

NORTHWESTnews

THE RESULTS ARE OUT

Oregon census figures show dramatic increase in same-sex partner households by Jim Radosta

Census figures released July 3 for Oregon show a dramatic increase in households with same-sex partners but most likely continue to undercount the actual number because of continued anti-gay bias.

"These figures represent a very positive trend for Oregon," said David M. Smith, Human Rights Campaign communications director and senior strategist. "In our opinion, the increase reveals more and more couples are willing to identify themselves as same-sex partners in a federal survey, but many continue to fear a backlash from anti-gay policies at the federal level and continued societal anti-gay bias. And despite an educational effort by HRC and other groups, not all respondents were aware of the census question."

In Oregon, the total number of households comprising same-sex partners was 8,932—a 295 percent increase from the 2,263 same-sex couples in 1990. A total of 3,846 households were composed of male couples, and 5,086 were composed of female couples.

The census counted 1,333,723 total households in Oregon. "As more gay and lesbian families feel comfortable about identifying themselves, the American people will become aware that public policy does not treat them equally and will seek to rectify this injustice," Smith said.

One of the significant trends found in the data is the presence of same-sex couples living in the vast majority of small towns and rural areas in addition to mid-sized and large cities, where popular stereotype views them residing. Census figures for Oregon show same-sex unmarried households in rural areas are slightly up.

"For the first time ever, government has begun documenting the 21st century family"

—**Lozzi L. Jean**

According to the data, 82 percent of same-sex unmarried households are from urban areas, while 18 percent are from rural areas. This marks a slight change from 1990, when only 14 percent of same-sex unmarried households were in rural parts of the state and 86 percent were from urban areas.

In the urban areas 3,115 of the same-sex unmarried partners were men and 4,218 were women. In rural areas 731 were men and 868 were women.

"The 2000 census confirms that gay and lesbian families are present in virtually every corner of the nation," said Gary Gates, a researcher with the Urban Institute, which is working with HRC on a special census project tracking same-sex partner households. "This suggests significant diversity among America's gay and lesbian families and offers a rich source for future demographic research on a segment of our population

that has unfortunately too often been ignored."

Four other states released census data July 3: Maryland, Colorado, New Mexico and North Dakota. Maryland reported the largest number of same-sex households with 11,243, a 271 percent increase from the 1990 census.

Colorado was next with 10,045 same-sex households, a 385 percent increase. New Mexico reported 4,496 same-sex households, a 429 percent increase.

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And North Dakota reported 703, a 583 percent increase. The census will be releasing data for other states in batches to be completed by mid-August.

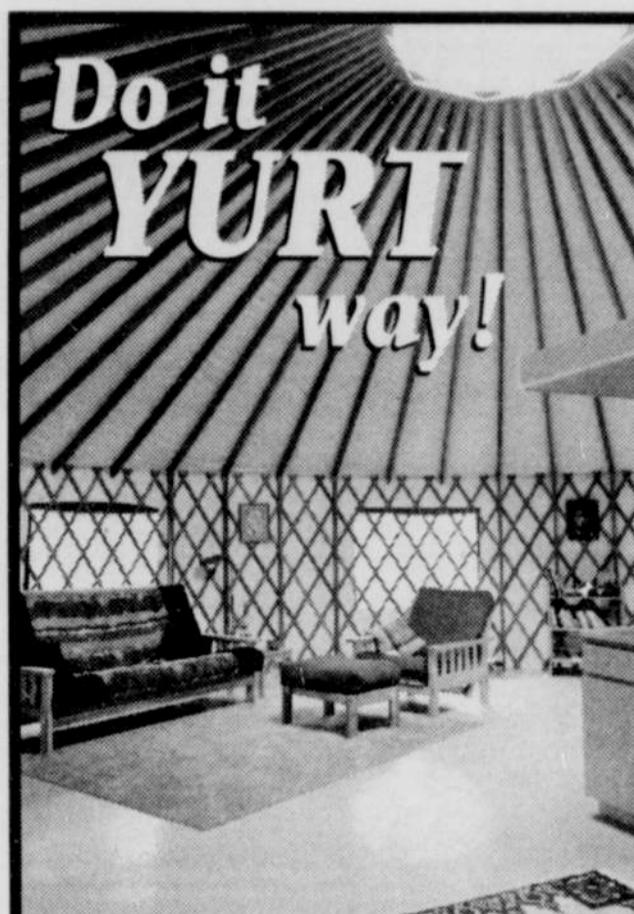
"For the first time ever, government has begun documenting the 21st century family," said Lorri L. Jean, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director. "The dramatic increase in same-sex partner households reflected in these census figures shows that one of our primary mandates is to ensure that every gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender family receives the same services, benefits and treatment given to other families."

Paula Ettelbrick, NGLTF family policy director, said the census does not count single queer people but since 1990 has counted unmarried same-sex partner households. The category of "unmarried partner" appeared on the census form for the first time 10 years ago.

About 150,000 households nationwide self-reported as same-sex unmarried partners—a severe undercount compounded by the U.S. Census Bureau's disqualification of same-sex couples who marked "spouse" to describe their relationship. This year, Ettelbrick explained, the agency reported it would change same-sex partners who marked "spouse" to "unmarried partner," resulting in a better count.

"The census numbers reflect the changing face of our society," she said. "As a community, we clearly shifted our focus in the 1990s to securing our family relationships through domestic partner benefits, adoption rights and same-sex marriage. The census numbers mirror the unprecedented rise in the visibility of our families during the past decade."

Jean added: "Public policy flows from the U.S. census. If we are not counted, we lose out on federal funding for research, funding for community services and passage of laws that benefit our community. We also sacrifice important opportunities for more equitable political representation of our community." ■



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