

Thousands gather to oppose Ballot Measure 9

More than 10,000 people came to Pioneer Courthouse Square on Oct. 4 to show their opposition to Ballot Measure 9. The crowd spilled out of the square and onto the sidewalks across the street. No counterprotesters were visible. The rally's theme, "Many Voices, One Message," was reflected in the long and diverse list of speakers.

Urvashi Vaid, keynote speaker at this year's Lucille Hart dinner and head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, brought out-of-state encouragement. "On behalf of lesbians, gay men and our allies across this country," she said, "I want all of you here on the front lines against the far right to know that the entire national gay community sends its love, support and heartfelt wishes for success."

"There is no peace," Vaid continued, "when organized hate groups like the Oregon Citizens Alliance wage campaigns to legitimize the prejudice that leads to this violence; when hatemongers like Pat Buchanan are embraced by our president, when the platform of the party that once stood for individual freedom endorses government regulation of the private lives of its people, when we are the target of a jihad — a religious war — declared upon us by those who seek to reinvent society to insure their own personal supremacy...."

"In the rather small minds of our enemies here in Oregon, the powerful democratic concept of civil rights has come to sound like a dirty word. If we read the OCA's lips, we keep hearing about *special* rights and never hear about *civil* rights. The distortion is deliberate.... The claim that we seek special rights is wrong; we already enjoy the *special* privilege of being the number-one targets of hate violence in America today; we have the *special* right to live with the fear that our house could be torched by racist and anti-gay skinheads like Hattie Mae Cohens and Brian Mock's was in Salem...."

"This," said Vaid, "is our Birmingham. This is our Selma. This is the battle of our lifetime. Justice, normality and history are on our side."

Presidential candidate Bill Clinton dispatched a representative to express his opposition to Ballot Measure 9. The representative, Bob Hantoy, is an environmental consultant for Clinton and the first person with AIDS to address a presidential convention. Clinton's telegram urging Oregonians to vote no on 9 said this is a "time to heal America, not divide it."

Sharon Gary-Smith of the Women's Foundation focused on the connections between different oppressions. "We need to stop it now, because who is next? This is the beginning, not the end. If you're not fighting for each and every one of us, we have no fight at all," she said.

Former governor Neil Goldschmidt, whose anti-discrimination executive order was the target of the OCA's first anti-gay campaign, opened the rally. He discussed how his Jewish roots made him aware of how it feels to be outside of mainstream society. He also gave a prayer in Hebrew advocating unity among all people.

Other speakers included Jeanette Pai, founder and co-chair of the Asian Pacific American Alliance; Michael Powell, owner of Powell's Books; Irv Fletcher, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO; Sherry Harris, the first African-American lesbian elected to the Seattle City Council and Rabbi Emmanuel Rose.

Parents join the fight

Regardless of who wins or loses at the polls Nov. 3, the OCA's Ballot Measure 9 will leave behind a bigger, stronger and more organized community of gay-rights activists. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is growing by



Thirty days until election rally attracts 10,000

leaps and bounds. The number of P-FLAG chapters in Oregon has tripled in the last few months, bringing the total to 14. Two more are in the process of being organized.

"What is happening," Cherie Garland, president of the Rogue Valley chapter, told the *Medford Mail Tribune*, "is the OCA is awakening a sleeping lion in these people, and they are forming groups much faster than would've otherwise happened."

Even in the most conservative pockets of rural Oregon, parents are stepping out of the closet and into the battle.

"Our children need us," said P-FLAG Regional Director Candace Steele, "because we can speak in the straight communities when their voices are discounted."

OCA organizer Monte Stamper told the *Mail Tribune* that his group expected this. "I have a hard time understanding why parents stump for their children's sex lives," he said.

Several parents explained to the *Mail Tribune* that they feared for their children's safety because of the OCA and Ballot Measure 9.

Local stores make good

Businesses across Portland and Oregon are getting involved in the fight against Ballot Measure 9. A stroll downtown reveals window after window with No on 9 displays. They range from the simple bumper sticker in the window of Flowers in Flight to the bright display consuming Zia Salon's window. Even businesses without displays are standing opposed to Ballot Measure 9. Recently a stack of OCA papers was found on the free publication shelf at the Third Eye on Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard. An employee explained that someone had put them there without permission. She dumped them in a recycling bin and loudly explained that the store had no room for hate.

While many businesses have put up No on 9 displays and donated money, some have taken even greater steps to educate their customers about the measure.

Powell's Books, with its full block of prime downtown window space, has what is probably Portland's most striking display. Windows are full of huge signs with slogans such as "Hate is not a family value. Vote no on 9." According to employee Melody Libby, the artwork for the signs is available to any interested party from the Kinko's on Northeast Broadway at 7th Avenue. Libby said other businesses have approached Powell's for help in setting up similar displays.

