

PHOTO BY LINDA KLIEWER



A vigil honoring Matthew Shepard was held at Metropolitan Community Church of Portland on Monday, Oct. 12.

EDITORIAL

BY MARTY DAVIS

Get out the vote

Hate crime in Wyoming underscores need for voter participation

Nov. 3 marks Election Day for voters nationwide. At the polls and through the mail, Oregonians are called on to perform their civic duty.

Though there may not be a divisive ballot measure specifically targeting our community, the election is important to gay men and lesbians throughout the Pacific Northwest. Up for grabs are numerous state legislative seats, U.S. Senate and House positions, and myriad local offices.

Despite that, there seems to be a general lack of enthusiasm about this election. Quieter elections bring the possibility that we suffer short-sightedness as to just who is actually running. It seems that we have come to attach one face and one image to our opponent. When the enemy is loud, vocal and in our faces, it motivates us to get active and organized.

But what if the strategy is changing? What if the hostile charge is now being led by people who have learned to tone down the rhetoric during the campaign? What if they have a new plan, one without openly hateful anti-gay speeches or calls for denial of rights and privileges?

Consider that the new strategy may be to get elected first, then work to support the causes that were glossed over or brushed aside during the campaign season. What if the face of the enemy is changing? What if it is not the hate-spewing, mostly white-male leadership of the Oregon Citizens Alliance? What if the new opponent is young, energetic, attractive, maybe even female? Youthfulness is no guarantee of liberalism or even moderation in political ideology. What it *could* be is a new generation of more highly-skilled politicians who have learned to manipulate voters via their images and words. It may be new candidates who have learned from the losses of the past and refined their techniques for the future.

This is why, even during a seemingly low-key election, it is crucial we

realize the importance of each race, be it city, county, state or federal.

In the early hours of Oct. 12, Matthew Shepard, 21, a gay University of Wyoming student, died while on life support. As you likely know, Shepard allegedly was pistol-whipped and tethered to a fence post by two young men, in what many are calling a hate crime.

In Wyoming, state lawmakers and activists held a press conference within hours of Shepard's death, calling for the passage of hate crimes legislation on the state and federal levels.

"Because of homophobic attitudes, every attempted bias crime bill proposed so far in the state Legislature has been blocked," said Wyoming state Rep. Mike Massie, a Democrat from Laramie, where the brutality occurred. "The viciousness of the attack on Matt clearly shows how critical this kind of legislation is. The attack was fueled by the kind of ignorance and intolerance that we as Americans must condemn in the strongest terms possible."

In Oregon, we have a statewide hate crimes law in place, thanks to supportive legislators. But such protections are lacking on a federal level, a reality that underscores the importance of your vote this election season.

So we ask you to consider this point. We ask that you study those readily available materials: Read the voters' pamphlet, call the candidates, evaluate the positions of your community leaders, check the endorsements of Right to Pride, *Just Out* or other sources you deem fit.

It is crucial that we vote, and do so intelligently.

■ On Oct. 18, at 6 p.m. in Pioneer Courthouse Square, a memorial service will be held in remembrance of Matthew Shepard. Legislators and activists will be on hand to urge passage of federal hate crimes legislation. The public is encouraged to attend. For more information, call 222-6151.

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just out

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FEATURE

ABCs OF ISRC: For the subjects of the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court: a lesson on the ins and outs of an empire
 pp 19-23

DEPARTMENTS

LOCAL NEWS • Symposium in Tacoma, Wash., focuses on queer history; fund-raiser Terry Bean has a lot to be proud of; *Just Out's* general election endorsements
 pp 7-11

NATIONAL NEWS • NGLTF doles out awards; NLGJA conference lauded by gay press; Supreme Court declines to consider Cincinnati law denying protection based on sexual orientation
 pp 12-15

WORLD NEWS • European Parliament scolds countries that still have anti-gay laws; ousted Malaysian deputy prime minister pleads not guilty to sodomy charges
 p 17

ENTERTAINMENT

DANCE • Trey McIntyre is making *Noise* at Oregon Ballet Theatre
 p 33

INTERVIEW • Alison Bechdel and her sketchy cohorts come to Portland
 p 35

THEATER • Tygres Heart deftly updates Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*
 p 36

BOOKS • *Empty Without You* fills void in queer history
 p 37

SHORTS • Hip Halloween hosts; everyone's favorite newspaper announces anniversary bash
 p 38

COLUMNS

OUTWORD • Don't be squeamish about straight folks invading gay haunts
 p 39

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