

Continued from Page 21

The Oregon Family Fairness Act, House Bill 2007, comes out of the House Ethics, Elections and Rules Committee and would create civil unions that would legitimate and protect same-sex or transgender couples who choose to register with the state. It would extend many of the protections afforded to straight, married couples to gay couples who are in a committed relationship. Basic legal rights that heterosexual couples have taken for granted for years would be extended to gays, including hospital visits, medical decisions, wrongful death suits, transfer of property, interstate inheritance, joint custody, adoption of children and employee partner benefits.

This bill's provisions are different in three key ways from those of SB 1000. Couples would sign a public registry in a county clerk's office without

In essence, under HB 2007, civil unions would be different from marriage. Some 1,100 potential federal benefits to married couples would continue to be denied to people united under the new statute.

There would also be no portability of the benefits. If a couple had a civil union in Oregon, they could still be denied hospital visitation in Nevada. Although some private institutions might elect to honor the commitment status, they would not be legally bound to do so.

While noting these obvious differences, Boyd says BRO believes the bills would essentially meet the immediate goals of providing greater equality and fairness to Oregon's queer families.

Both spokespeople for BRO and allied Salem lawmakers believe that 2007 could be the year both bills pass. As Boyd pointed out, the legislation owes a great deal to many hardworking people over many years. That includes tireless lobbying work

lunge any such bill with a referendum in 2008, recent polls suggest the majority of Oregonians support fairness and equality for sexual minorities. If Oregon enacts such a law, it will join at least five other states that already have some type of civil union or marriage for gays.

Other States

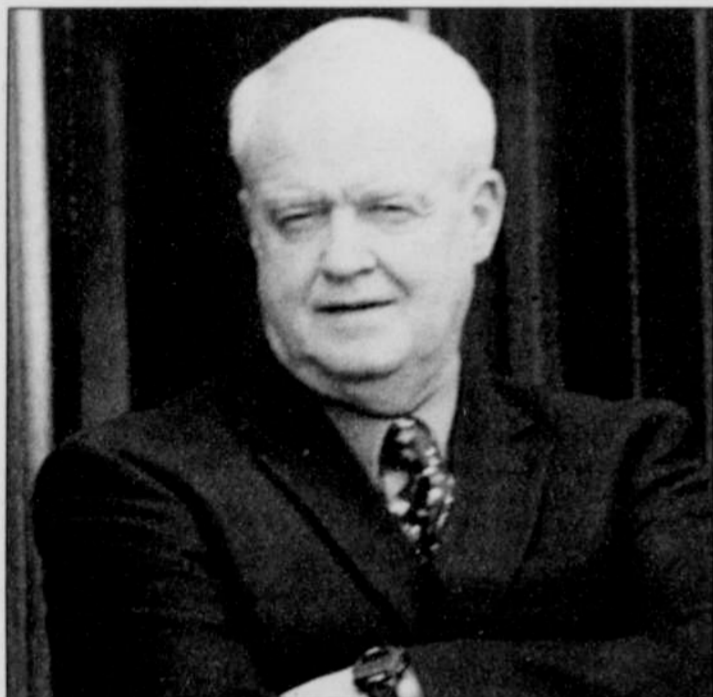
At least 17 states have enacted some legal protections against discrimination toward queer people. Washington enacted anti-discrimination measures last year, but the Legislature is still struggling to pass civil unions in light of deeming same-sex marriage unconstitutional. In 2006, a state Supreme Court ruling overturned proposed domestic partnership rights.

There are five states with some type of legal status for committed gay relationships. Three are in New England. Massachusetts is the only state in

occurred nearly 40 years ago, when protections from police harassment and arbitrary arrest for gays congregating and socializing in their own clubs could not be taken for granted. With the exception of a few large cities, gays might not have been able to even socialize with their own.

Same-sex marriage and legal protection from discrimination for gay people were not even concepts in the public lexicon. Today, there are a number of states with anti-discrimination statutes that include sexual orientation and gender identity and five states that have some form of legal unions. Other states, such as Washington, may soon follow suit. Oregon's moment may have arrived.

