Senator Brian Hatfield Releases Statement on Same-Sex Marriage

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : February 2, 2012 at 5:05 am

Olympia, WA - Sen. Brian Hatfield issued the following statement today on Senate Bill 6239 to allow same-sex marriage. “The debate over marriage equality has occupied the time and thoughts of the 2012 legislative session like no other issue. These are serious and difficult times in which we find ourselves, and members of the Legislature have devoted hundreds of hours to this and other issues before us. Legacy biomass, a balanced budget, job creation for the 19th Legislative District and all of our state were all areas I arrived in Olympia ready to discuss and to tackle, yet the question of marriage equality has overshadowed them all. While I wish that other issues of equal importance were capable of capturing the attention that this matter has, I realize that we as legislators are being asked to rule on an area that strikes at the very core of people’s lives, faiths and beliefs. “Time and again I have been asked for my thoughts on this question and how I will vote when the question is asked on the Floor of the Washington State Senate.This is a measure that has emotionally torn at me as I have wrestled with my choice.

In the past, I have supported the rights of gays and lesbians, voting against the Defense of Marriage Act when I was a member of the Washington State House of Representatives and yet voted against the domestic partnerships as a member of the Senate. That fact is not meant to garner sympathy or support, but to illustrate just how conflicted I have been about this question."

“This has been one of the most difficult votes I have ever been associated with. Regardless of how I choose to vote on the issue of marriage equality, I will alienate myself from friends and neighbors that I have known for years. A vote in favor of marriage equality will enrage those who see it as a stone cast against God and the beliefs that I, and thousands like me have been raised with. A vote against will label me as a bigot who is against extending the basic rights that I enjoy to all residents of our state.“I believe that ultimately this question should be decided by the voters of Washington. Odds are that a public vote will be taken on this issue. Considering that fact, I would hope to see support for a referendum amendment being added to the bill on the Senate Floor. It is all but certain that the voters will decide; why not include that choice in our final vote on the matter? “I also recognize that times have changed for the world, the country and the state. Measures granting equal rights to gay and lesbian couples have been approved by legislative bodies and state residents for several years. This year, the federal government overturned the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. What kind of message are we sending to our men and women in uniform when we will finally allow them to serve and to defend our freedoms, but will not extend all such freedoms to them?“As I consider my upcoming vote, first allow me to say that I have devoted a monumental amount of time soul searching and praying about this issue. As a Christian, I look to my faith in times of great stress and doubt. The question of whether or not to redefine the institution of marriage is a question that goes far beyond a simple “yea” or “nay” vote in the State Legislature. As I prayed for guidance, I went as far as to ask God for a sign that would help light the path for me toward reaching my decision. That sign, as I interpret it, has come in multiple forms, including an email from former Representative Betty Sue Morris, who shared with me that in a 20-plus year legislative career, her greatest regret was voting in support of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996. Two years after voting in favor of the act,

she learned her daughter was a lesbian. While her daughter has forgiven her, she has never forgiven herself for what she feels was a betrayal of her own family, something she has never been able to get over. Also, a similar message was conveyed to me from former legislator Dave Quall, who also singled out the DOMA vote as the greatest regret of his legislative career. As Christians, he said, we should be open to all people who are seeking God’s grace. Rejecting a measure recognizing their right to wed is like putting out a “Need Not Apply” sign. These are former colleagues whom I love and respect and I take their struggles and their revelations on this issue very seriously. Additionally, I spoke to my former pastor who said that while his beliefs were based on the Bible and therefore against a redefinition of marriage, he would not love anyone less or treat anyone differently based on their sexual orientation or choice of spouse. As private citizens, we are able to have that opinion, but as legislators, our “no” vote on this issue will be seen as loving my fellow man or woman less, based on their sexual orientation and an act of discrimination. That is something I cannot do.“Therefore, after months of thought and prayer, I have decided that I will offer my vote in support of Senate Bill 6239. I believe this will not be the final word on this issue, as it is almost certain the voters of this state will have a chance to weigh in with our collective, “yea” or “nay”. I now hope that the Legislature can return to the business of the state, including balancing the budget, creating jobs and moving toward a full economic recovery.”