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Perspectives

Don't talk about this editorial in school!

Another measure dealing with homosexuality has been put on the ballot by the Oregon Citizen's Alliance

If the Oregon Citizen's Alliance and the Christian Coalition have their way, this November you will be asked whether public schools can condone or support homosexuality.

Or you might be deciding whether public schools can allow free speech.

Then again, you might be voting on whether individual lifestyles are a matter for the government to legislate.

Depending on how you frame the issue, you might be voting on all of these. Because right now backers are stepping up efforts to qualify a ballot measure for the November election that would prohibit any discussion in Oregon schools that "encourages, promotes or sanctions" homosexuality.

While OCA President Lon Mabon has the right to bring the matter to voters' attention, voters should turn this possible ballot measure down. Banning any discussion that "encourages, promotes or sanctions" homosexuality in public schools attacks free speech, ignores underlying issues of adolescent development and does not promote the tolerance that keeps societies functioning.

There's no denying it's a hot issue. All over the country, Americans are figuring out ways to frame the sensitive issues of homosexuality. Can homosexuals marry? Can they adopt? Can they be protected under the law like other minorities? Do they have special rights?

And for all the national discussion, Oregon has had its share. The OCA has put other ballot measures to Oregonians in the 1990s limiting the rights of homosexuals. One, in 1992, asked the Oregon state government to discourage homosexuality. Another, in 1994, asked Oregonians basi-

cally the same question only in softer language.

Both were defeated (56 percent "no" in 1992, and 52 percent "no" in 1994). But it seems that the OCA hasn't got the message yet: Oregonians don't want the government to legislate such personal morality.

This time the stakes are perhaps even higher. Public schools, while less open than universities and colleges, are unique and special places to learn about other people, oneself, society and culture — along with history, math and geography. For public schools to have limits on what kind of discussions can take place is dangerous, especially when one kind of discussion in particular is singled out for prohibition.

The OCA and the Christian Coalition are worried that being sensitive to homosexuals and bisexuals in public schools sends the message that being gay is a good way of life. Well, the flipside to that is that banning it would express that homosexuality is a bad way of life — and public schools are not supposed to decide that for anyone.

Moreover, the topics of sex, gender and character — all of which encompass certain aspects of homosexuality and bisexuality — come to light every day in public schools. Whom someone asks on a date, whom someone's parent is living with, whom someone likes as a celebrity role model — these subjects are crucial to teenage living. To shut one out damages the development of young adults and ignores the reality that such subjects will be discussed anyway.

With the emotional problems facing teenagers today, it would be a shame for guidance counselors to have to turn away a student who is struggling with sexual issues just because the law tells counselors they can't be supportive or even "sanction" any feelings.

There is irony in that the backers of the measure want private matters out of public schools, but they are fine with discussions of morality and sexuality that fit their definition of normal and acceptable. The government should leave personal matters alone. If anything, the government and schools should be accepting of all types of people, because all types of people make up the very fabric of this country.

You can't ignore a whole segment of the population. And you can't hide reality.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

QUOTED

"I think the ethical approach is to give him one last chance. He has given me his word that he will take extraordinary steps to change behavior."

— Indiana University President Myles Brand on not firing basketball head coach Bobby Knight following a month-long investigation into charges of misconduct toward players and staff. ESPN.com, May 15.

"It was only about a week ago that it started to hit me that I was testing for Anakin ... Darth Vader! It's just been sort of hard to grasp."

— Little-known 19-year-old Canadian actor Hayden Christensen on getting the much ballyhooed part of Anakin Skywalker in George Lucas' upcoming Star Wars movies. CNN.com, May 12.

"While this report established a record of the events of April 20, it cannot answer the most fundamental question — why."

— Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone on his department's minute-by-minute account of the Columbine High School shootings, which was released Monday. The Associated Press, May 15.

"I think pageants like Miss Universe give us young women a platform to foray in the fields that we want to and forge ahead, be it entrepreneurship, be it the armed forces, be it politics."

— New Miss Universe Lara Dutta, who was crowned Saturday May 13, on the benefits of the competition. ABCNews.com, May 13.



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

Letters to the editor

Expose the night, Emerald

I would like to respond to your recent editorial regarding sexual assault and the upcoming event, "Take Back the Night" (ODE, May 12). I appreciate your intent to address the issue but question your solution. Rather than create a slick new anti-rape campaign, why not take a look at the advertising that already exists? Take, for example, the Scandal's ad with the spiked heel and the heading, "Weekend Warrior." Or the recent Playboy bunny ad reading, "You must have done something right. She's coming again." Ads like these perpetuate the myths of woman as a sexual commodity and relationships as a battleground and a conquest.

One way to change the rape culture is to take responsibility for the role we play in preserving the myths that support it. You can choose to run ads that respect the intrinsic worth of all human beings or you can maintain the status quo. The Emerald already has the power and the resources to promote healthy relationships. Why not use it?

As for the suggestion that we develop a

program that gets attention like the Genocide Awareness Project, no cause warrants the manipulation and lack of compassion that characterized that event. There are better ways to create social change. There are empowering, community-building ways to change our world. The "Take Back the Night" march is one of them.

If you are truly passionate about this issue, we hope you will join us May 18 as we march through the streets of Eugene, honoring survivors and demanding an end to violence.

Lori Brown
ASUO Women's Center

WRC choices charged campus

I experienced renewed optimism and pride in my community as I recently watched students, University President Dave Frohnmayer and all involved in the decision to join the Worker Rights Consortium.

In one fell swoop, Frohnmayer and other University officials did more to invigorate the educational climate at the University than they can imagine. They delivered the message that the end doesn't justify the means, and they put actions to the rhetoric. This is what I want youth to learn. I want

them to know that the adults around them value principles and moral choices; that the adults around them value principles and morals over money; that we understand on some level why many youths today are angry.

Nike CEO Phil Knight has been generous to the University in the past, but he showed his true colors in withdrawing funds. He appears to be only interested in contributing to educational opportunities for students so long as the University's politics match his own. This is not the sort of price tag that an educational institution should ever accept.

I am pleased with the clear focus Knight and other financial "benefactors" have provided for the long-standing issue of academic freedom and private donations to universities.

Unlike supporters typically portrayed in local media, I am a professional woman working in this community. I pay taxes willingly and live a mainstream lifestyle. I am also one of many people in Eugene who support active, political discourse and public demonstrations, as well as University presidents and officials saying no to donations with strings attached.

Karin Thompson
Eugene resident

CORRECTION

The article "Breslow, Magnier envision energetic executive," (ODE May 16) unclearly paraphrased ASUO President-elect Jay Breslow's statements regarding generating interest in the ASUO next year.

Many ASUO campaigns, such as voter registration, are political, and Breslow and Vice President-elect Holly Magnier are planning fun ways to generate student interest.

The Emerald regrets this unclear paraphrase.