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LOCAL news

BILL BLASTED BY BIG O

April 22 is the tentative date for a public hearing on House Joint Resolution 29, one of four bills designed to undermine a December Oregon Court of Appeals ruling, known as *Tanner vs. Oregon Health Sciences University*, that bars sexual orientation workplace discrimination and stipulates that all state and local governments in Oregon must offer spousal benefits to the same-sex domestic partners of their employees.

HJR29 reads, in part: "No law shall be passed granting to any citizen or class of citizens privileges, or immunities, which, upon the same terms, shall not equally belong to all citizens...."

"No provision of this Constitution requires the granting of marriage licenses, rights or benefits to unmarried individuals.... To be valid or recognized in this state, a marriage may consist only of the union of one man and one woman."

The bill sits in the House Civil Judiciary Committee and is a referral, meaning if it snares approval in the Republican-controlled Oregon Legislature, it goes directly to the ballot for a public vote, thereby circumventing a gubernatorial veto.

Jean Harris, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the statewide group leading the lobbying efforts in Salem, recently made her case against the bill before the editorial board at *The Oregonian*—and her efforts paid off.

On April 7, the state's largest daily newspaper published an editorial denouncing HJR29, saying the legislation "seeks to capitalize on voter unease over same-sex marriage."

It then warned: "But no one should be fooled by this masquerade. The measure is the successor to earlier bills that would have



Handmaidens to bias

Unsettled bills measure defending current marriage law would have voters add legal discrimination to constitution

Legislators Republican legislators have come up with a new way of carrying gays and lesbians out of the Oregon Constitution's equal protection provisions. House Joint Resolution 29 seeks to capitalize on voter unease over same-sex marriage that no one should be denied by this measure. The measure is the successor to earlier bills that would have banned domestic partner benefits in the public sector, specifically health insurance for gay workers' partners. But dressed up as a defense-of-marriage referral, it attracts moderates, and it keeps supporters from looking like Oregon's radical anti-gay lobby. It gives the anti-gay forces their best shot at victory with voters since they overturned Gov. Neil Goldschmidt's anti-discrimination executive order 11 years ago. Harris says she felt good after speaking with the editorial board. "They listened and agreed this was an unnecessary bill," she says. Next up? Convincing House Civil Judiciary Committee members to embrace that belief. Basic Rights Oregon is seeking parties to testify against HJR29. For more information, call 222-6151.

Reported by INGA SORENSEN

SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON GROUPS NAB PRIDE GRANTS

Clark County Pride, part of the Seattle-based Pride Foundation, has announced the recipients of funds for its winter 1998-99 grant cycle.

They are: Triple Point youth program of Evergreen AIDS Response (\$1,700 for youth activities); Martha's Pantry program of Metropolitan Community Church of the Gentle Shepherd (\$2,000 for the food bank); Southwest Washington chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (\$1,250 for voicemail and resource materials); and the Fort Vancouver Regional Library Foundation (\$1,000 for AIDS information). All winners are Clark County-based organizations.

Clark County Pride is affiliated with Pride Statewide, the Pride Foundation's outreach program. The foundation raises and disperses grants to queer-affirming groups in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska.

FOUNDATION PUMPS UP OREGON GROUPS, TOO

A handful of Oregon groups also recently received grants from the Pride Foundation for projects that support the sexual minorities community.

Basic Rights Oregon received \$5,000 for its Fair Workplace Project, a statewide grass-roots program designed to encourage employers to adopt personnel policies prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Pride Northwest, organizer of Portland's queer pride parade, was awarded \$4,584 to continue its work with the Conversations Project, which aims to build bridges among the various segments of the sexual minorities community.

The Scappoose-based Rural Organizing Project, meanwhile, received \$5,000 to create and distribute the Safe Schools training modules on school safety issues for sexual minority youth. The project is aimed at Oregon's rural and small-town school districts.

YOUTH TO SPEAK OUT ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The Metropolitan Human Rights Center, Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Ministries, and Jobs With Justice are sponsoring *Youth Speak Out on Civil Rights* from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 17 at Ainsworth Church, 2941 N.E. Ainsworth St. in Portland. The purpose of the event is to offer youth opportunities to develop skills and language that address civil rights issues.

Eric Ward, regional coordinator of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment, is the slated keynote speaker.

The gathering will include interactive workshops and roundtable discussions on environmental justice, youth organizing, civil rights, affirmative action, hate crimes, racism and oppression. The cost is \$6 and includes lunch. For further information, call Linda Hunter at 823-5136.

Compiled by INGA SORENSEN