, like millions of other families in America," Warshaw said.

Basic Rights Oregon Executive Director Roey Thorpe and American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon Executive Director David Fidanque also made brief statements following the ceremonies expressing support for same-sex marriage.

"Marriage is a basic right," Thorpe said. "Basic Rights Oregon strongly believes that state law ... will stand behind this decision."

The Multnomah debate

As a swarm of people gathered outside the Multnomah County headquarters at 501 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd. on Wednesday morning, four Multnomah County commissioners called a press conference to officially announce their intention to distribute marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Multnomah County Attorney Agnes Sowle said that after a review of Article I, Section 20 of the Oregon Constitution, which prohibits favoritism in the law, she concluded in a published opinion that denying marriage licenses to same-sex couples would violate the constitution.

The five-page opinion — which was deemed legally sound by Portland lawyer Charles F. Hinkle and endorsed by four of the five Multnomah



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

The breezeway of the Multnomah County headquarters was packed with couples lining up to apply for their licenses Wednesday. Wedding-bound couple Douglas Calkins (left) and Anthony Stick filled out paperwork while waiting to get inside the building.

commissioners — paved the way for Board Chairwoman Diane Linn to authorize the marriages.

"What this means is that this county will comply with the constitution and will issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples who request them," Linn said. "I took an oath of office to uphold the constitution of the state of Oregon. I intend to do just that."

Sowle said the opinion has been sent to all counties in Oregon with the recommendation that they adopt the same policy.

Other Multnomah commissioners, many who attended the morning's wedding ceremonies at the Portland Hilton and Executive Tower, echoed that oath.

"We will not allow discrimination to continue when the constitution of the state of Oregon grants privileges equally to all citizens," Commissioner Lisa Naito said. "I will defend the rights granted in the constitution."

Article I, Section 20 of the Oregon Constitution states that "No law shall be passed granting to any citizen or class of citizens privileges, or immunities, which, upon the same terms, shall not equally belong to all citizens." Oregon is one of 12 states that hasn't adopted specific anti-gay marriage laws.

Missing from the press conference was Commissioner Lonnie Roberts, the lone dissenter of the group. He sat in his spacious sixth-floor office while reporters grilled the remaining commissioners about his absence, asking if rumors were true that he was intentionally left out.

Linn responded, denying that Oregon Public Meetings Law had been violated during the decision-making process.

"We respect our colleague's opinion on this," she said. But "he chose not to (participate)."

Roberts saw it differently. At a small press conference held in his office minutes after the other commissioners

finished, Roberts said the process was secretive and unfair.

"I was left out of the loop as far as the initial discussions," he said. "And it goes beyond that to the fact that this conversation and this issue should have been brought before the full board at an open hearing and allow all the citizens on all sides of this issue to take part. It was not."

Roberts, who disagrees with Sowle's constitutional interpretation, said only the courts or a voter-based referendum will bring true understanding and closure to the issue.

"I think that we should clarify (the constitution) because, regardless of whether I disagree with the final outcome, if it's very clear as to what the constitution and the laws say ... then that's it," he said. "I believe you should obey the laws, even if you disagree with them."

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski said he plans to do just that. Kulongoski spokeswoman Marian Hammond said Kulongoski has asked Attorney General Hardy Myers to review the county's decision. Myers is expected to respond sometime next week.

"Basically, the governor has asked the attorney general to answer the question of whether or not the county's actions are legal or constitutional," Hammond said, adding that Kulongoski supports civil unions for same-sex couples.

Calls to Myers' office were not returned.

Protesters and supporters face off

At 9:40 a.m., after the commissioners' separate press conferences ended, tempers flared in a tense moment when Li and Knox, each representing one-half of the first two couples to receive marriage licenses, emerged from the building. A few protesters, screaming and taunting Li and Knox as the two held their licenses in the air, approached the growing crowd of cheering supporters.

"You filthy sinners!" screamed one protester as he pushed his way toward Li and Knox.

Multnomah County Sheriff's officers, who were milling around the building during the day to keep order, immediately stepped in to clear the growing mob of mostly eager media officials cramming in for interviews, and forced the protesters back to their designated area near the sidewalk.

In the protesters' area, about 20 people paced up and down Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard, carrying signs — one reading "Man + Woman = Marriage" — and chanting anti-gay slogans at the line of same-sex couples and supporters circling the block.

Protester Brian Dahrens of Oregon City took issue to what he viewed as an unfair and secretive process leading up to the county's decision.

"I believe this is a complete breach of everything democratic," he said. "I wasn't allowed to say my opinion. To me that's a breakdown of the system."

Another protester, 30-year-old Jason Cox of Portland, said that, beyond what he called an anti-democratic process, he also views same-sex marriage as sinful.

"I'm just totally against it," he said. "I'm Christian. It says in the Bible that it's immoral."

On the other side of the fence, same-sex couples and their supporters rallied throughout the day, yelling their own epitaphs, carrying their own signs and throwing rice as new couples emerged with \$60 marriage licenses in hand.

Kathy Okay of Corvallis, who was in line with her partner, Kels, called the day simply "fantastic."

"It recognizes us," she said. "It recognizes same-sex couples for the first time in history."

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