

Measure 9: Sanctioning bigotry in schools

The Oregon Citizens Alliance is trying to rip Oregon apart again. The group's 1992 anti-gay measure, ironically also titled Measure 9, created a firestorm across the state and subjected homosexuals to harassment, death threats and physical abuse. The OCA's latest Measure 9, despite the propaganda, does not protect children from the "homosexual agenda" and does not improve schools. What it does is far more dangerous to children: It institutionalizes bigotry and silence.

Measure 9 purports to make schools better by limiting what can be taught. The measure's content holds that "sexual orientation, as it relates to homosexuality and bisexuality, is a divisive subject matter not necessary to the instruction of students in public schools."

But in order to combat sexually transmitted diseases and provide counseling to students seeking advice from impartial professionals, these subjects need to be allowed

in schools. And how would it affect regular curriculum? If a student asked about homosexuality during history class, could a teacher answer?

Measure 9 contains vague wording in order to be confusing. The language of the measure also states "homosexuality and bisexuality shall not be presented in a public school in a manner which encourages, promotes or sanctions such behaviors." What, exactly, is sanctioning homosexuality? Do those words mean that unless you say homosexuality is unnatural and perverse, you're breaking the law? That's only one viewpoint. The measure demands sanctions for grade schools and community colleges if they break the law, but it doesn't specify what those sanctions are.

No one knows exactly what the ramifications of Measure 9 are, and that's the OCA's goal. Make everyone afraid, and they'll shut their mouths.

This new, improved Measure 9 came about because six teachers in Portland protested the school district's sexual diversity efforts and argued that the district was neglecting to present the viewpoints of those opposed to homosexuality. Maybe they're right.

A good teacher, we would hope, would present all of the views of the subject they're teaching. In a discussion of sexuality, students should be told that some people in society see homosexuality as a natural, acceptable orientation. And students should be told that some people see homosexuality as abnormal and perverse. Reading should include information on "reparative therapy," which claims to be able to make homosexuals into heterosexuals, as well as essays from the many homosexuals who know that their sexual and romantic attraction has never been a choice.

Education, like journalism, should be about presenting the

many sides of an issue. But teachers must be able to present information; it is unacceptable in a public school to create a climate where teachers are afraid to speak out against harassment of homosexual students because they might be accused of "sanctioning" the students' orientation. That would be uncivil and unfair.

Regardless of one's opinions about homosexuality, we live in the same society and we must treat other humans with basic dignity. That means that in a government-funded situation, we need to err on the side of tolerance. Lon Mabon is certainly welcome (and philosopher John Stuart Mill argued it was everyone's public duty) to speak publicly about his feelings that homosexuality is unnatural. He's free to shun homosexuals and tell his friends to do the same.

There's a difference, however, when we codify into law any particular group's controversial position. Ideally, the laws of the United States protect people and property

from others. Laws are not supposed to be a forum for carrying out a personal vendetta. The Oregon Citizens Alliance has been trying to do exactly that for years.

Once again, we must all step up and demand that Oregon remain free and open to dialogue. Measure 9 would stifle dialogue, and because of its confusing wording, the law would scare teachers and school counselors into being silent about sexuality. That isn't education or freedom.

If Measure 9 passes, an editorial such as this one could cause a public school to lose state funding, just for having the audacity to write openly about homosexuality. No newspaper wants to lose that right and the Emerald certainly doesn't want to see the citizens of Oregon lose that right. Vote no on Measure 9.

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

Televised debates pander to the lowest common denominator



CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PAT PAYNE

Debates used to be a big thing in this country. In Lincoln's day, the whole town would gather in the square for hours to listen to the candidates speak on the issues of the day. People back then obviously were either very passionate about politics or had no lives to speak of, because each speech would routinely go on for an hour. Yet the audiences for these debates got a glimpse of the candidates as they were. The verbal fireworks of the series of Illinois debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas were legendary.

Now, it's a five-second sound bite written up by a spin doctor in a vain attempt to keep the public from switching to a re-run of "Charlie's Angels." The Fox Network was so confident of a ratings windfall, they scheduled the two-hour premiere of their highly-hyped new series right against the Bush-Gore debates, which were showing on the other three major networks.

That is the sad state of both the electorate and the candidates: A public that can't be bothered with judging who should run the country for the next four years and candidates so stage-managed and rehearsed, their heads would explode if they were sideswiped with an unexpected question.

During last month's Rick Lazio-Hillary Clinton senatorial debate in Buffalo, N.Y., the most noteworthy things were the attacks. Hillary, in each of her rebuttals, wove in the irrelevant point that Lazio has served as Deputy Whip

under Speaker Newt Gingrich. Lazio countered with almost-as-irrelevant allusions to President Bill Clinton's sex scandal. He also won the prize for the most visually stunning moment in the debate: Leaving his podium to confront Hillary with a paper pledge not to use "soft money" in her campaign. In short, debates are nothing but rehashes of political ads writ large.

Television has a large part to do with the declining stature of the debates. The fall of 1960 marked the first televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Almost immediately, it was their looks that counted, rather than their policies. Kennedy's youthful looks and ease in front of the camera were in sharp contrast to Nixon's sweaty and pallid visage.

Ronald Reagan, the movie-star-turned-politician, was a master of the "new" debate. We all remember his quips on camera: "I know my opponent has been turning age into an issue. I just want to say that I'll try not to use his youth and inexperience against him." And "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" are just two of his famous quotes from debates. The Great Communicator did much to turn debating from a contest of ideas into a political MTV — style over substance. Just as video killed the radio star, television killed the rational debate.

TV has some of the blame. However, they're no longer dealing with people coming to a town square of their own free will: Candidates have to compete with a cornucopia of other choices. They want to get their message out to the largest number of people. And that means speaking to the lowest common denominator to prevent them from clicking channels.

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Letters to the editor

In regards to "Gore environmental adviser speaks on campus" in the Sept. 29 ODE, I would like to commend how you handled the "unexpected confrontation with a large, dead fish."

That article was understandably dedicated to the zealous Ralph Nader supporters.

While not as outspoken, the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group had a strong presence and presented a poster with the signed names of more than 250 University students to McGinty, and she signed it in front of the 200 students that packed the Ben Linder Room. Addressed to President Clinton, the message reads:

"From the mighty redwoods of California to the misty pines of North Carolina, our National

Forests are a vital part of our country's heritage. Please issue a final roadless policy that provides immediate and lasting protection for all our National Forest roadless areas of at least 1,000 acres, including those of the Tongass coastal rain forest in Alaska — without loopholes, exemptions or waivers. The policy should immediately and permanently halt road building and timber sales, along with mining, off-road vehicle use, and other destructive activities." In signing this poster, McGinty demonstrated her support for a landmark administrative policy.

The next few months are a critically important time for the public to urge the Clinton administration and the Forest Service to enact a strong final policy with no exceptions before Clinton leaves office.

Come by the University Book-

store on Tuesday. OSPIRG will be there with a 10-foot-tall Smokey the Bear.

Brad Schallert
 Head OSPIRG Media Intern

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