Once inside the store, Powell's customers get a more in-depth education on the measure's ramifications. Five hundred to 1,000 titles in the store now carry warning labels pointing out that if Ballot Measure 9 passes, these books could be

banned from public libraries and schools, including universities. While the overwhelming majority of customers are appreciative of the store's efforts, some have expressed disapproval, and employees report that the warning tags are disappearing on a regular basis. Powell's has also raised \$20,000 from anti-9 button sales.

Owner Michael Powell spoke at the Oct. 4 No on 9 rally about the economic disaster Ballot Measure 9 could bring Oregon.

"Nine could be the most devastating thing to happen to Oregon's economy in our lifetime," he said. Powell also cited moral reasons to vote against the measure. "That kind of fear, that kind of worry, should come to no one in this country," Powell said.

Powell's Special Project Coordinator Bill McRae also cited ethics for the store's anti-9 efforts. McRae says the decision to make a public statement against Ballot Measure 9 is based on the store's concern for gay employees, its opposition to censorship and its good citizenship. McRae said the measure would "taint the very backbone of the state."

Anti-9 efforts continue a bit farther down 10th Avenue at Conant and Conant Booksellers. Roy Conant says the store is planning to bring Jack Castiglione, author of *A Straight Person's Guide to Gay People's Anguish*, to Portland. Castiglione is also known for his work against gay-bashing in Long Beach, Calif., where he chairs the Hate Crimes Subcommittee of the city's Human Relations Commission. He is also active with the police chief's Gay and Lesbian Advisory Group, the Lambda Democratic Club and Dignity. Castiglione will give two presentations of his book, one at 7:30 am and again at 7 pm on Monday, Nov. 2, at Sun's Cafe, adjacent to Conant and Conant. A documentary produced by KCTV, Long Beach's Public Broadcasting System affiliate, will be shown. The bookstore has also presented several events focusing on bigotry in general recently.

Conant also plans to help out financially. He will donate 20 percent of profits for Nov. 2 to the No on 9 campaign. No on 9 buttons can be redeemed for a discount at Conant and Conant after the election.

Conant says these efforts are a natural product of the store's philosophy.

"It's the philosophical basis of why we're in business," he said. "It's simply not right to practice that kind of exclusionary politics."

Educational efforts aren't limited to bookstores, however. Zell's cafe on Southeast Morrison Street has set up a display titled "What color is your triangle?" It features triangles in several colors and an explanation of which groups were assigned which colors in the Nazi concentration camps. Owner Tom Zell says he has seen straight people standing at the display figuring out which

colors they would have worn if they were in Germany when the Nazis were in power. Customer demand for information has been so great that Zell has made available copies of the flier explaining the display.

Zell says he and his wife and co-owner Nancy Jambor have always kept their politics out of their restaurant. This is the first time they have taken a stand on an issue in their business.

"I feel very strongly," said Zell, "that the issue in Ballot Measure 9 is an issue of rights, and taking rights away from people. It affects everybody."

Zell's also sells No on 9 buttons and the menu board urges diners to vote.

Visitors association opposes 9

The Portland/Oregon Visitors Association has been warning Oregonians for several weeks about the economic disaster Measure 9 could bring to the state, and after much internal debate, the association has decided formally to oppose the measure.

"The visitor industry," said POVA Vice President Bruce Fery, "led by this organization, welcomes all peoples to our state regardless of their color, creed, national origin or sexual orientation. To allow this measure to pass would jeopardize the future of this industry, the state and Oregonians in every community."

POVA has estimated that Oregon could lose over \$21 million in convention business if Ballot Measure 9 passes. Conventions that could cancel include the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, which would bring more than \$4.5 million, the National League for Nursing and various education and library groups.

This is the first time the group has taken a position on a ballot measure. POVA released a statement explaining their reasons for getting involved. It reads in part: "Passage of Measure 9 would blacklist (sic) Portland and Oregon as a convention and visitor destination by fostering a negative message—one of exclusion, hate and bigotry.... As the recognized voice of the [tourism] industry, POVA also must speak out against this threat to the visitor industry and, thus, to Oregon's economy. As one of the state's vital economic constituents and the leader of Oregon's fastest growing industry, POVA must add its name to the list of opponents."

A POVA press release also mentions the clear threat of a boycott of Oregon and the effect of lost funding for police and fire services.

Facing our neighbors

Oregon's neighbors are becoming quite alarmed about Ballot Measure 9. Washington State politicians and citizens are voicing their concerns. In a press conference at the Lloyd Center Red Lion, Washington Gov. Booth Gardner spoke quite strongly against the measure. He pointed out that Oregon is closely tied to Washington by our regional boundaries. Gov. Gardner affirmed the diversity of people living in the Pacific Northwest and voiced the fundamental threat that Ballot Measure 9 poses. He was followed by the majority of Seattle's City Council members.

The overriding message coming from our neighbors was one of serious concern about escalating hate crimes, loss of trade—specifically with Japan—and an abhorrence of this type of discriminatory legislation even being on the ballot. Many told stories of looking to Oregon for leadership in specific humanitarian areas. There seemed to be almost puzzlement at the oxymoronic quality of Ballot Measure 9 happening in Oregon.

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER