

Renters' civil rights deserve high priority

It looks like Portland civil rights legislation may finally expand its menu to include the city's gay and lesbian community along with those experiencing housing discrimination because of their income source.

Portland's City Council held its final meeting yesterday to hash over a recently proposed civil rights ordinance that would prohibit discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations based on sexual orientation and income source.

The final draft of the ordinance, recently signed by Mayor Bud Clark and the four city commissioners, has the support of all five council members.

Those against the proposal say that passage of the anti-discriminatory source-of-income legislation would put landlords at risk by protecting those with unstable incomes.

This group, however, bears no real risk. The provision allows landlords to check potential renters' financial references along with the reliability and amount of income.

So, the landlords can be sure they'll get their money and make sure it's legit. No problem, right? Wrong.

Since outright discrimination based on race, religion, physical disability and age was made illegal years ago, source of income offers a handy way to reject the "wrong" people in a legal way. It only makes sense to deny a single mother, minority family, disabled person or elderly couple housing because their income may consist of disdainful moneys such as welfare, social security or alimony.

Passage of this proposal would tear a convenient facade from landlords, forcing them to rent to those they previously would have denied on shaky ground.

Raising even more of a stink is the official acknowledgment and protection of gay and lesbian rights.

This issue has garnered an increasing amount of venomous reaction from conservative groups everywhere, the most vocal being the Oregon Citizens Alliance. Besides officially opposing the recent proposal, OCA is trying to push an Oregon constitutional amendment formally classifying homosexuality as abnormal.

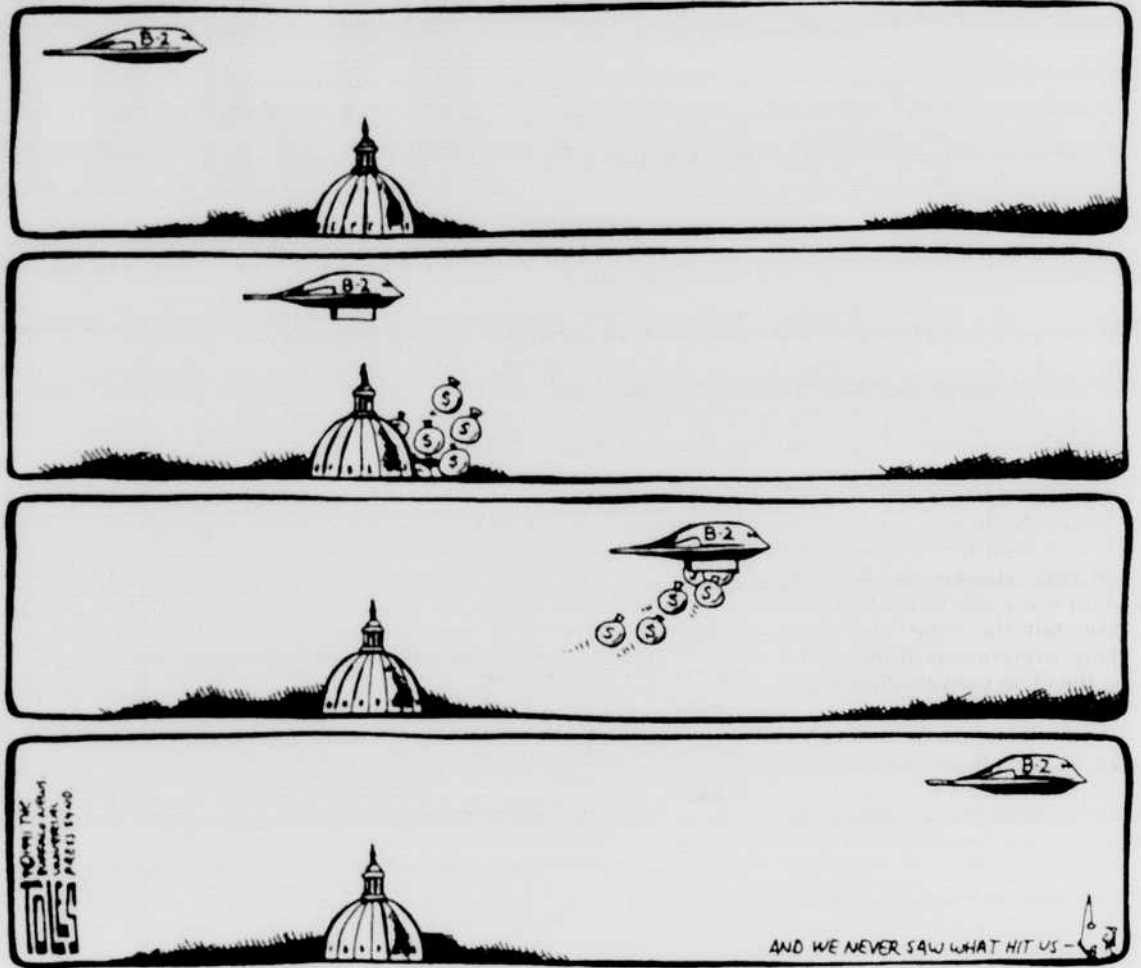
It's good to see the gay and lesbian groups' staying power in the face of such fear-based oppression. They can find strength in other persecuted groups' past and present struggles.