Kulongoski, who had the foresight to appoint the Task Force on Equality, in combination with a Legislature that enjoys a progressive, Democratic leadership that favors gay civil rights—



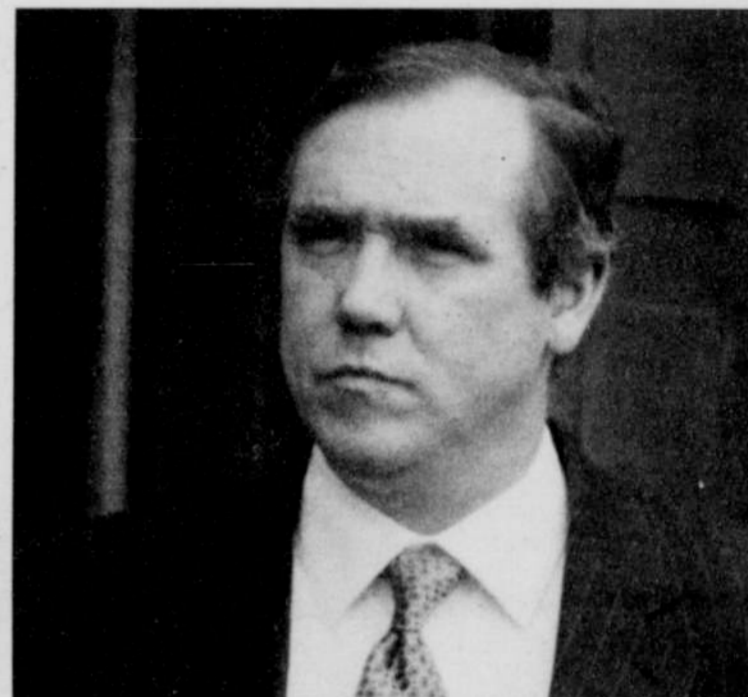
State Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, told activists that civil rights is a priority for the Senate.



State Rep. Tina Kotek described a climate of equality at the Capitol.



State Sen. Ben Westlund, D-Tumalo, takes the stage at the Lobby Day rally.



State House Speaker Jeff Merkley promised to give the bills a day of debate on the House floor.

legal "solemnization" of unions, such as a ceremony conducted by a priest, rabbi or public official such as a judge, as with marriage. This would not prevent couples from having legally nonbinding commitment ceremonies.

A second key difference is the bill would make civil unions a different legal entity under a separate statute. This is intended to reassure people who do not oppose gay unions but who feel marriage is a religious and civil institution provided for straight couples.

Finally, there would be a residency requirement, meaning that couples would have to live in the state. A male or female couple could not visit from other states for the purpose of getting hitched here, as we have seen in other jurisdictions like Vermont or British Columbia.

and consistent support by the gay and gay-friendly communities in the state. Oregon stands at a threshold that could change forever the second-class status of gays.

If SB 2 passes, sexual minority residents could no longer be fired because of their private identities—termination would depend on performance on the job—nor denied housing or educational benefits. A transgender person could not be legally refused service in a public restaurant or asked to leave because no bathrooms could be provided. Of course, discrimination might continue. But after the bill passes, queers may bring civil lawsuits to seek redress and punitive damages.

If the Legislature passes the two proposed bills, Kulongoski has signaled he will sign them into law. While the Oregon Family Council vows to chal-

lenge any such bill with a referendum in 2008, recent polls suggest the majority of Oregonians support fairness and equality for sexual minorities. If Oregon enacts such a law, it will join at least five other states that already have some type of civil union or marriage for gays.

By this high standard, the other states with unions come up short, but they do attempt to provide some legal framework for committed gay couples. California has a domestic partnership bill that has been in effect for five years that essentially gives gays the same rights as straight couples. Vermont, Connecticut and most recently New Jersey have legalized forms of civil unions.

Staying the Course

Experts say that gays wondering when they will achieve greater equality need only adopt a longer time frame. The Stonewall riots in New York City

including the House for the first time in more than a decade—could break the ideological deadlock over gay unions and enact legal protections that gays have been demanding for almost two decades. A strong state advocacy group, Basic Rights Oregon, has worked for years to line up support and develop compelling arguments as well to help write the proposed legislation. Oregon's gay community has also been toughened, sometimes tragically, by fighting and surviving years of discriminatory ballot measure campaigns and a same-sex marriage ban. This year will either be just another in the battle or the most significant year for gay civil rights in Oregon's history. **jc**

JACK TURTELTAUB is a practicing psychologist and writer who may be reached at drturtael@yahoo.com.

LIPOATROPHY (SUNKEN CHEEKS)?



You CAN see
"YOU"
in the mirror
again!

SCULPTRA injections can help you look as young and healthy as you feel.

Dr. Marla Ross, a board certified dermatologist, is your local sculptra expert. For consultation and treatment, call her at **503-245-2415.**

**H
S
S**
NORTHWEST

NATURAL HAIRLINES

**HAIR
SURGERY
SPECIALISTS
NORTHWEST**



**Regrow Your Own Hair...
Permanently!**

- New Follicular Unit Hair Transplantation Technique
- Restores Your Youthful Appearance Permanently, Naturally
- 15 Years Experience • Free Consultation

10215 SW Hall Blvd • Portland
503.244.5368

See why we are **\$1000s LESS!**
www.naturalhairlines.com