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Opponents aim to put gay rights on ballot

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BILL GRAVES; The Oregonian

Two landmark gay-rights laws, signed less than a week ago by Gov. Ted Kulongoski, were officially targeted Monday for referral to voters.

Jack Brown of Grants Pass, chairman of the Constitution Party of Oregon, and two other southern Oregonians filed papers with the Oregon secretary of state so they can begin collecting the 55,179 signatures they will need to put the two laws on the ballot in fall 2008.

They are challenging Senate Bill 2, which bans discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, work and public places such as restaurants and theaters, and House Bill 2007, which creates legal **domestic partnerships**, giving state benefits of marriage to same-sex couples.

Brown said he's launching the referral effort because he sees the laws defying the spirit of Measure 36, a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2004 that declares marriage as legally valid only between a man and a woman. The **domestic partnership** law also unfairly leaves out other couples who head households but cannot marry, such as two sisters, he said.

"Even though the Legislature knew what the intent of the voters was, they ignored it," he said. "I want to give voters the chance to affirm what their spirit was when they approved Measure 36."

Basic Rights Oregon, the state's largest gay-rights group, assumes the petitioners will get the signatures they need, said spokeswoman Melissa Chernaik. But she said the group also expects voters to approve the laws

"It is just a shame," she said. "We'll ultimately be victorious, so what does this do but delay a good number of protections for families? It just seems needless."

Alex Bailey-Gilliam, 34, of West Linn said the news, though expected, was "over-the-top frustrating."

He and his partner, Kevin Bailey-Gilliam, 29, have been in a committed relationship for 10 years and want the benefits that a **domestic partnership** would give them.

Their family is like any family, Alex said, with daily routines of school, lacrosse practice and homework. Alex works as a global marketing expert while Kevin, a psychologist, stays home with their three children --Madilyn, 9; Ethan, 10; and Christian, 14. The two men share a mortgage, investments and bank accounts.

Yet they cannot file a joint tax return, Alex said, and they pay an extra \$350 a month because they cannot share the same health insurance policy.

"We're not talking about special rights," he said. "We're just talking about equal rights."

The petitioners must collect the required number of signatures from registered voters within 90 days after the Legislature adjourns. If they succeed, the effective date of the two laws will be delayed from Jan. 1, 2008, until Oregonians vote on them in the general election on Nov. 4, 2008.

Chief petitioners are Brown, an auto mechanic; Robert Sweat, a Republican and auto mechanic in Wilderville; and Richard Hake, a member of the Constitution Party and a Web page graphic designer in Rogue River.

Brown, who ran for Congress in Oregon's 2nd District in 2006, said he will enlist contacts across the state to help gather signatures. He said he's confident his group can collect enough signatures to put the referendums on the ballot.

The bigger challenge, he said, will be finding money to match the campaign that Basic Rights Oregon and its supporters will mount to protect the new laws.

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