

Text of the OCA's so-called Student Protection Act

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OREGON

Section 1. ORS 336.067 is amended to read (new section):

(e) Sexual Orientation as it relates to homosexuality and bisexuality, is a divisive subject matter not necessary to the instruction of students in public schools. Notwithstanding any other law or rule, the instruction of behaviors relating to homosexuality and bisexuality shall not be presented in a public school in a manner which encourages, promotes or sanctions such behaviors.

Section 2. ORS 659.155 is amended to read (new section):

(1) Any public elementary or secondary school determined by the Superintendent of Public Instruction or any community college determined by the Commissioner for Community College Services to be in noncompliance with provisions of ORS 336.067(e) or ORS 659.150 and this section shall be subject to appropriate sanctions, which may include withholding of all or part of state funding, as established by rule of the State Board of Education.

HEAD TO HEAD

Basic Rights Oregon prepares to battle the Oregon Citizens Alliance even before the group qualifies its ballot proposal by Jonathan Kipp

Like a recurring bad dream for Oregon's sexual minority communities, the Oregon Citizens Alliance has reared its head from relative obscurity, intent on bringing yet another anti-gay initiative to the state ballot for voters to ponder.

Since last September, the OCA has been collecting the 66,786 signatures needed to qualify its initiative for the November ballot.

Jaime Balboa, executive director of the queer political organization Basic Rights Oregon, says BRO expects the OCA to acquire the needed signatures by the July 7 deadline.

The 12-year-old OCA, still under the command of Lon Mabon, sponsored Measure 9 in 1992 and Measure 13 in 1994. Oregonians voted down both anti-gay initiatives after opponents spent a combined \$3.9 million to defeat the OCA-sponsored proposals.

But this time the OCA has help. *The Oregonian* recently reported that the state chapter of the Christian Coalition stepped forward to help the OCA gain enough signatures to qualify the "Student Protection Act"—the provocative name the OCA has assigned the proposed statute.

The Christian Coalition is "fighting to protect our kids from the homosexual agenda," Lou Beres, executive director of the Oregon chapter, told *The Oregonian*.

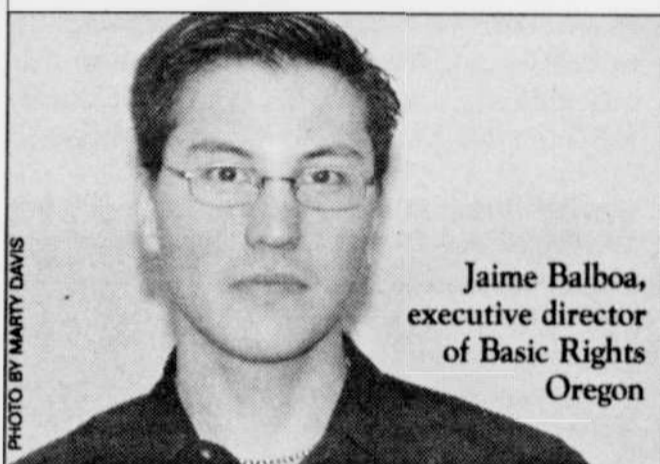
The initiative would essentially prevent public schools, including community colleges, from presenting any information about homosexuality or bisexuality "in a manner which encourages, promotes or sanctions such behavior." The proposed statute also outlines the consequences for schools crossing the line—the withholding of state funds.

Balboa says the language in the initiative is so "wide and ambiguous that they'd be able to drive a truck through it." The initiative does not define "encourages, promotes or sanctions" and does not address anti-gay speech or information. Balboa believes the consequences of the initiative would be far-reaching and devastating.

"It's clearly destructive to all Oregonians," he says.

Perfectly good teachers who identify as sexual minorities could and would be fired if the initiative is made law, Balboa predicts. Books and materials written by queers—as well as those touching on homosexual ideas and culture or famous gay people—would be removed and banned unless they specifically condemn gays, BRO literature says. Counselors and support groups for sexual minority students also would be prohibited.

Equally disturbing to Balboa is that HIV and AIDS education would likely be curtailed. The idea that the OCA and the Christian Coalition are putting public health and safety at risk in order to advance their ideology is appalling, Balboa says.



