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Gay rights, taxes up for vote



SALEM (AP) — The divisive debate over gay rights in Oregon takes its next turn today when voters in two cities and four counties decide the fate of measures to protect homosexuals from discrimination.
 Voters also will pass judgment on a statewide measure aimed at making more money available for urban renewal projects.
 Thirteen school districts are asking voters to approve bond levies to pay for school construction and repair and for computers and other equipment.
 In addition, voters in Ashland are deciding whether to skirt the Measure 5 property tax limit's impact on public schools with a city levy to pay for athletics, libraries and other school activities.
 The latest chapter in the gay rights fight is taking place in the cities of Canby and Junction

City and in Douglas, Josephine, Klamath and Linn counties, where voters are deciding on local anti-gay rights ordinances.
 The measures, drawn up by the Oregon Citizens Alliance, would prohibit local governments from passing laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination.
 The OCA sponsored the new measures after its Measure 9 anti-gay rights plan was rejected by Oregon voters last fall. The OCA is working on a new statewide initiative for the 1994 statewide ballot.
 The Portland-based group that's fighting the local measures on Tuesday's ballot sees them as part of the OCA's renewed crusade to block civil rights for homosexuals.
 "The intention of the OCA is to gain some momentum to be able to put another initiative on the Oregon ballot next year as well as in our neighboring states" of Washington and Idaho, said Liz Kaufman, spokeswoman for Support Our Com-

munities.
 OCA Chairman Lon Mabon predicted that the measures would pass in all six places today. He said that represents a growing backlash against what he called an increasingly aggressive political campaign by homosexuals.
 "There's been a mood change on the part of the electorate on this issue," Mabon said. "In a lot of cases, the average citizen wasn't aware of the advancements that homosexuals were making and how far they wanted to go."
 The Legislature sent Measure 1 to the statewide ballot because the Oregon Supreme Court ruled last year that taxes to pay off urban renewal bonds are not exempt from the Measure 5 property tax limit passed by voters in 1990.
 Local officials say the ruling has severely limited a key source of revenue for urban renewal projects around the state.

'Deceased' alum attends reunion

ALBANY (AP) — Members of the Albany High School Class of '43 were saddened when a picture of classmate Helen Ellis Gordon was included among classmates who had died.
 But their sorrow vanished when the Portland woman showed up at a reunion Sunday.
 Gordon's picture was on a table with those of deceased classmates during a reunion banquet at Spring Hill Country Club.
 Classmate Lauralee Reese Clum of Albany questioned whether Gordon was dead, and reached her by telephone.
 "I tried to call and find out if she was dead, but the phone was always busy," Clum said. "I

called this morning and found out that she's alive and kicking. I told her to come to the potluck and wear a white dress."
 Gordon, 67, said she did not receive an invitation to the reunion but read about it in *The Oregonian*. She couldn't attend the banquet, but after receiving Clum's call Gordon and her husband, Kenneth, decided to drive down for the reunion potluck.
 "I just came for the day. It was worth it," said Gordon.
 She said her feelings were not hurt by the mistake.
 "I'm just glad to be alive," she said. "I had cancer in 1988 but I got over that, and I feel I'm pretty lucky. I'm in pretty good

'I tried to call and find out if she was dead, but the phone was always busy.'
 — Lauralee Reese Clum, Albany High, Class of 1943


Ranchers turn grubstake into cash cow

PORRHILL, Idaho (AP) — Dennis and Pam Ponsness are the first to admit their job stinks.
 But raising millions of maggots for bait and pet shops has its rewards for the couple, now savoring the sweet smell of success.
 "Some people thought we were a little nuts when we started," said Dennis Ponsness. "It used to bother me to say I raise maggots, but now it's kind of a kick."
 The biggest drawback is the stench of rotting fish corpses used to fatten up the fly larvae before they are shipped in canisters to retailers across the United States.

"It's gross. I did a lot of gagging before I got used to it," said Pam Ponsness, who still sometimes wears a respirator into the trailer where the fly larvae are hatched.
 The odor of the grubs and the rotting fish permeate clothing.
 "We have to shower twice a day and wear the same overalls that we leave hanging outside," Ponsness said. "It's a smelly operation, but we don't smell any worse than a hog farmer."
 "A lot of our worst and best conversations have been over that table shaking maggots," Ponsness said, referring to the sawdust-sifting process. "If we want privacy, that's the place to

go, because we know no one will come in here."
 Mrs. Ponsness laughs as she remembers her husband running through the house with a vacuum, sucking up flies to start the business. Once, the temperature in the trailer was too high and the maggots became more active, some squirming out of their boxes.
 "I knew we were in trouble when I could see them coming out the door," Pam Ponsness said. "They covered the floor."
 "I always know something went wrong when I hear Dennis outside with the vacuum cleaner."

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