

LANE CO.

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In 1998 the state Supreme Court decided that same-sex couples could not be denied the medical benefits given to married couples under a section of the state constitution forbidding laws that give privileges to one group of people, but not to all.

Multnomah County legal counsel used the same section of the constitution when it decided it was illegal to deny gay couples marriage licenses.

Commissioners asked for a new opinion prior to Tuesday's Multnomah County announcement, County Commissioner Peter Sorenson said.

Sorenson, who represents South

Eugene, said he expects the Oregon Supreme Court to eventually rule on the legality of same-sex marriages.

If the court decides that it is illegal under the state constitution to deny marriage licenses to gay couples, all Oregon counties will be required to issue licenses for same-sex marriage.

Sorenson said Lane County officials are also watching closely for Attorney General Hardy Myers' decision on the issue, which is expected soon, as well as watching how other state jurisdictions react to the controversial move by Multnomah County officials.

"All of that influences and affects the work of our Lane County legal counsel in their advice," he said.

Sorenson added that if county commissioners do decide to give marriage

licenses to same-sex couples, they would tell the public beforehand.

"I think that we're trying to handle this in an open and public fashion," he said.

Multnomah County Commissioner Diane Linn had the support of three of the four other commissioners when she announced the county would issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Commissioners did not officially vote on the subject, however, nor was public input considered.

Linn made her announcement after receiving the opinion from Multnomah County legal counsel stating that it is illegal to deny same-sex marriage licenses.

The city of Eugene has a Domestic Partner Registry, instituted in Novem-

ber 2002, which recognizes unmarried couples of any sexual orientation who sign the registry. Registration, however, does not afford couples any legal rights.

"It's entirely symbolic," Ward 3 City Councilor David Kelly said.

Sorenson said the Board of Commissioners has no specific plans to discuss gay marriage at this time.

That fact did not preclude him from expressing his own support of same-sex marriage at the press conference he called Wednesday afternoon.

"My feeling is that the Legislature and the legal system ought to recognize that discrimination is wrong, and I feel very strongly that this is discrimination," Sorenson said.

He added that he thought President

Bush's call for a constitutional amendment defining marriage as an institution between a man and woman is "totally inappropriate."

"I think it's a bad idea to have a federal constitutional amendment dealing with a topic that is historically well within the role of the state," he said.

Lane County Commissioner Bill Dwyer, who represents Springfield, said he does not support same-sex marriage in Lane County, but would uphold it if the law required him to do so.

"I think that consenting adults should be able to enter into any contract that they want, but whether they define it as marriage or not depends on the law," he said.

Contact the city/state politics reporter at nikacarlson@dailyemerald.com.

REACTIONS

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math and Italian, said she thinks Multnomah County's decision is a step in the right direction and will help promote diversity and tolerance. She said the decision will draw same-sex couples to Multnomah County, which will help increase diversity.

She was surprised the decision came in Oregon, however.

"Oregon hasn't really seemed like one of the most tolerant places," Esterberg said. "The Northwest always seems kind of slow. That's cool that we're on the ball with something."

Junior Aaron Foresman, who is studying marketing, was less eager to call the decision a victory. Foresman, a non-denominational Christian, said, "By allowing gay marriage you change the makeup of what marriage is meant to be."

He said allowing same-sex marriages is "messing with something pretty sacred." He's not opposed to gay marriage, however, if it's done in the name of love, rather than for the pursuit of financial benefits, he said.

Foresman said he was not particularly surprised it happened in Oregon, adding that he is almost surprised it didn't happen in Lane County.

Sophomore business student Ruby Chen said she supports same-sex marriage.

"If we didn't allow them to marry, it would mean we didn't see them equally," she said.

Chen said opponents of same-sex marriages are against it because married same-sex partners would demand more rights that garner considerable opposition, like the right to adopt children.

Sophomore economics major Joe Croson said he does not understand the opponents' arguments.

"Personally, I think it's ridiculous that so many people are against (same-sex marriage)," Croson said. "We're a country of freedom, yet we deny such a basic freedom."

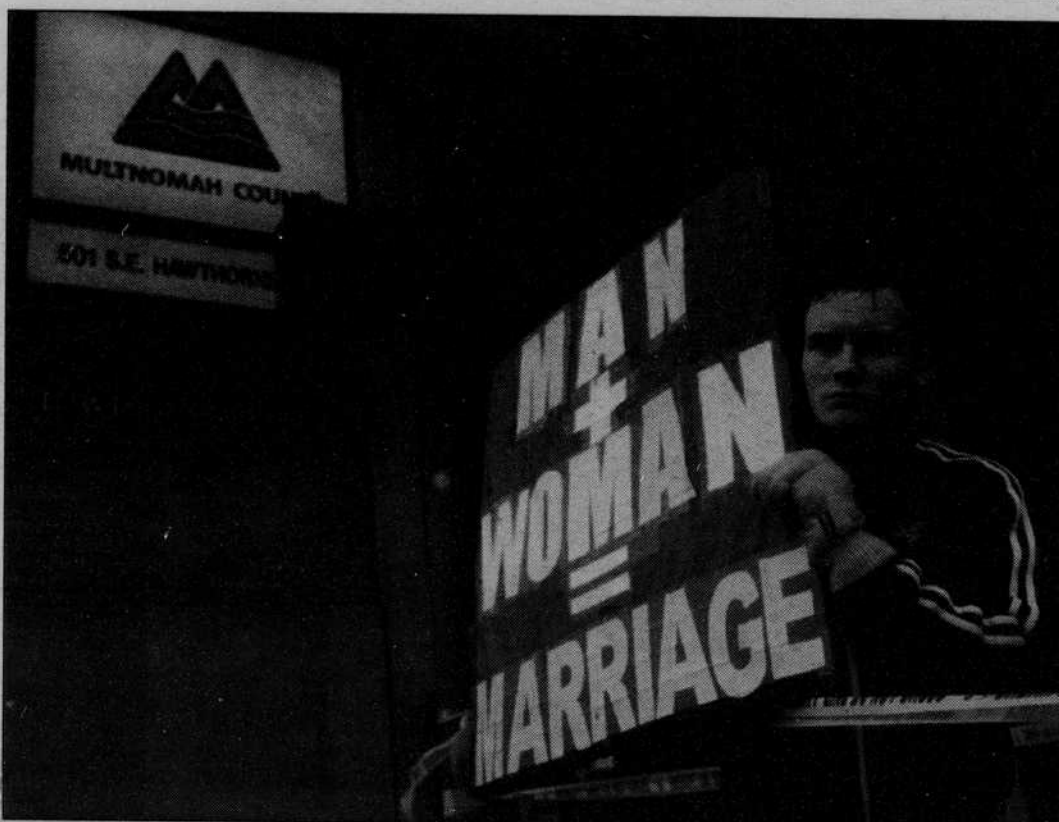
Croson said he's heard the argument that same-sex marriage conflicts with Christianity, but he does not agree that should mean repressing it in the United States.

"Our nation is not founded on Christianity," he said. "It doesn't seem right to me to use religion as a tool to suppress a sexual minority."

But freshman business major Sweet Paul said she isn't comfortable with same-sex marriages occurring. God had a purpose in creating Adam and Eve and that's because he wanted men and women to join, not people of the same gender, she said.

"That's not the way God made things," Paul said.

Contact the people/culture/faith reporter at jaredpaben@dailyemerald.com.



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

An individual identifying himself only as Josh holds a sign in front of Multnomah County headquarters in Portland on Wednesday afternoon to protest the county's decision to issue same-sex marriage licenses.

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