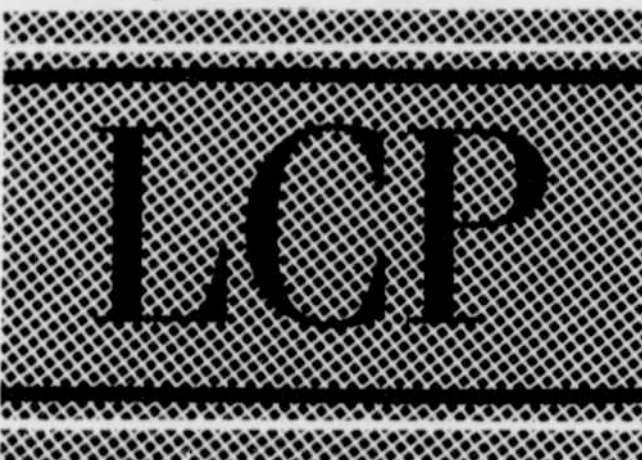


Community activist seeks House seat

I am a totally supportive ally, and I want to work with the community to figure out what initiatives, what legislation, what strategies are needed to pass gay rights

BY KELLY MASEK

Beverly Stein, a community activist of long standing, is seeking to represent District 14 in the Oregon House of Representatives. Stein aims to continue her work as a community activist. The candidate worked for former Portland city commissioner Margaret Strachan as liaison to the Bureau of Human Resources, and in 1984 managed Herb Cawthorne's campaign for the city council.



Beverly, as a civil rights activist, do you believe in the necessity of a gay rights bill, or do you think gays and lesbians are asking for "special rights"? Would you support and fight for a gay rights bill in the House of Representatives?

I think discrimination against any group is not acceptable. I believe no one should have to work in a situation or be worried about their housing because they are going to be discrimi-

nated against. The [gay] civil rights bill is not affirmative action, and people who equate it with affirmative action, for instance, are using that as a ruse, a smoke screen, to avoid the real issue. Civil rights protect people's right not to be discriminated against, and that is absolutely the bottom line.

I'm not only going to support gay civil rights, I'm going to be out front on it. I will be a leader on this issue. I think it's very important not only to have people who will vote, but who will also talk to others about voting.

What message do you have for your gay and lesbian constituents? What do you want them to know about you?

I want the community to know I am an ally for their efforts. I think I've proven myself to be an ally through the Right to Privacy PAC endorsement.

How will you promote and support gay and lesbian interests in the House?

My interest is in helping groups of people become more involved in the government process, to feel hopeful and powerful. What I want to do is work with groups, I don't want to do for them. I want to be part of the strategy discussions about how to approach an issue, such as the gay rights issue. This is a strategic issue, and I don't know what the best strategy is. I would want to work with people to try to find out what makes sense. Do you force a floor vote or do



Beverly Stein

you wait until you are sure of the votes because of those closet cases who are in delicate positions? If you don't have the votes, they won't vote for you anyway, but this is all strategy. My message is that I am a totally supportive ally, and I want to work with the community to figure out what initiatives, what legislation, what strategies are needed to pass gay rights.

What advice do you have for gay and lesbian activists as they struggle to gain power and recognition in mainstream politics?

I think they've been doing a great job! They've gotten involved in the electoral process, created a political-action committee, raised lots of money. The Right to Privacy PAC is one of the largest in the state. These are all important steps. My general message is to engage in coalition work, which I consider an important way to push forward an agenda for any group. Look for the links with other groups and agree to work together on common issues. It is necessary to build those bridges between groups because no one group is going to succeed — to meet their total hopes — without the support of other groups. But I don't want one group to succeed at the expense of another. I want groups to understand each other's issues. Gays and lesbians need to think about other groups, and now, for example, with AIDS they have the opportunity to do that as they deal with human-services budgets. I hope gay and lesbian groups take an interest in other human-services issues and build a coalition. We need to be moving toward this.

What difficulties would gays and lesbians experience working with other groups?

Homophobia! But you need to get in there and meet people on a personal basis. One thing you can't expect is for everyone to be one hundred percent perfect before you work with them. When we got started in the Rainbow Coalition, we brought black people, and women, and lots of other people to work together. We had some very tense meetings about racism and sexism because those issues came up. There's no other way to work those issues out with people of good will unless you are there. It

can be hard, but you need that person-to-person contact to begin to educate each other, to see each other as human, susceptible to the hurt of oppression. The hardest part is overcoming your fear and going for it anyway. You don't know who you will find as an ally, and we need people of good will to come together.

As you talk about gays and lesbians getting together with other groups, I am reminded of one group whose support we truly need, and that is the support of our closeted members, all of them, but most especially those who are currently in positions of power in the mainstream community. How can we reach them?

