

Cease fire called; truce nowhere near

If you're one of those people who has a fetish for labels, you could call House Bill 3500 a cease fire in the war over gay rights. If the responses from opponents and proponents is taken into account, Armistice Day is still a long way off.

The bill, passed 38-21 Tuesday in the Oregon House, would prevent local governments from enforcing or enacting laws that would single out people on the basis of sexual orientation. The immediate result of the measure — if approved by the Senate — would invalidate all the anti-gay statutes around the state, including those passed just a week ago.

Sponsored by Eugene Rep. Jim Edmundson, HB3500 is a double-edged political sword. Not only would it prevent discrimination against gays and lesbians, but would also keep local governments from awarding "special rights" — the ambiguous, catch-all phrase left over from the Measure 9 hysteria.

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It's obvious Edmundson's plan is a compromise, but not only between Oregon Citizens Alliance supporters and gays and lesbians. HB3500 is a thinly-veiled political twig to the House Republican Caucus, which didn't want to vote on the Senate-passed anti-discrimination measure. In political parlance, that sort of backhanding is called "giving the other guy an out."

Of course, just like other recent, notable compromises, HB3500 has fallen flat.

The OCA, gearing up for Son of Measure 9 in 1994, has already come out against the bill. The reaction provides stunning insight into the political maneuverings of the group. During the Measure 9 campaign, the OCA piously proclaimed it was not seeking discrimination, but just trying to prevent gay and lesbian special rights — something HB3500 guarantees. If there were any voters out there who still bought this idea, the post-passage frothing of the OCA leadership should erase all doubts.

The next battleground will be in the courts; surprise, surprise. Concern over whether the Legislature is usurping power from local governments has judges from around the state warming up their gavels.

Those who take perverse pleasure in watching this pitched battle can take heart; there appears to be little chance that this war will end anytime soon.



COMMENTARY

Rent-increase story obscured facts

By Shanta Kamath and Eileen Traylor

In response to Martin Fisher's article and the editorial from the June 29, *Emerald* we would like to familiarize the authors and their readers with some facts those pieces obscure.

Out of a \$20 monthly increase for Amazon, only \$4 is to be used for maintenance. Yet the second sentence of Fisher's article begins, "The increased rents are due to routine maintenance costs ..." as though this were the primary cause of the 13 percent increase for this year.

Added to last year's \$14 increase, this makes a cumulative 23 percent increase since September of 1992.

The editorial in the same issue said, "A sad, cold fact of inflation is that as time goes by, things will be more expensive." The rate of inflation may be bad, but 23 percent? In fact, the "percent change" column on a detailed Amazon budget contains 23 (out of 33) categories with no detailed increase or decrease under "service and supply expenses." It is clear that maintenance is not the reason for the rent increase.

The "Administrative Assess" column, which refers to University overhead, contains a 427 percent increase. Since 1947, University Housing has had a commitment to provide access to higher education through low-income housing.

As a self-supporting auxiliary, Family Housing was not estab-

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lished to subsidize the University. In fact, eligibility requirements were just revised to formally declare Family Housing to be for lower-income students. After such a move, the rent increase constitutes a special tax for University-wide services to be paid only by the students who meet the low-income guidelines.

An additional \$5 of the \$20 will go to the debt service on the 18th Avenue and Agate Street project. Most people familiar with the project believe these 20 overpriced units fall far short of the criteria for family housing. The bedrooms are 20-square-foot smaller than Amazon's, and the increased floor space of the overall unit is lost in corridors.

Yet if their rents had to service the entire debt, rates would need to be set at \$650 a month for a two-bedroom. This is far out of the range of any family-housing resident, so the University expects residents in existing housing to pay 42 percent of the service to make up for administrative bad planning so they can rent at (not under) market rates. (No wonder the housing department doesn't include that project in its deceptive graphic about the

relationship of the increase to market rates).

These facts should make any one question the use of \$1.4 million in bonds designated for low-income housing to build the apartments at 18th Avenue.

The June 29 editorial states, "At issue is not so much the rent increase ..."

Someone seemed to get the idea it was not the money but where the money was going that is causing the outrage. Well, guess again folks. The issue is very much the rent increase. Perhaps to the editorial writer, \$240 a year does not sound like much, but to a single mother with four children, or a GTF making \$633 a month, it's a lot — an awful lot.

The *Emerald* should be the voice of the students. Well, these students were speechless at the *Emerald*'s ignorance of the complex issues surrounding this rent increase. We do not see jeopardizing Family Housing as the "periphery" of the problem, and we believe we have choices other than "weary Acceptance."

Marlene Drescher, ASUO advocate, and a unanimous vote by the Family Housing Board (including two housing administrators) have gone on the record against the increase. We hope the *Emerald* will be more inclined to dig a little deeper and check the facts the next time it is confronted with these issues.

Eileen Traylor and Shanta Kamath are residents of Family Housing.

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