Beat: Politics

Uruguayan senators approve bill to legalize gay marriage

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USPA News - The Uruguay Senate on Tuesday approved a bill which would legalize same-sex marriage in the country, and the bill now heads to the lower house where it is expected to pass later this month. It would make Uruguay the second nation in Latin America to legalize gay marriage.

The lower house of Uruguay`s general assembly already approved the bill in December 2012, but the Senate bill that was approved on Tuesday includes a number of modifications that will require new approval from the lower house. Senators voted 23 to 8 in favor of the bill that also changes other aspects of marriage. In addition to legalizing same-sex marriage, the bill raises the minimum age for marriage to 16 for everyone, as it is currently 12 for girls and 14 for boys. The modified law is likely to be discussed and voted upon by the lower house later this month, which would allow the first same-sex marriages to take place in July or August if approved. A majority of senators welcomed the bill for giving people equal rights and obligations in marriage, despite opposition from the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations. Human rights activists also welcomed the news, including Human Rights Watch which urged the lower house to move quickly. "Uruguayan senators made the right decision by allowing same-sex couples to marry," said Boris Dittrich, advocacy director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Rights Program at Human Rights Watch. "Final approval will enable gays and lesbians in Uruguay to marry the person they love and will strengthen the fundamental rights of everyone in Uruguay to equality and non-discrimination." When the modified bill is approved by the country`s lower house, it will make Uruguay the second country in Latin America to fully perform and recognize same-sex marriages. Argentina legalized gay marriage in July 2010, but not after a heated debate, mass protests from both supporters and opponents, and opposition by the church which slammed the bill as a `threat against God.` Earlier this month, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community marked the 12th anniversary of the first ever same-sex marriage in the world. The Netherlands was the first country in the world to officially recognize and allow same-sex marriages after Queen Beatrix signed the marriage bill into law on December 21, 2000. It went into law on April 1, 2001. In addition to the Netherlands and Argentina, same-sex marriages have also been legalized in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. In Mexico, same-sex marriage is only performed in Mexico City and the state of Quintana Roo. Support for same-sex marriage has also increased across the United States in recent years. Residents in Maine, Maryland and Washington voted to legalize same-sex marriage last year, marking the first time that U.S. states legalized same-sex marriage by a direct vote of the people. Same-sex marriage was already legal in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont and the District of Columbia, but they are not federally recognized.

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