

**NORTHWEST**news

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**The State of the Union**

City Club of Portland sponsored a forum March 17 to assess the rapidly changing institution of marriage. Among the panelists was Mary Pitman Kitch, who serves on *The Oregonian* editorial board, which has repeatedly slammed the Multnomah County Commission's decision to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

"Our opinions on gay marriage are still evolving," she said. "If you polled the members of the editorial board, I know one thing they would tell you for certain, and that is: 'Gee, this is so sudden. This is happening so fast.'"

Lewis & Clark professor Stephen Kanter focused on constitutional legal matters, admitting that the marriage question is a close call. "Every law discriminates in one way or another, so deciding what kind of discrimination is permitted is the tough thing," he said, "and it depends on what level of scrutiny the court will use on this matter to determine whether a ban on same-sex marriage is constitutional or not."

**Benton County Proposes Marriage**

The Benton County Commission followed Multnomah's lead March 16 by voting in favor of same-sex marriage. Licenses will be issued to gay and lesbian couples beginning at 9 a.m. March 24 in Corvallis.

The 2-1 vote followed more than 2 1/2 hours of public testimony overwhelmingly in favor of marriage equality. David Fidanque, American



PHOTO BY JIM RAOSTRA

PFLAG parents Donna and Arthur Saffir testify against a proposed county charter amendment March 9

Civil Liberties Union of Oregon executive director, recalled the case of a Japanese American World War II veteran who was prohibited by state law from owning land when he returned home.

"If you had been county commissioners in 1946 when Kenny Namba tried to record his property deed, would you have told him he couldn't because the law didn't allow it? Or would you have looked at the Oregon Bill of Rights, which requires equal treatment for all citizens?" Fidanque asked. "The Oregon Constitution requires you to do the right thing and stop the discrimination against same-sex couples."

The ACLU and BRO say they will continue to explore all legal options available to end marriage discrimination throughout the state. Attorneys might file suit in one or more of the counties that choose to ignore the constitution and deny licenses to same-sex couples. □

**WASHINGTON STATE**

**LAWSUIT FILED**

Lambda Legal and the Northwest Women's Law Center filed a lawsuit March 8 in state court in Seattle seeking the right to marry for same-sex couples in Washington. The case, on behalf of six same-sex couples who were denied marriage licenses at the King County Clerk's office, argues that denying marriage to same-sex couples violates the state constitution's guarantees of equality, liberty and privacy for all Washingtonians.

"As long as gay couples cannot marry, they are not treated equally under the law," said Jamie Pedersen, co-chairman of Lambda Legal's board of directors and an attorney at the Seattle law firm Preston Gates & Ellis. "This case seeks full marriage for lesbian and gay couples in Washington—nothing more and nothing less."

Washington is among 38 states with laws explicitly prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying. The lawsuit seeks a judgment that would strike that state law down as unconstitutional and would order King County to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

"Over the last few weeks and months, lesbians and gay men in Washington have seen couples marrying to the north in Canada and to the south in Portland," said Jennifer C. Pizer, senior staff attorney in Lambda Legal's Western Regional Office. "Our clients are paying Washington taxes and sending their children to Washington schools—they need

the protections only marriage provides, and they need them here at home."

**SEATTLE MAYOR: "IT'S A MATTER OF FAIRNESS"**

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels signed an executive order March 8 that would give married city employees equal rights regardless of whether they are straight or gay. He will also send the City Council a proposed ordinance to extend these protections to others throughout Seattle.

"When my wife, Sharon, and I want to do something like refinance our house or visit a family member in the hospital, absolutely no one challenges us about the legitimacy of our marital status," Nickels said. "It's long past time that gay and lesbian couples who love each other and get married receive that same recognition."

The city of Seattle cannot directly change the law that bars same-sex marriages, but it can ensure city employees and citizens are not discriminated against because of their marital status.

"Within our lifetimes the marriages of interracial couples were not recognized in many states and many cities. Fortunately, that has changed," gay City Councilor Tom Rasmussen said. "Now, gay and lesbian couples are seeking the same rights as all married couples to be able to live and travel freely without fear that their relationship will be disrespected. The right of gay and lesbian people to marry is fundamental to our equality and humanity." □

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for beer**

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