

500 gay rights backers rally, lobby at Oregon's Capitol

BY CHARLES E. BEGGS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM — Gay rights activists from around the state converged on the Capitol Thursday for a rally and a day of lobbying lawmakers to pass equal rights measures for same-sex couples.

"Our time has come," Roey Thorpe of Basic Rights Oregon told a crowd of around 500 people at the Capitol's main entrance.

"We will never go away. We will never give up," said Thorpe, executive director of the state's major gay rights organization.

The event was held on the one-year anniversary of Multnomah County creating a political uproar by beginning to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

The legality of the 3,042 licenses issued before a judge halted the practice is up in the air because voters in November passed a state constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

A case awaiting a decision by the Oregon Supreme Court asks the justices to decide whether the licenses are valid or whether the voter-passed marriage prohibition is retroactive.

Another major issue in the case is whether the courts have the authority

to define marriage-type benefits for same-sex couples or whether that's up to the Legislature.

Gay-rights backers are lobbying lawmakers to create "civil unions" that would provide the equivalent of marital benefits for gay couples, such as rights to spousal death benefits or visiting rights in hospitals.

Sen. Ben Westlund of Bend, the most prominent Republican gay-rights voice in the Legislature, told the rally he's "passionately supporting civil union legislation" along with Senate Majority Leader Kate Brown, D-Portland.

Gay rights supporters also are pushing for passage of a bill that would outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations.

Democratic Gov. Ted Kulongoski says adoption of the anti-discrimination measure is a high priority of his, and he also backs civil unions.

Westlund said prospects are "excellent" for passage of both measures in the Democrat-run Senate but likely would run into trouble with leaders of the Republican-controlled House.

House Majority Leader Wayne Scott, R-Canby, has said the anti-discrimination bill probably deserves

an airing but that he is concerned about giving "special rights" to gays.

Chuck Deister, spokesman for House Speaker Karen Minnis, R-Wood Village, said she would have no comment on the proposals Thursday.

House Minority Leader Jeff Merkley, D-Portland, said he thinks the bill would have "a very good chance" of passing if leaders allow the measure to come to a House vote, because it likely would get bipartisan support.

A bill to create legal rights for civil unions between same-sex couples would have a tougher time passing in the House, he said.

Katie Potter, daughter of Portland Mayor Tom Potter, attended the rally and said one of her goals is defeating a bill that would give a preference in adoptions to heterosexual couples over same-sex partners.

Potter and her partner, Pam Moen, took marriage vows in Multnomah County ceremonies last year, and Moen adopted Potter's two children.

She said despite the voter-passed gay marriage ban, surveys have shown a majority of the public supports the idea of civil union arrangements.

Oregon troops find bodies of apparent Westerners in Iraq

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND — Shallow graves found by Oregon Army National Guard soldiers in Iraq contained four bodies, apparently of Westerners, that showed signs of execution, Guard spokesman Maj. Arnold Strong said.

"They found a polo shirt that had eight bullet holes in the back and lots of bloodstains," Strong said in a telephone interview with The Oregonian from Taji Camp, an Army base north of Baghdad.

The remains, which were handed over to the Army Criminal Investigation Division and the FBI, have not been identified publicly.

Oregon soldiers believe they were from Western countries, Strong said, based on the condition of the teeth and on the clothing.

An Iraqi informant alerted the U.S. military to the location of the remains. The informant claimed to have seen the bodies in September in "fresher condition" and believed they

either were American or British based on their clothing and hair color, Strong said.

Seven Americans, most working for civilian companies, and a handful of civilians from other Western countries appear on lists of missing foreigners in Iraq.

Oregon Guard soldiers, nearing the end of the one-year tour in Iraq, were getting ready to leave the country.

"This was literally the last company mission," Strong said. Led by Sgt. 1st Class Manuel Annear of Roseburg, the platoon spread out across the desert sand near the site.

"Sometimes these things are booby traps," Strong said.

Soon, they came across the remains. The graves yielded two intact skulls, remnants of two others, plus fragments of vertebrae and some rib bones.

The remains were put in plastic bags and taken to a nearby Marine base.

IN BRIEF

Memorial for Hatoon to be held Saturday

The campus community will remember and celebrate the life of Victoria "Hatoon" Adkins in a memorial service on Saturday at 3 p.m. at the Memorial Quad in front of the Knight Library. Adkins, 67, died from accident-related injuries Tuesday after she was hit by a car while riding her bicycle on Franklin Boulevard.

Adkins, who was homeless, was a long-time campus resident and most recently made her home on a bench by the University Bookstore. Flowers, candles and notes now adorn the bench, and people have been stopping by to

pay their final respects.

At the memorial, community members will share their stories of Adkins; there will also be a reading of messages left at her bench. Local musicians will be in attendance.

After the memorial, those who knew Adkins will gather in the Knight Library Browsing Room to remember and honor the community and network of friends that contributed to her life.



HATOON VICTORIA ADKINS
ACCIDENT VICTIM

— Ayisha Yahya

What's happening with gay marriage nationally

On Tuesday, the Washington State Supreme Court will hear arguments in a case challenging the state's ban on gay marriage. Laws on gay marriage vary from state to state:

- Massachusetts is the only state where gay marriage is legal. The state's Supreme Judicial Court legalized it in 2003; the court will hear arguments this year on a challenge to a 1913 state law that bars out-of-state gay couples from getting married there.
- In addition to Washington

state, legal challenges by same-sex couples seeking the right to marry are pending in California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Maryland and Oregon.

- Voters in 13 states passed constitutional amendments banning gay marriage last year: Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon and Utah.
- Four states already had gay marriage bans in their constitutions: Alaska, Hawaii, Nebraska and Nevada.
- The following states have laws on the books (but not in their

constitutions) prohibiting gay marriage: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia.

- Connecticut, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Maryland, Rhode Island, Wisconsin and Wyoming have no laws explicitly banning gay marriage.
- Vermont banned gay marriage but legalized same-sex civil unions in 2001.

— The Associated Press

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