

PRESS RELEASE

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**SASKATCHEWAN COURT RESERVES EQUAL MARRIAGE DECISION
Judge will Rule Friday**

Saskatoon--Today Madam Justice Donna Wilson of the Family Law Division of the Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench reserved judgment on the issue of equal marriage in Saskatchewan. She advised she will render her decision this Friday, November 5 at 10:00 a.m. The case was brought by five same-sex couples: Erin Scriven and Lisa Stumborg, Lenore Swystun and Kelley Moore, James Hein-Blackmore and William Hein-Blackmore, Nicole White and Julie Richards, and Martin Bonneville and Ted Atkins.

"The Attorney General of Canada agreed with us that it is unconstitutional to exclude same-sex couples from civil marriage," said Greg Walen of Saskatoon law firm Scharfstein Gibbings Walen & Fisher, who represents the couples. "The Attorney General of Saskatchewan advised the Court that the issue is a matter of federal jurisdiction and that the province takes no position. Given the weight of judicial authority on this matter, I think it likely that the Court will extend civil marriage to same-sex couples."

"Marriage signifies societal recognition and affirmation of a relationship between two people who love each other and are committed to each other," said Lenore Swystun, whose partner is Kelley Moore. "Kelley and I had a commitment ceremony January 25, 2002, but for us, equal marriage is simply about acknowledging our basic human rights."

"We are committed to one another and wish to be together for the rest of our lives," said Lisa Stumborg, who had a covenanting ceremony with her partner Erin Scriven on October 9, 2004 at St. Thomas-Wesley United Church in Saskatoon. "We hope to have a civil ceremony to 'legalize' our marriage before we leave for our honeymoon on Sunday. To me, the right to marry is important because we would like to have children and we see this as a way of solidifying our family."

"It's nothing revolutionary," said Nicole White, who plans to marry her partner Julie Richards next summer. "I've found the person that I want to spend the rest of my life with."

"What equal marriage means to me is peace of mind," said James Hein-Blackmore, who married his husband William Hein-Blackmore in B.C. on July 6, 2004. "The day we were married was a great day of happiness as we professed our love to one another. But not having our marriage recognized here in Saskatchewan is a great burden."

"We cannot allow discrimination to continue against one group of people without putting everyone's rights at risk," said Larry Hubich, President of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. "Providing equal access to civil marriage not only respects equality rights, it also protects religious freedom, by allowing religious officials to choose for themselves whether or not to perform marriages for same-sex couples."

"Civil marriage is a public institution and should be open to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation," said Donna Smith of the Saskatchewan chapter of Canadians for Equal Marriage, an umbrella group working for passage of the federal government's equal marriage legislation. "Equal marriage furthers Canadian values like inclusion, mutual respect and freedom from political or social prejudice. Equal marriage strengthens families. Our families need support just as much as opposite-sex families."

"Right now 82% of Canada's population enjoys full marriage equality. Hopefully on Friday that figure will rise to 85% with the inclusion of Saskatchewan," said Laurie Arron, Director of Advocacy of Egale Canada, the national group advancing equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons and their families. "Equal marriage diminishes no one. Canada is being strengthened by the inclusion of these loving, committed couples."

"We look forward to the day when all Canadians have the equal right to marry, when Parliament finally passes legislation to make that a reality," said Cicely McWilliam of Canadians for Equal Marriage. "Until then, we call on all the remaining provinces and territories to accept equal marriage and begin issuing marriage licences to same-sex couples."

A survey released July 1 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada and Environics found that the number of Canadians agreeing that gays and lesbians should be allowed to get married has increased. Currently, 57% agree, the highest level since CRIC first asked the question two years ago. The number disagreeing currently stands at 38%. (see New Canada survey at http://www.cric.ca/en_html/index.html)

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