

Homophobia 101

Attacking homophobia at its source, Billy Russo's campaign for a school board seat heads into the home stretch.

B Y B I L L Y R U S S O

Last week I spent a *fruitful* afternoon collecting signatures for a petition to get my name on the ballot for the Winston-Dillard school board election this spring. I spent most of my time standing in front of Drive-n-Save in Winston, asking total strangers if they would sign my petition. Only two people asked about my candidacy — a woman in her forties, and a younger man. The woman signed, the man refused. No one was rude to me, and only one young man tried to sell me his version of Jesus.



The Roseburg Report

It was one of the first warm sunny days of the year. And as I wandered around the parking lot hawking my good name, I wondered how I was going to pull this off. I believe that this candidacy is important. And I'm concerned that the local homophobes are going to sabotage my efforts.

Douglas County is home to a loosely knit coalition of churches that oppose homosexuality. I call them the Gang of 20. They came into existence during the controversy over MCC Roseburg's use of the chapel at the First United Methodist Church during the summer of 1984.

Later that fall, at the beginning of the holiday season, the Gang of 20 announced a day of prayer and fasting to address the issue of homosexuality. I visited three of the churches in my area and introduced the ministers to Homophobia 101. They

weren't prepared to deal with me. And at least one of the churches withdrew from the coalition after their encounter with me. They were very unorganized. The only thing that they agreed on is their unnatural fear of the gay and lesbian community. And with the exception of occasional sermons, they have been silent since.

The bigot Joe Lutz fanned — blew? — the ashes back to life during the Republican primary last spring. He waged a sleazy campaign by exploiting the uninformed and the intellectually lazy with misinformation about our lifestyles.

On the other hand the local media has demonstrated a high degree of integrity. Every time the *News-Review* printed a homophobic news item or ad, I met with the appropriate editor and called him (they were always men) to task. And to their credit, they have never repeated the same mistake. I believe that I will be treated as fairly as can be expected (considering that this is a fiercely heterosexual society).

There is, however, a popular religionist radio station broadcasting from Winston. I have listened to it constantly since announcing my candidacy, and have been waiting for them to attack me. And as soon as they do, I will be at their door asking for equal time.

I have a fair chance of winning this election. And, more importantly, I have something to offer my community. I hope to establish a number of task forces to deal with important community issues. The group process is an effective way for a community to address a wide spectrum of social and economic concerns. I can facilitate that process.

I know that my gayness will be an obstacle for many of the voters. The homophobic religionists will use it to cloud every issue I raise. I have the skills to expose their bigotry. And I have the energy to deal with them. I don't, however, have the resources that they have. I need to raise enough money for at least one bulk mailing to the 5,000 households in this school district. I also want to purchase advertising in the local newspaper.

I need to raise \$1,200 or more. I need your help. Please make a contribution to my campaign fund. Make your checks payable to: Elect Billy Russo, P.O. Box 942, Dillard, OR 97432

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