

# Judge's widow wants law to allow assisted suicide



SALEM (AP) — The widow of a Multnomah County judge who died after a painful battle with cancer has become a leading volunteer for a campaign to allow physicians to help terminally ill patients commit suicide.

Edythe Steinbock, 63, stuffs envelopes and performs other tasks at the "Oregon Right to Die" headquarters in Portland in hopes of getting the measure on the statewide ballot in November.

"I don't care what jobs I do," Steinbock says. "I just want this to pass."

Steinbock wasn't always active in the "death with dignity" movement.

Up until recent years, she focused her attention on raising two daughters with her husband, now-deceased Circuit Judge Irv Steinbock, and on her job as a buyer for Nordstrom's department store.

Edythe Steinbock's life changed forever in 1992, when her husband of 42 years was diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the esophagus, which quickly spread to his liver.

Irv Steinbock died within six months, but not before going through an excruciating illness that made him decide to end

his own life with a fatal dose of prescription drugs. However, he died in a hospital the night before he had planned to go home to commit suicide.

Still, Edythe Steinbock says the experience convinced her to work for passage of the measure to allow physicians to prescribe medication for terminally ill people that could end the patient's life.

"If a person does not want to suffer, then he should be able to make that decision for himself," she says.

The Oregon Supreme Court hasn't approved a ballot title for the plan, meaning that backers can't begin collecting signatures yet to earn a spot on the November general election ballot.

However, both sides agree there's a lot of interest in the issue and that the measure's proponents won't have much problem rounding up the 66,771 signatures they need once a ballot title is approved.

It promises to be an emotional, high-visibility campaign.

Spearheading the opposition is the Coalition for Compassionate Care, an organization that includes the Catholic Church and Oregon Right to Life, among others.

Lynda Harrington, executive director of Right to Life, says while her group is

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Edythe Steinbock,  
— widow

known mainly for its battle against abortion, it is ready to fight a measure it believes would be a step toward euthanasia, or mercy killing.

Current law does not make it illegal for individuals to commit suicide or attempt to kill themselves, she noted.

"But allowing one class of individuals, that is, physicians, to help kill a patient crosses a significant moral line in our society," Harrington says. "We think the abortion issue could pale in comparison with the euthanasia issue."

Geoff Sugerman, campaign director for the suicide measure, rejects the idea that the measure is a step toward euthanasia.

The measure would allow doctors to prescribe life-ending medication only

when a patient requests it, and only in cases when a patient is diagnosed as having less than six months to live, Sugerman said.

"Why should we force people to die in an inhumane way?" he says. "Is it better to have someone shoot themselves in the head?"

Pat McCormick, campaign spokesman for the opponents, says that while Edythe Steinbock's story is heart-rending, there are many equally compelling stories of people who "die with dignity" without resorting to suicide.

"The idea that taking a fatal dose of medication is somehow more dignified than dying naturally is an interesting assumption, but I don't think it's true," McCormick says.

Steinbock considers that an academic argument and says she's going to do everything she can to see that the ballot measure passes in November.

"Until you see someone you love go through this, you will never understand the emotion that goes with it," she says. "I just don't want anyone else to suffer needlessly. If I can help one person, one family, this will be worth doing."

## UNIDIVERSITY

You are invited to attend a public forum to discuss the ACMC's report to the University Assembly (March 8 minutes) and the proposed legislation which will be introduced at the April assembly meeting.

**When?** Thursday, March 31 from 12-2pm

**Where?** Walnut Room, EMU (Across from the Post Office)

Those needing accommodations for a disability should call 346-3013

Please bring ideas, comments, and criticisms.



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## Skinhead kills girl in home

(AP) — A skinhead gang member has been charged with manslaughter after his twin brother's girlfriend was killed with a shot to the chest from a .357-caliber Magnum handgun.

Tiffany Elizabeth Webber, 20, of Eugene, died at a hospital after she was shot Saturday at the home of Geoffrey Wayne Gerg and Daniel James Gerg.

Geoffrey Gerg, 19, was charged with first-degree manslaughter.

His twin, Daniel, faces an unrelated charge of unlawful possession of a short-barreled .22-caliber rifle, investigators said.

The brothers are listed as skinheads on a state police computer network that tracks known gang members, Lane County District Attorney Doug Harclerod said Sunday.

State police investigators recovered at least a dozen firearms — including a semiautomatic rifle — from the home the brothers shared with their mother and Webber, Harclerod said.

Police later discovered that the handgun used in the shooting was listed as stolen from Springfield, he said.

Bail was set at \$50,000 for Geoffrey Gerg and \$30,000 for Daniel Gerg.

The men initially said the shooting was an accident, state police said.

Harclerod declined to describe the events leading up to the shooting, but said evidence indicates that the .357-caliber Magnum had been unloaded, then was subsequently loaded by someone other than Geoffrey Gerg.

"When Tiffany came into the room, he pointed the firearm at her and pulled the trigger," Harclerod said.

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