The people who are the most out now are going to have to be the models. You need models, leaders. There are people emerging as leaders in the gay and lesbian community, and the next step for them is to become leaders in the mainstream community. One of my goals is to encourage leadership. I think many people have that potential. We need more people taking on the responsibility for thinking about how to move things forward and how to mobilize others.

Can you highlight your other priorities, if elected as the District 14 representative?

Healthcare is one. It's a crime there are 450,000 people in Oregon without healthcare — the majority of whom are working. Childcare is another priority. People need affordable, accessible childcare. I believe the government is going to have to take a role in making that happen, whether encouraging the private sector to provide childcare in the workplace or providing increased subsidies. Many home childcare providers are low-income women who need support, education, training and a sense of self-esteem.

A common thread in my priorities is self-esteem. It addresses the issue of crime in the long term because we need to make sure the young don't get involved in crime. It means making them feel good about themselves by giving them the opportunity for a living-wage job, by ensuring prenatal care, and by making sure they aren't abused as children. We need to increase the minimum wage in order to create living-wage jobs with good benefits and a safe work environment.

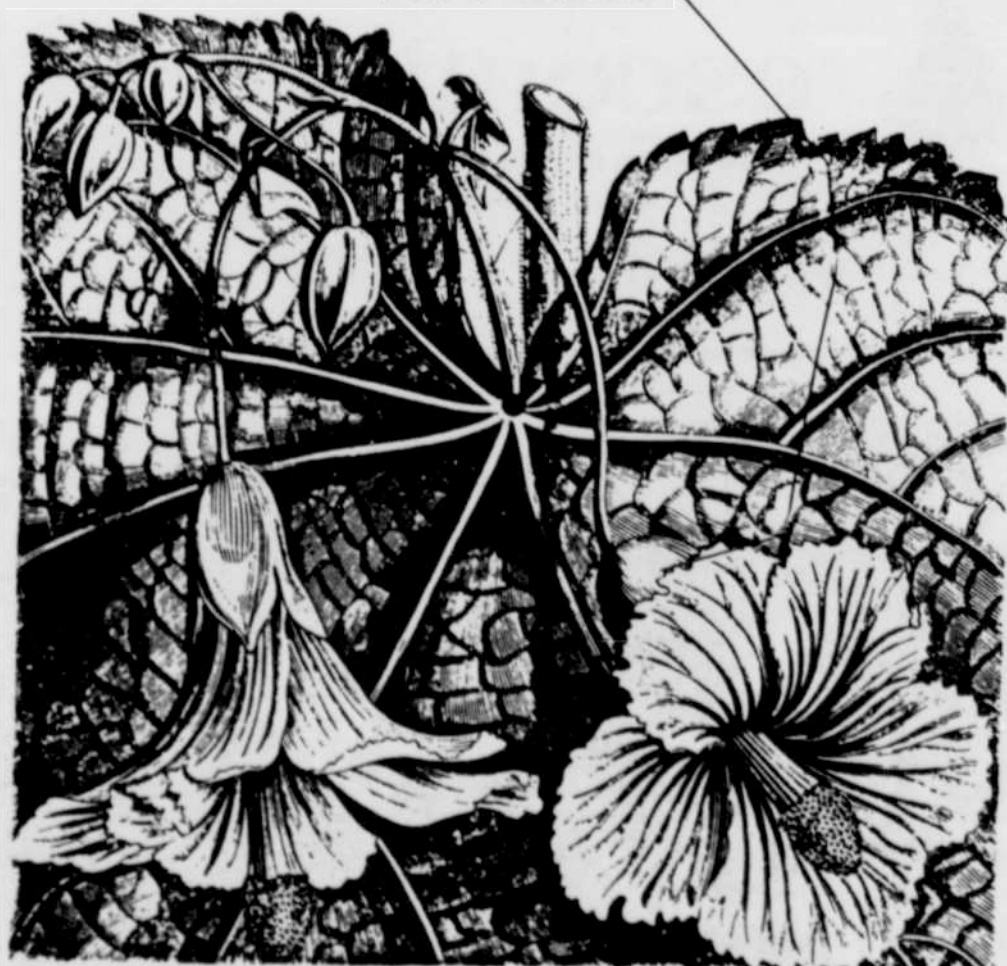
Bev, any final words of encouragement or inspiration?

I see an important step forward for the community in the creation of the Lesbian Community Project. LCP has taken an electoral component now, which is very important. I think people need to continue to build their skills in that area to be even more effective. The other thing that is important is to do this work with joy. If we want to do something to bring people together, to build something or change something for the better, it has to look attractive. Who wants to do something that is boring or no fun? I do this [politics] because I like it. I like working with people, thinking about policy. It gives me a charge! This is what makes people hopeful, doing it with joy. Politics is a wonderful way to meet people, to sharpen your skills, to move yourself forward.

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