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Rosie O'Donnell Weds Longtime Girlfriend

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Rosie O'Donnell married her longtime girlfriend Thursday, taking what she called a proud stand for gay civil rights in the city where more than 3,300 other same-sex couples have tied the knot since Feb. 12.

"I want to thank the city of San Francisco for this amazing stance the mayor has taken for all the people here, not just us but all the thousands and thousands of loving, law-abiding couples," the former talk show host, holding a large bouquet, said after she and Kelli Carpenter emerged from their brief ceremony inside Mayor Gavin Newsom's office.

The couple were married by Treasurer Susan Leal, one of the city's high-profile lesbian elected officials.

The newlyweds walked hand in hand down the grand marble staircase in the rotunda to thunderous applause from hundreds of spectators who came to witness the city's first celebrity same-sex wedding.

As the San Francisco's Gay Men's Chorus serenaded the couple with a few bars of "Chapel of Love," O'Donnell smiled and said: "We really did. We got married."

O'Donnell told the crowd that she and Carpenter, who have been together six years and are raising four children, decided to dash to San Francisco after hearing President Bush endorse a proposed constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage Tuesday.

"We were both inspired to come here after the sitting president made the vile and hateful comments he made," O'Donnell said.

The couple left New York at 5 a.m. in order to make their 1 p.m. appointment in San Francisco to pick up their marriage license.

"One thought ran through my mind on the plane out here with liberty and justice for all," O'Donnell said, drawing even more cheers as she held up her hand in a peace sign. She and Carpenter then kissed for the cameras.

The couple were flying back to New York later in the day to attend parents' day at their children's school Friday, O'Donnell said. She joked that with four children under the age of 8, they hadn't planned a honeymoon.

City Hall, which has been transformed into a virtual wedding chapel since the city began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, was packed with spectators hoping to catch a glimpse of the most famous couple to be married there so far. Tourists, reporters and couples there for their own weddings vied for space on all three levels of the ornate building, while the Gay Men's Chorus serenaded the crowd with renditions of "The Star Spangled Banner" and "We Shall Overcome."

In an interview, Leal said she wished others could have seen O'Donnell and Carpenter as they took their vows to be "spouses for life."

"There was not a lot of ad-libbing even though Rosie is a comedian. They smiled a lot, they had a lot of tears in their eyes," Leal said. "It was like any people who know they are entering into a solemn commitment."

The couple brought a friend from New York to serve as one of their witnesses and recruited Joe Caruso, the mayor's director of neighborhood services, to be the other.

"It is a great pleasure and privileged to be part of history," Caruso said.

Earlier, on ABC's "Good Morning America," O'Donnell said she decided to marry Carpenter, a former dancer and marketing director at Nickelodeon, during her recent trial in New York over the now-defunct Rosie magazine. During the case, she referred to Carpenter as her wife.

"We applied for spousal privilege and were denied it by the state. As a result, everything that I said to Kelli, every letter that I wrote her, every e-mail, every correspondence and conversation was entered into the record," O'Donnell said. "After the trial, I am now and will forever be a total proponent of gay marriage."

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer will ask the state Supreme Court on Friday whether San Francisco's issuing of same-sex marriage licenses violates state law, which designates marriage as only between heterosexual couples.

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