

Republicans wish to dispel view

By John Higgins
Emerald Contributor

The loud presence of the Oregon Citizens Alliance in conservative politics has created an image problem for the Republican Party in Oregon.

Many Republicans would rather focus voter attention on issues such as maintaining a strong military and cutting taxes rather than on stopping gay rights.

For example, the state Republican Party teamed up with state Democrats last fall to oppose the OCA's anti-gay rights Ballot Measure 9.

Like the state party, two Republican groups active at the University are trying to project a more moderate image.

The local chapter of College Republicans copes with the problem by simply avoiding controversial social issues that may divide its broad range of members.

The recently formed Republicans for All Americans hopes to unify the party under more moderate guidelines by attracting people from the center of the political spectrum and opposing extreme conservatives in the party.

College Republicans is a club that has represented the Republican Party on campuses for more than 100 years. Like the state party, the group voted not to endorse Measure 9.

But the group's president, Kim Kerbs, said the vote did not represent an endorsement of civil rights for homosexuals.

"There were people who felt very strongly that a measure like this should be passed," Kerbs said, "but at the same time they felt very strongly that Measure 9 was bad law."

By keeping the debate out of the moral sphere, Kerbs said she hoped to avoid alienating the group's more socially conservative members.

The group did not advertise the vote at recruitment tables, and the issue rarely came up in meetings.

College Republicans increased its membership from four members before the election to about 30, an unusually high number for a campus chapter. Though the group attracted some people because of the stand against Measure 9, most of its members joined after the election.

Kerbs said the group is successful mainly because it has solid organization and increased visibility on campus.

Kerbs has tried to avoid single-issue crusades either for or against gay rights, arguing that the group must represent all Republicans, including those opposed to gay rights.

However, many Republicans believe that strident opposition to gay rights will hurt the growth of the party in the long run.

Last fall, Jeff Osanka, a recent University gradu-

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Jeff Osanka,
founder of Republicans for All Americans

ate, formed Republicans No on 9, which changed its name to Republicans for All Americans after the election.

Throughout the election campaign, his group set up information tables around campus advertising its opposition to Measure 9. He said the group collected about 70 signatures of people interested in joining.

Non-Republicans who came to Osanka's table frequently assumed that all Republicans supported Measure 9 and were surprised to find many did not. He hoped to counter that assumption and persuade conservative Democrats and Independents to become Republicans.

"Only by standing against the radical right can we hope to persuade people," Osanka said. "Many people on this campus are Republicans in philosophy. They simply don't want to associate themselves with some of the national figures they've seen."

Oregon Commentator Publisher Ed Carson was one of the members who joined Republicans for All Americans after seeing Osanka's table before the election.

Carson said he was attracted to Osanka's group because he saw it was possible to be a Republican and support gay rights at the same time.

Although a former Democrat and Independent, after joining Osanka's group, Carson became a Republican.

Carson is not a member of College Republicans, but there is some overlap in membership between the two organizations. Though both groups want to appear more moderate, they disagree about how to reach this goal.

For example, Kerbs questions whether the former Republicans No on 9 should have called themselves Republicans because she considered Measure 9 to be a non-partisan issue.

"It does the same thing as the OCA trying to put out the image that all Republicans are yes on nine," Kerbs said. "It splits the party, and I think it's bad for the health of the party in the state."

Members of Republicans for All Americans like Carson want to help shape the party of the future. They see College Republicans as more of a social club that represents the party as it is.

"They're not trying themselves to be an element of change," Carson said.

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