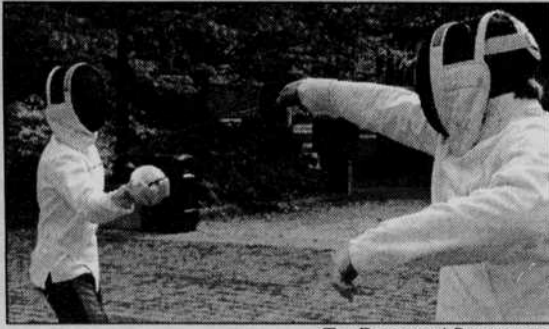


EN GARDE



Tuesday afternoon, junior Robert Teel and senior Evan Cooley fence to attract more students to the Fencing Club and demonstrate the sport.

TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

Measure 36: Students may decide outcome

Continued from page 1

measure that I thought precluded that," he said.

If the measure passes, Clark said it would "effectively moot about three-fourths" of the current case before the Supreme Court, although it would not change the status of the marriage licenses already issued to same-sex couples.

Vetri said the amendment leaves unresolved the question of the nearly 3,000 gay couples whose marriages were upheld by the appeals court, and the court will have to decide how to rule on the validity of those existing marriages.

"We have a really sort of bizarre situation where the court could conceivably say those 3,000 are declared married but no other couples can get married after (Measure) 36," Vetri said, adding that opponents will challenge the measure on constitutional grounds if it passes.

Some advocates also say same-sex marriage, if Measure 36 doesn't pass, would open the door to other forms of unions.

"The argument raised in the Supreme Court is not that the sky is going to fall and that we will be overwhelmed by polygamy ... " Clark said. "The question is: Where do you draw the line legally?"

Clark said it won't be legally feasible to say that any two people can marry but not allow three people to marry or allow people who are closer than cousins to marry.

"There can't be a line," he said. "The reasoning that would apply to same sex couples ... would apply to a number of other concepts of marriage."

Vetri disagreed, calling it "crazy" that same-sex marriage would open the door for polygamy.

"By that theory, we should never take a step forward on anything," he said. "There's no logic behind that slippery slope-type argument."

Michael White, executive director of the Defense of Marriage Coalition, said the campaign for the measure is not designed to reflect negatively on any family arrangement, including same-sex marriage, but is meant to uphold the traditional definition of marriage, which is key to supporting children.

"The issue for us is that kids do best and deserve the opportunity to live in a household with both their mother and their father and we think marriage contributes to that," he said.

White added that legalizing same-sex marriage will affect what children learn about marriage in classrooms.

Elise Self, co-chairperson of the Eugene chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, agreed that families are important, but said members of same-sex marriages can be just as good as heterosexual parents.

"Lots of different family situations can be good homes," she said.

Self, who said she has a straight son and a lesbian daughter, said she worries about the message Measure 36 sends to children of existing same-sex relationships.

"They hear that not only are their parents not OK and there's something wrong with their parents, but that their household is doing wrong," she said. "It's very painful to live in a society where you have to fight so hard for your rights."

Self also said the measure "will hurt real Oregon families" by limiting gay couples' access to medical treatment and benefits, lifesaving medical treatment decisions and inheritance rights.

White said opinions vary among campaign members about civil unions for same-sex couples. He said supporters are "sympathetic and understanding" of people in same-sex marriages that want benefits, such as the right to hospital visitation, but that supporters of same-sex marriage

tried to force change.

"If this thing had started in the legislature, let's say as civil-union legislation, rather than in the courtrooms trying to change marriage, our coalition might not exist," he said.

Self added that the measure would legitimize discrimination against gays.

"I have lived in Oregon for over 30 years and I can't believe something is going into the constitution that would treat my two children differently," she said. "This is our constitution, and it's meant to protect people, and putting this in the constitution is discrimination, no matter what they say."

Spokeswoman for the Yes on 36 campaign Rebekah Kassell said people are looking to the Oregon measure because it is a closer race than in other states. She added that students, many of whom she said support same-sex marriage, will help determine the measure's success.

"It may very well be young voters who decide this issue in the election," she said.

