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John Baker and new leadership

*Developments in the Right to Privacy PAC reveal
a desire to involve more people, and to work more
closely with community groups.*

B Y W. C. M c R A E

John Baker was elected chair of the Right to Privacy Political Action Committee last month, the eighth largest political fund-raising group in Oregon. Baker, a Portland native, says he has always been involved in politics. He first began in the local campaigns for John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s, and later became involved in union politics. After serving in the military, he returned to Portland and helped start the Portland Town Council (PTC), the groundbreaking gay activist group which provided community leadership during the 1970s and that largely defined the Oregon gay movement. Baker left the PTC to co-chair the PTC Foundation, now Phoenix Rising. Baker was a founder of the Right to Privacy PAC in 1981, and has remained a member of its board.

As chair, Baker stresses that he is more organizational in his approach to the job than his predecessor, Keeston Lowery. “I’m not willing to stay up till 2 a.m. every night,” says Baker. More of the activities will be delegated to other board members and committees.

Baker will use the broadened focus to increase the scope of the PAC’s activities. The primary purpose of the PAC will remain raising money. “Money enables visibility,” says Baker, “and it lets others know how concerned we are about our rights.” However, Baker admits that fundraising through the annual Lucille Hart Dinner “is getting so easy.” The PAC will continue to sponsor fundraising events around politicians, as it did this year for Rep. Les AuCoin and candidates Paulus and Goldschmidt.

Baker also wishes to enlarge the scope of the PAC beyond mere fund raising. The PAC can maintain ties to elected officials and serve to educate them further on community issues and concerns. The PAC can also help educate the community on political issues: Baker suggests inaugurating monthly breakfast meetings with politicians as a forum for involving people in the political process. Gays and lesbians can also engage in voter registration drives.

During his tenure, Baker says the PAC will address AIDS issues more fully, in part by strengthening ties between the PAC and the Cascade AIDS Project. (Baker is also on the board of CAP.)

Baker says he’s “not interested in a better job politically,” and considers politics almost as a hobby. He intends that the PAC, under his leadership, will become involved in more issues, and at the same time have responsibility for this growth of activity shared among the board and committee members.

The Right to Privacy PAC is going through restructuring, according to board member L.C. Hansen. Newly-elected Chair John Baker and the board are working to “get more people involved, and get more productivity.” The board has recently been looking at the group’s by-laws to determine how best to engineer these changes.

Hansen says that board members now are going to be given specific responsibilities. Before, board positions entailed “nebulous” duties, which left most responsibility to the chair and the treasurer. The PAC is also going to establish two major committees. The Political Affairs Committee will work up candidate questionnaires, interview candidates, gather subjective information, and network with other political organizations. The Fund-raising Committee will continue to organize the Lucille Hart Dinner, and sponsor other fund-raisers around political figures or social issues.

Another goal for the PAC is to convene meetings to increase communication between groups and individuals. “The PAC’s goal is to follow the leadership of other gay groups in their specific areas. We need good communication between all activists. This is an important year for gay rights,” says Hansen. “We can’t let the conservative movement stifle us.”

Greater involvement, however, is the focus of the changes. Hansen stresses that committee positions are open to non-board members, and that anyone interested should contact the board. There will also be several new positions open on the board itself after adoption of the new by-laws. •

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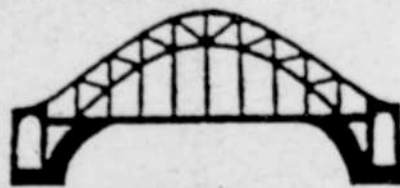
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C O M M E N T A R Y

Continued from page 3

desperation of those shaking in closets and the gratuitous punishment that leads so many of our brothers and sisters to walk crippled through life as emotionally disturbed, mentally tormented, and alcoholic.

More and more of us have the courage and self-respect to recognize that if we do not rock the boat we will be drowned. The injustices we confront cannot be discounted any longer by feelings that somehow we deserve them, that our struggle for justice is not as valid as others.

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