Prejudice against various groups remains an ugly mark on this country's continuing history. But that same history shows changes can be made, if fought for hard enough.

The proposal of this ordinance proves this, but the fight won't be over should it be approved. Minority and women's groups everywhere can attest that passage of civil rights legislation is not enough to gain true equal status in this society.

The reason why: Laws have the power to change peoples' actions, but not the magnitude to change fears and misunderstandings ingrained over generations.

The first step has been taken, however, with this proposal's support. It's a good sign that America may after all be a land of equal opportunity.



LETTERS

Nice try II

Presenting Jamie Bakum's second letter, sung to the tune of Christopher Fassett's letter (*ODE*, Oct. 1) with full credit and apologies to him.

In regarding Fassett's response to Russell McGlothlin's letter (*ODE*, Sept. 27), I can only laugh and say "nice try."

Every time the greeks try and defend themselves, the same examples of hypocritical independents spew forth their stuff.

The "complete hypocrisy" that Fassett speaks about is actually the fact that even after they claim to be so culturally sensitive and so morally superior to the greeks, independents continue to call greeks "frat f-ks" and throw off-campus parties to smoke pot and "score."

Jamie Bakum
Kappa Sigma

True, sometimes a bad apple ruins the independent reputation, but they are responsible for their social image when they put their tie-dyes on that they paid for.

So independents, don't justify your existence with flailing George McGovern-esque speech of self righteousness. Actions speak louder than words, especially when you are wearing your Birkenstocks.

The purpose of this parody was not an attack on Fassett, nor anyone I may have alluded to. The entire point of my letter was to show the idiocy of stereotyping either side. Fassett writes because he took offense at being called a stereotyper, when the letter he writes is full of them. He is as misguided as those who call him a "GDI."

Think about it

Last weekend I attended a memorial service for a woman I'd graduated high school with. She was extremely intelligent and talented, very hardworking and successful, made friends with everyone and always made time for fun.

She'd graduated Whitman College in May and was up there preparing her resume. She and her older brother were driving home when a 40-year-old man from Oregon, driving in a drunken stupor with a blood alcohol level of .25 (in Washington state, .10 is legally intoxicated), drove his truck in the wrong direction on I-90 and hit my friend's car face on, ending her life of only 21 years.

Her brother is in a coma in critical condition. The driver was unharmed and tried to plead innocent. Because of him, an unnecessary death was caused to a very successful and well-respected person, and a few thousand people are suffering from the pain and shock of the situation.

Please don't drink and drive. Since it's the beginning of the year, and parties are back and everybody is psyched, watch out for yourselves, especially for those "other drivers." Next time it could be one of your friends.

Deborah Hirt
Interior architecture

EDITOR'S NOTE

Two cartoons that ran in Wednesday's *Emerald - Weasel's World* and the editorial cartoon at the top of Page 2 - contained material about the homeless and African-Americans, respectively, that some of our readers have found offensive.

One of our staff's priorities is to publish material that is sensitive to our readership and the rest of the community as a whole. Sometimes we fall short of this goal, and we appreciate reader comments and concerns when this happens.

The *Emerald* apologizes for running the cartoons, and regrets any insensitivity we may have displayed.

Christopher Blair
Emerald Editor