However, in reference to the Yes on 36 campaign, White said weekly polling has revealed that "support from young people is surprisingly strong."

"Young people may be a lot more accepting of homosexuality, but so far what we're finding is that they still appreciate the value of marriage," he said. "That's something that's been pretty encouraging to us."

White said his organization is optimistic about the measure's success because "every Oregonian, regardless of how bad their family life may have been, had a mom and a dad, even if they didn't live with them or know them."

"It's that kind of personal stuff that gets right to the core for a lot of people. They can't imagine life any other way," he said.

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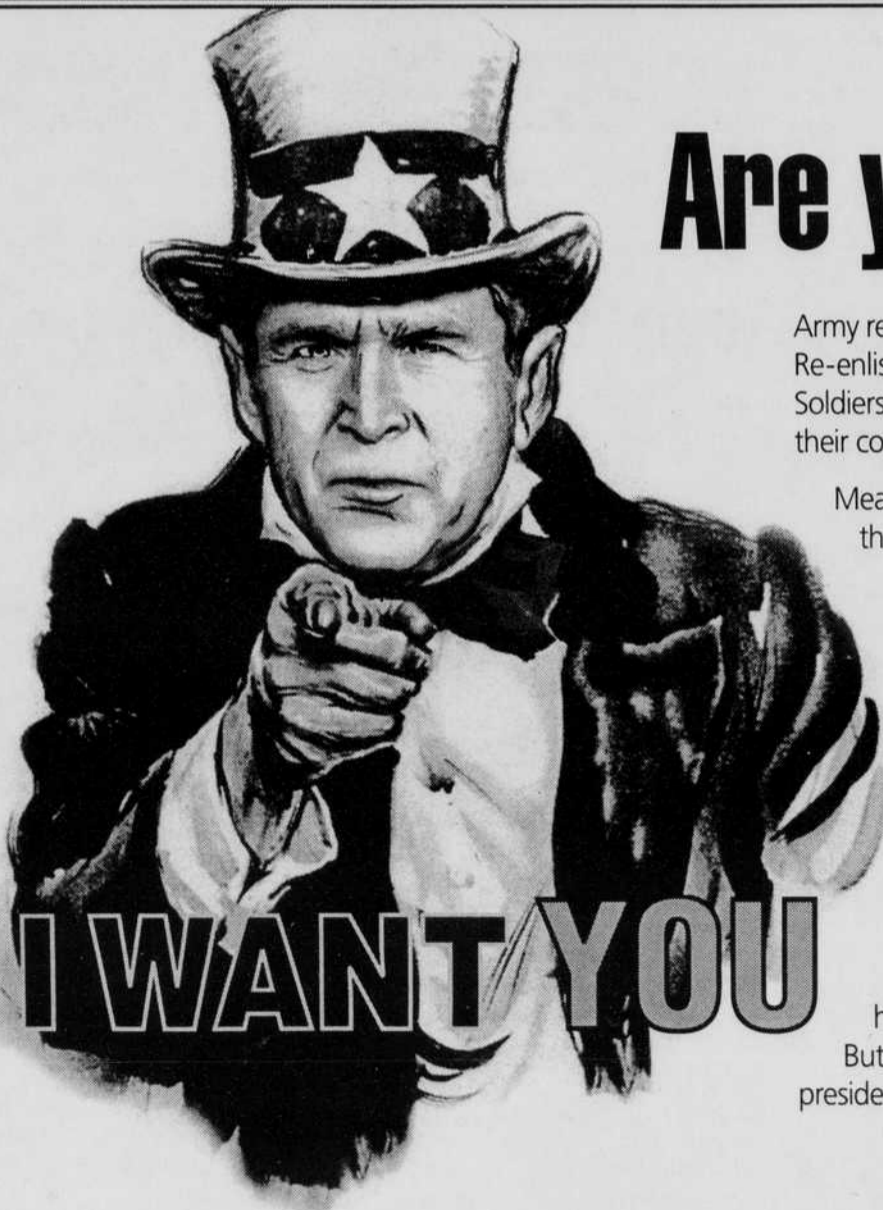
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