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local news

Oregon PTA passes resolution to respect different views on sexual orientation

Parent-Teacher Associations throughout Oregon must oppose legislation that tries to keep information about family diversity and sexual orientation out of the schools, the state PTA decided last month.

A resolution in support of family diversity—and rejecting prejudice based on sexual orientation—was approved by a handful of votes last month, at the Oregon state PTA convention in Portland. The resolution, which was proposed by

members of the Ainsworth Elementary School PTA and the Robert Gray Middle School PTA, was introduced at the last minute of the convention in an effort to increase its chances of approval.

Introduced under an emergency clause because of the pressure of pending OCA initiatives, the reading of the resolution struck silent a crowd of more than 2,300 chatting mothers, according to PTA member Marla Murray.

"This was after a day and a half of changes in the by-laws," Murray said. "All these mothers had been hopping up

to the microphones to testify. When they heard this resolution, a hush fell over the room. All of a sudden, nobody was going up to the mike."

When those in opposition to the new resolution recovered from their initial shock, they lobbied to table the resolution, Murray said, which would have delayed action on it until next year's convention. The four Portland-area parents who presented the resolution had a limited time to speak and only a few opportunities to refute their opposition.

"I felt like I was in a basketball game and down to my last couple of timeouts," Murray said.

By breaking the resolution into two sections, the parents were able to get it approved by the 200 voting delegates at the convention, which was held in Portland on April 29 and 30. The first section was approved fairly easily, Murray said, winning about a 70 percent yes vote. It says:

"Resolved, that the Oregon PTA does not accept prejudice, harassment, discrimination or intolerance directed against students, parents, teachers or staff members as a result of their sexual orientation."

The second half of the resolution was harder to get passed, Murray said, and it ended up winning approval by only a handful of votes. That section says:

"Resolved, that the Oregon PTA opposes all legislative attempts to suppress information about family diversity and sexual orientation."

When it appeared that the resolution was headed toward defeat, Murray stepped to the mike for a final plea.

"I just explained," Murray said, "that we're here as parents to protect our children. That's the role of the PTA, to provide a safe learning envi-

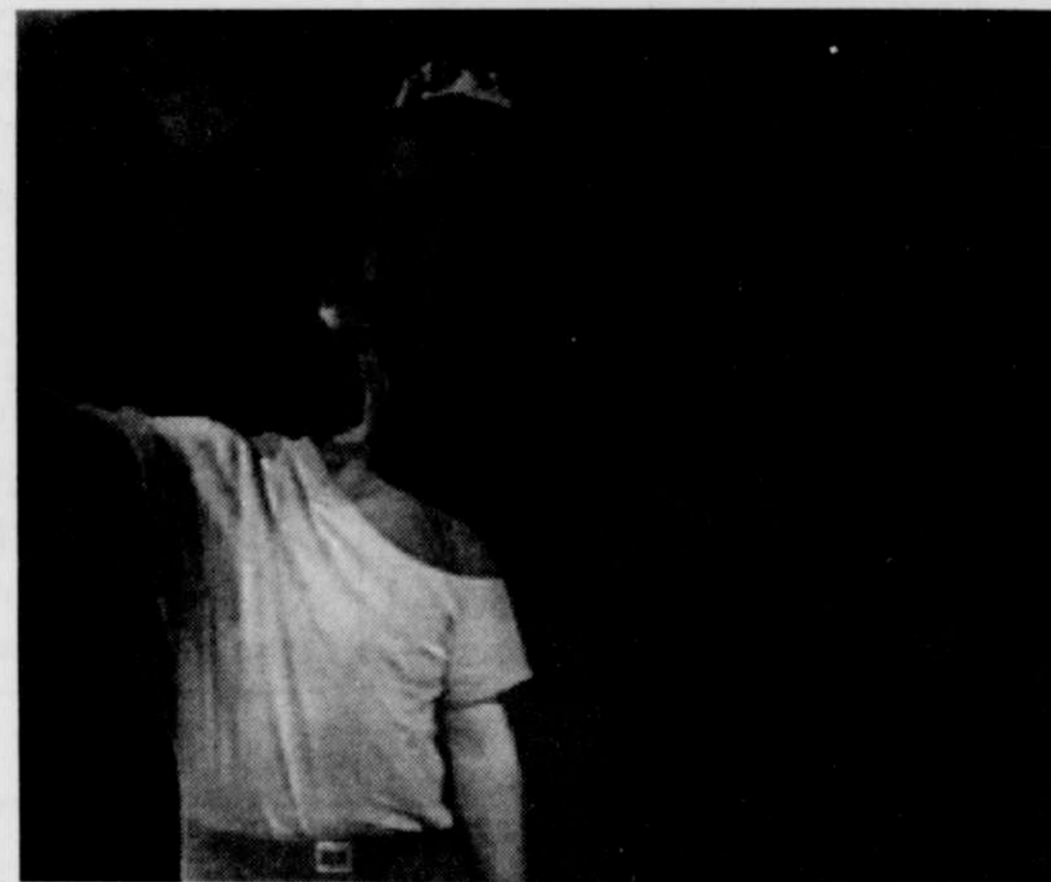
ronment for all children. We don't tolerate or accept racial slurs but, three or four times a day, you can hear kids calling people queer, faggot or lesbo—and that's hard for children who have gay or lesbian parents to hear."

Murray described the resolution's approval as "A big coup," and added, "I hear Lon Mabon is really pissed about this—and I'm glad."

Martha Allen

Young people's video wins award

Turn Loose the Voices has won a Golden Apple, the highest award given by the National Educational Film and Video Festival.



Haneefah Dudley (foreground), Joseph Lyons and Giang Pham sing "I'm Gon' Stand!" in Turn Loose the Voices, the award-winning video produced by 21 local youth to educate about bigotry.

Based in Oakland, Calif., the festival is the largest and most prestigious educational film and video competition in the country. Turn Loose the Voices was chosen from 1,500 festival entries.

What makes this achievement exceptional is that the video was developed by Portland-area youths. Originally produced on stage, under the direction of the artistic staff of the Young Actors' Forum, the show features a multicultural cast of 21 local young people whose songs, stories, dramatic and comic scenes, and choreography communicate the painful impact of bigotry, and the value of diversity.

For more information about the video contact Media Matchmakers, PO Box 1007, Clackamas, OR 97015. A teacher's study guide is available.

Jann Gilbert

Health network formed for sexual minorities

The group Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Physicians of Oregon has organized a network to provide assistance for sexual minorities seeking health care.

The group's goals are to work with the medical community to fight homophobic bias and HIV-status discrimination for both doctors and patients; to network with existing sexual minority groups; and to establish a speakers bureau to inform the public on health concerns specific to the sexual minority community.

For more information, call the group at (503) 241-0886.

Jann Gilbert

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