

# The big debate over 51

## Sides fail to straighten issues out

By TOM WOLFE  
Of the Emerald

The moderator spent the first five minutes outlining procedure for a fair panel discussion on gay rights Thursday night — participants spent the next two hours polarized over what fairness means for gays.

"Homosexuality is not a civil right and it's not a human right," maintained Brent Rich, lawyer representing Volunteer Organization Involved in Community Enactment (VOICE), a group demanding that Eugene remove a clause in its human rights amendment protecting gays in housing and employment.

"The basic reason for this ordinance is to insure equality of treatment for both groups," countered Dominick Vetree of Eugene Citizens for Human Rights (ECHR).

The panel discussion, held at the Eugene Public Library, entertained questions and comments from an intense audience of about 100 people.

"Homosexuality is not normal," asserted Maureen Giebar, also of VOICE. "People lose their jobs and their housing by their own conduct."

"What you're saying is that it's alright to be (gay) as long as you don't have to know it exists...It's musty in that closet and it's dark in that closet and besides that, it's beneath human dignity," said Vetree.

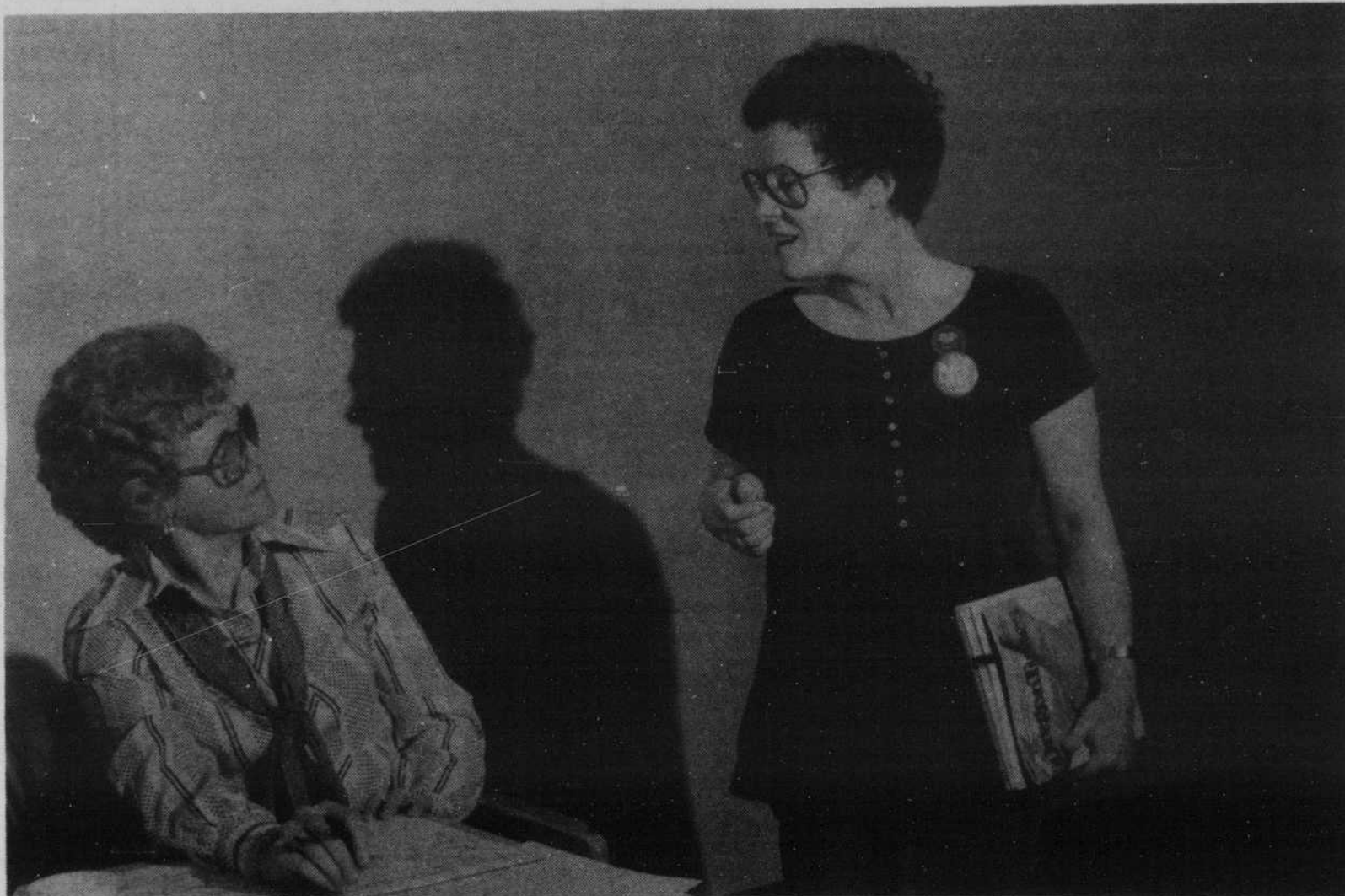
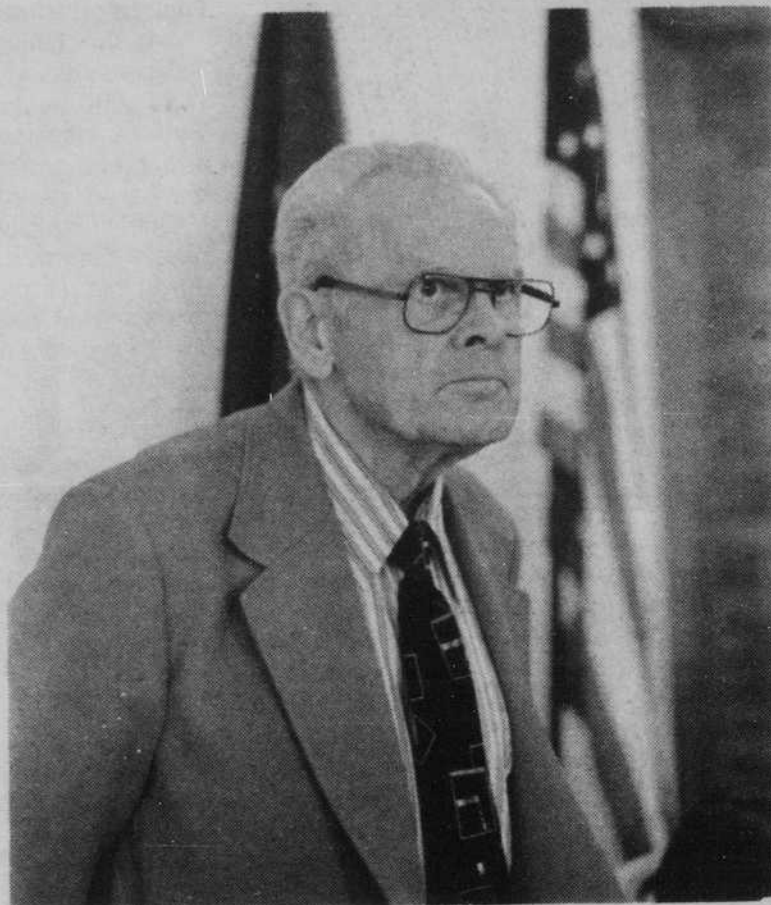
Handclapping from different parts of the room broke out after nearly every panelist's reply as people began disagreeing on everything from statistics to the language of the human rights amendment itself — all fed from the equally divergent points of view from on-lookers.

While panel members agreed discrimination against gays took place in housing and employment, they disagreed both on the extent of the discrimination and its malevolence.

"The threat of discrimination is pernicious," said Vetree. "Gays are forced to live a life of insecurity, always living under the threat of their employers finding out and firing them. Life for gays is a charade."

