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Connecticut court allows gay marriage

Fri Oct 10, 2008 3:56pm EDT

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By Ted Lorson

HARTFORD, Connecticut (Reuters) - Connecticut's highest court on Friday unexpectedly struck down a ban on gay and lesbian marriage, making the New England state the third in the nation to allow full-fledged marriage for same-sex couples.

After four years of legal wrangling in the state court system, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled 4-3 that a ban on gay marriage constituted "cognizable harm" and infringed on a "fundamental right" of same-sex couples.

The decision, which overturns a lower court ruling, follows the legalization of gay marriage in California this year and in Massachusetts in 2003. It was hailed by gay rights advocates as a proud day after battles over the culturally divisive issue in several states.

Connecticut Gov. Jodi Rell, a Republican, disagreed with the ruling but said she will uphold it.

"I continue to believe that marriage is the union of a man and a woman," Rell said. "I do not believe their voice reflects the majority of the people of Connecticut."

She said she was convinced that any attempt to reverse the decision, either legislatively or by amending the state Constitution, would fail.

The decision came as a surprise after previous courts upheld the ban and lawmakers wrote specific language into a civil union measure defining marriage as between men and women.

Connecticut was one of four U.S. states that permits same-sex civil unions that grant rights such as insurance coverage, tax benefits and hospital visitations. But these lack the full, federal legal protections of marriage. **Continued...**

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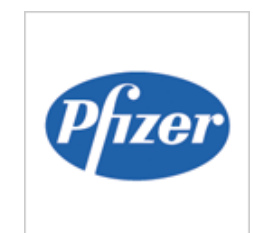
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