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Colville Tribes vote to recognize same-sex unions

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NESPELEM, Wash. – The Colville Tribal Council on Thursday voted to recognize same-sex marriage.

Council Chairman Michael Finley said tribes have always known that gay people – whom they call Two-Spirited Peoples – have a special place in their society.

Finley said tribal culture has long recognized that some people are born a certain gender, and are drawn to people of the same gender. “They’ve always been accepted,” he said. Now, tribal law will also treat them equally and with respect, he said.

He said there were no objections to the amendment recognizing gay marriage when the final council vote was taken, but not all 14 council members were present.

The provision affects more than 9,360 members who are descendants of 12 different tribes and are members of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

About half of them live on the 1.4 million-acre Colville Indian Reservation.

Initiated by tribal council members, the action taken by the council Thursday amended the tribes’ domestic code to recognize gay marriages.

Practically speaking, Finley said, it will mean that gay partners can have the same rights as a married couple of different sexes. One change already enacted allows anyone who works for the tribe to add a spouse of the same sex to their insurance and benefits.

He said the tribe will now begin modifying its other codes, plans and policies to make sure they agree with the newly passed amendment.

Finley said that just like anywhere else, the ways people get married on the reservation vary, but any tribal entity that now legally marries a couple will also marry same-sex partners.

A news release from the Colville Tribes quoted tribal member Lois Trevino, who works for the tribe.

She could not be reached on Friday, but was quoted in the news release saying, "This Resolution makes me feel stronger, because it validates my relationship, and the relationships of all same sex couples, and it makes me feel safer because it offers protection and recognition for my family."

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