Geiber countered saying, "We all need jobs, houses etc., but this ordinance will not solve your problem — it's your conduct that might be losing those jobs and houses."

And so discussion continued — those opposed to the ordinance refusing to read the gay rights amendment as a civil or human right and defenders of the ordinance demanding that it be kept as the only available means protection for homosexuals.



Photos by Adrienne Salinger

Marilyn Osgood-Knight, who is against Ballot Measure 51 and Thursday's debate. Audience members (above) participated in questions and applause throughout the two hour banter. Maureen Giebar, a VOICE leader, exchange words at

## Groups plot strategy for campaign utilities

By ANN TRENEMAN  
Of the Emerald

Billboards ask you to vote yes. Buttons ask you to vote no. Proponents and opponents debate the issue on radio and television. Letters to the editor abound on it. Newspapers are peppered with ads. And chances are someone has come to your door within the last few days to talk you into or out of it.

"It" is Measure 51 on the May 23 ballot. The measure, if passed, would repeal the human rights ordinance passed last fall by the Eugene City Council, which prohibits discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation.

The two major groups actively campaigning for and against the measure are the Eugene Citizens for Human Rights (ECHR), which urges a "no" vote that would allow the ordinance to stand, and Volunteer Organization Involved in Community Enactments (VOICE), which urges a "yes" vote to repeal the ordinance.

The campaign has been hot and heavy on both sides, and although each group says it is sticking to the issues, campaign

literature shows the issue is a different one for each.

ECHR literature says the issue is human rights and that the ordinance insures basic rights for homosexuals not protected by law. VOICE literature cites the issue as special privileges for homosexuals and the effect the ordinance will have in the future.

The ordinance is a "mild and innocuous statement," according to ECHR member Mary Ann Johnson, quoting from a Register-Guard editorial endorsing a "no" vote. "It doesn't even specify gay or homosexual in the ordinance," she says.

Larry Dean, VOICE campaign manager, says the issue is about homosexuals and that it would limit the freedom of employers and landlords.

Several Eugene City Council members will hold a press conference Monday at 9:30 a.m. in the McNutt Room of the city council chambers to clarify the ordinance's intention.

"A lot of people are confused," Council member Scott Lieuallen says. "The ordinance is not designed to give anyone any special privileges."

Until May 23, both sides will debate the

issues in public forums and on television and radio. (See related story on Thursday night's debate).

Dean says that early next week VOICE may release some information that could "change the nature of the campaign." When asked what it was, he said he couldn't say but to call back next week.

Both sides say the key to their success lies in the amount of voters that turn out to the polls May 23.

"There's still a large portion of undecided voters out there," Dean says. He says the preliminary results from a VOICE-sponsored survey show more than 25 percent of the voters are still undecided on how to vote. He's sure that with the proper information that block will vote "yes."

"We are registering as many people as possible," Johnson says. "We firmly believe the majority of people agree with us. Their votes are essential."

The University vote is important to ECHR, and voter registration booths have been in the EMU and will continue to be there until next Tuesday. Cars and shuttle buses are planned for May 23 to take students to their polling locations.

Dean says VOICE has 400 active canvassers out, and that the group should soon reach its goal of knocking on every door in Eugene. ECHR has more than 100 canvassers, according to Johnson.

Human rights ordinances similar to Eugene's have been repealed in St. Paul, Minn., Wichita, Kan. and Miami, Fla. The recent repeal in Wichita has bolstered the VOICE camp.

"I'm delighted," Maureen Giebar, a VOICE leader, says. Dean says he doesn't think Wichita's repeal will change the vote count in Eugene, however, because VOICE has been running a different campaign than Wichita's.

"This is Eugene, not St. Paul," Johnson says. "In Eugene discrimination has no place."

Although both groups agreed early in the campaign to keep outside influences out, both have accused the other of bringing them in.

In response to charges that VOICE has been quoting from outside irrelevant sources in its literature, Dean says the group has "quoted very conservatively"

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