

difficult for me to understand people who can keep switching their views on that kind of an issue," says Roberts, who adds she has experienced discrimination firsthand as the mother of a disabled son. She also says when she was a single mother she faced credit discrimination because of her marital status. "Discrimination isn't right, but it exists, and that's why I feel compelled to speak out against it."

As governor, Roberts testified at legislative hearings in favor of gay and lesbian rights bills—a step no other governor has taken. On May 20, 1991, just hours after the Oregon Citizens Alliance announced its plans to pass its "Abnormal Behaviors Initiative," better known as Ballot Measure 9, Roberts called a press conference where she blasted the OCA for its anti-sexual-minority crusade. She was among the first—and certainly the most prominent—of public officials who went head to head with the OCA over the issue of civil rights for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Roberts appointed Oregon's first two openly gay and lesbian judges, and she was a staunch backer of a state human rights commission—support she says was prompted by an alarming rise in homophobic violence. She also regularly attends Right to Privacy's Lucille Hart Dinner, a major sexual minority rights fund-raiser.

"I think Oregon is very unique. At RTP's Lucille Hart Dinner you'll see dozens upon dozens of politicians and public officials on hand supporting the gay and lesbian community. This just doesn't happen other places," says Roberts, who has become a prominent figure to gay men and lesbians nationwide. During the past few years Roberts has been a keynote speaker at the Washington, D.C.-based Human Rights Campaign Fund's Leadership Conference, and she has traveled to several major cities specifically to trumpet civil rights for sexual minorities. Most recently, Roberts and Republican Barry Goldwater, a former U.S. senator, co-chaired Americans Against Discrimination, an HRCF project designed to promote tolerance.

"I've tried hard to create a tolerant climate in Oregon. I've had to constantly make it clear where I stand on human rights for gays and lesbians, as well as other people. I think my willingness to talk about these issues made other people feel more comfortable about coming forward," she says. "Unfortunately it is still fairly unusual for a politician to do that, particularly outside of Oregon. Even Ann Richards, who had very strong support from the gay community, never appeared at a gay event. I know there was frustration on the part of the gay community in Texas because of that."

Roberts' willingness to publicly address difficult subjects is not limited to political and cultural issues—it also encompasses personal matters. Two years ago Roberts did not attend the Lucille Hart Dinner, opting instead to spend that time with her ailing husband, state Sen. Frank Roberts, who was in the latter stages of cancer. As Frank Roberts' disease progressed, the duo turned to the gay and HIV/AIDS communities to learn about dying with dignity. In a letter that was read at the fund-raiser, Barbara and Frank Roberts not only thanked Oregon's gay and lesbian citizenry for supporting them professionally, but also expressed their gratefulness to the community for helping teach them how to live out

their final days together in the most fulfilling manner they could.

"There are so many memories Frank and I shared in this house," says Roberts of the governor's quarters in Salem. "I remember when we got this elevator put in [funded at her own

expense and through private donations]. Frank [who was wheelchair-bound] was so excited when he finally got to see what the second floor of the house looked like. This is the home where we shared life and death together."

Although Frank Roberts passed away several months ago, the governor says she has not had an appropriate opportunity to grieve. "If there is any community who will understand my need to grieve—and from that grief the chance to heal—I would think it would be the gay community. I need to take that time for myself—that was the primary reason I chose not to run for re-election."

Time to heal and take a vacation: "It's been 10 years since I've taken an extended vacation. I

think I'm probably due," says Roberts. And what will she do? Savor some of the small pleasures of life, of course: "Like wearing jeans instead of pantyhose. And it will be nice to drive a car again," laughs Roberts, who admits she and Frank used to sneak a drive when they were at an out-of-



Above: Roberts greets local activist Kathleen Sadaat at the 1994 Lucille Hart Dinner; Below: Roberts addresses the Senate Business, Housing and Finance Committee on behalf of SB 708



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state event. "Maybe I'll even play some video poker." And she'll be jotting down some personal observations about what it was like to be governor, "while those details are still fresh" in her mind.

As for her future professionally, Roberts says she's eyeing a couple of positions at Harvard, as well as a job with a nonprofit in the nation's capital (she didn't want to say which organization). Maybe, too, when the political pendulum starts swinging back to the left, she'll even make another bid for the governor's seat. "I'm not ruling it out," she says. "I love serving the people."