

MILITANT DEMOCRACY

Insurgent newspaper *The Oregon Observer* arms its readers with a voting tool created by the human rights activists of Rural Organizing Project by Inga Sorensen

Marcy Westerling calls it a "nasty little scene." Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan paints it as "poison." Both activists are referring to *The Oregon Observer*, a Grants Pass-based monthly newspaper that promotes the concept of a citizens' militia and attracts a gun-totin' readership with a hefty skepticism toward government.

Scanning the October issue, O'Hartigan came upon a half-page grid highlighting a num-

Text immediately underneath the grid read, in part: "The Rural Organizing Project asks human dignity activists to take out their democracy grids, take a look at the issues and get out and vote against these measures."

O'Hartigan says she was appalled to spot ROP's name, because of what the nonprofit group claims to stand for: democracy and diversity.

ROP was spawned from the 1992 campaign over Ballot Measure 9, an anti-gay initiative that voters ultimately rejected. The organization is comprised of an estimated 60 autonomous human dignity groups throughout small-town and rural Oregon.

According to ROP materials, the emphasis is on rural areas because such spots have "been a target of anti-democratic organizations that seek to divide communities by fanning flames of fear and bigotry. Scapegoating immigrants, gays and lesbians, and other marginalized communities, these anti-democratic groups are attacking our communities seeking to limit choices, shut

grid was a paid advertisement from ROP, a group that relies on donations from the public, as well grants from organizations like McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, which promotes Oregon organizations that work for progressive social change.

"I thought, what's ROP doing giving money to a right-wing extremist group?" O'Hartigan tells *Just Out*.

As it turns out, ROP didn't run an ad. "I hadn't even known about it," says Westerling, who is ROP's executive director.

Still, she notes, the grid that appeared in the newspaper matched one that ran in an ROP newsletter.

"It was entirely accurate," she says. "[The *Observer*] took something we did and they reproduced it."

Westerling says someone, though she doesn't know who, may have given the *Observer* a copy of the newsletter.

"But they gave no info on who brought it in," she says, adding, "We have about 100 activists we work with throughout Josephine County."

And though she calls the *Observer* a "nasty little scene" that is "totally pro-militia and pro-guns," Westerling says she's more intrigued than appalled by the unfolding of events.

"Let's say one of our leaders did bring [the newsletter] in. I don't know what we would have done," she says. "It's not a clear-cut issue."

Westerling concludes: "I don't think it would have meant that ROP endorsed what the paper stands for—we simply promoted critical thinking during an election."

O'Hartigan disagrees. "Common decency requires ROP come out [and state] strongly and publicly that [the *Observer*] is an abhorrent publication," she insists.

She adds that she was "shocked at the apparent lack of concern expressed by [ROP]."

#70	Amends Constitution: Gives public, through prosecutor, right to demand jury trial in criminal cases. REALITY: Prosecutor also ignores victims (as well as defendant and judge) who does not want to have jury trial (example, sex crime).	Y
#71	Amends Constitution: Limits pretrial release of accused persons. REALITY: Current law provides protection against release of persons accused of violent crimes. Assures person is guilty if arrested. Costs taxpayers millions for jail space that does not currently exist.	Y
#72	Amends Constitution: Allows murder conviction by 11 to 1 jury. REALITY: Currently, murder conviction requires unanimous decision by jury. This is contrary to proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Increases likelihood of more innocent people found guilty. Louisiana is the only state that allows murder conviction by less than 12-0.	YE
#73	Amends Constitution: Limits immunity from criminal prosecution of persons ordered to testify about conduct. REALITY: Gives state and local prosecutors same kind of unbridled power that special prosecutor Ken Starr used against Susan McDougal. Erodes constitutional protection against self-incrimination.	YES
#74	Amends Constitution: Requires terms of imprisonment announced in court to be fully served, with exceptions. REALITY: Takes away power from the people and the legislature to change bad sentencing laws. Prohibits release of prisoner if gravely ill even if victim agrees to release.	YES
#75	Amends Constitution: Permits convicted of certain crimes cannot serve on grand juries, criminal trial juries. REALITY: Bars persons convicted of felony within last 15 years or "dishonest or violent" misdemeanor within last 5 years from serving on criminal juries. Requires state to do background check on everyone called to jury duty or requires persons to self-report.	YES

Some have characterized this series of referrals on capital punishment as the rewriting of the Oregon Bill of Rights. Crime victims have organized to oppose these measures because these constitutional amendments give the Rural Organizing Project asks human dignity activists to take out these amendments at the cost of \$1.5 million dollars for the state.

ber of crime-related measures on the Nov. 2 ballot.

The seven initiatives (which were backed by Republican state Rep. Kevin Mannix) sought to amend the Oregon Constitution to grant victims rights in criminal prosecutions, for example, and prohibit people who have been convicted of certain crimes from serving on grand juries and criminal trial juries.

According to the grid, each measure would erode the Oregon Bill of Rights and would not, as proponents claimed, bolster victims' rights.

down discussion, and narrow the vision of an inclusive Oregon."

Given all that, O'Hartigan thought, what the heck is ROP doing in the likes of *The Oregon Observer*?

After all, the publication describes itself as a guard "for the future security of America's citizens," and its October issue includes ads from the Militia of Montana that promote materials instructing folks how to survive martial law and Y2K. (Want to buy a gas mask?)

O'Hartigan also wondered whether the

GIRLS LIKE IT MOIST

Maybe it's all that wet, earthy, mossy stuff. Whatever it is, seems the Northwest is the place to be if you're a chick who digs chicks.

So says the November issue of *Girlfriends*, a national magazine for lesbians, queer girls, et. al. The region snagged the No. 1 and 2 spots in the publication's 1999 list of "Best Lesbian Places to Live."

Ever the lesbian bridesmaid, Portland came in second behind Seattle as the greatest girl-loves-girl spot in the nation.

This is the fifth year *Girlfriends* has presented its top 10 picks, and this recent analysis, claims the mag, is the most comprehensive to date.

According to assistant editor Jessi Hempel, the article's author, 15 factors were pondered, including rates of unemployment, job growth and violent crime; the average cost of a three-bedroom home; the average cost of a two-bedroom apartment; the number of gay and lesbian businesses and organizations; and whether a city and state have gay-friendly laws on the books.

According to *Girlfriends*: "The nation's first four openly gay elected officials all hail from Oregon, the land of granola munching, 'zine publishing, down-home dykes.

"The notoriously anti-gay Oregon Citizens Alliance has kept a low profile lately, as the city of Portland continues to create a better environment for its lesbian inhabitants: It has comprehensive anti-discrimi-

nation laws, benefits for domestic partners, and rents that won't dent the wallet."

To find the "pulse of lesbian life," the magazine suggests one check out the Lesbian Community Project, In Other Words feminist bookstore, It's My Pleasure, SisterSpirit and Kokopeli's Choice.

Seems Portland was neck-in-neck with Atlanta—but the Rose City's air quality was deemed better, thus propelling Portland to No. 2.

The list rounds out with Columbus, Ohio, in at No. 4, followed by Portland, Maine; Denver; Washington, D.C.; Burlington, Vt.; New Orleans; and Phoenix.

■ Reported by INGA SORENSEN



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