Jaime Balboa, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

BRO has been gearing up for what is expected to be a short but dramatic fight. The organization will have to wait until July 7 to learn whether the OCA has qualified its initiative for November's general election. But Balboa and company are not waiting around for the official word to come.

"We need to hit the ground running," says Ron Glanville, who is on the board of governors of the Human Rights Campaign.

HRC, based in Washington, D.C., is the largest lesbian and gay political organization in the country.

Glanville says fund raising is more difficult before the announcement that an initiative has qualified for the ballot. People are reluctant and want to wait, he says.

"The OCA has gotten very sophisticated,"

Glanville adds, referring to the wording of this year's proposal.

Glanville agrees that the Student Protection Act's tone is softer than the rhetoric of measures 9 and 13, but it's ultimately not all that different: "It is still fear-based," he says.

HRC recently contributed \$5,000 to help BRO begin a counterattack, and Glanville says HRC will provide a great deal more support if the initiative qualifies in July.

Balboa's staff has also been taking action. More than 30 volunteers recently attended leadership training sponsored by BRO and two national gay and lesbian organizations.

The group worked on building a campaign to defeat the OCA's proposal, but the volunteers were also building something bigger than just a campaign, Balboa says. He adds that the trainees constitute a diverse gathering of seasoned leaders and of young people. Balboa says the group's intent, in addition to strategizing, was to train the next generation of Oregon leaders.

BRO estimates that \$1.7 million will be needed to defeat this year's anti-gay initiative, should it make it onto November's ballot.

"Every gift is meaningful and every gift is needed," Balboa says.

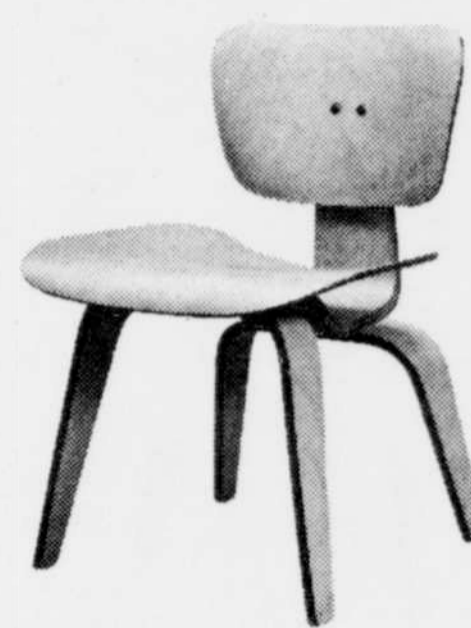
Only one month into his directorship at BRO, Balboa says he is not surprised that the Christian Coalition has jumped in. He says the coalition's leaders choose their fights carefully.

"They are watching Oregon. They want an issue they can replicate," he says.

"We have to build a fire wall in Oregon that says, 'This far and no farther,'" Balboa adds. "We are talking about basic rights—no one has the right to vote that away."

■ **Want to get involved? Help BASIC RIGHTS OREGON by donating money, volunteering, hosting a house party fund-raising event, becoming a corporate sponsor, polling or answering phones. Contact BRO at P.O. Box 40625, Portland, OR 97240; JaimeBalboa@aol.com; www.basicrights.org; or (503) 222-6151.**

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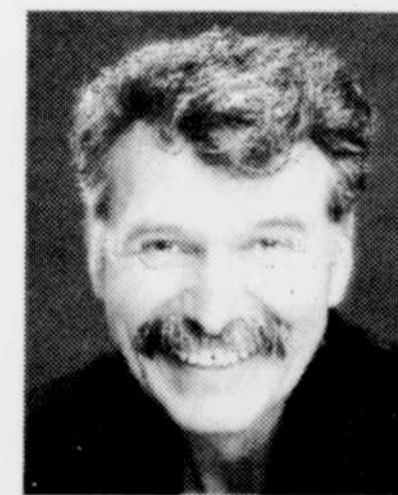
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Early on Saturday, May 13, 65 seemingly diverse people gathered on the downtown campus of Portland State University for Oregon Bi Conference 2000, a day of workshops and socializing put on by the Portland Bisexual Alliance with the assistance of PSU's Queers & Allies.

They came to the event from Newport and Corvallis, Ore.; Seattle and Olympia, Wash.; Vancouver, British Columbia; and, of course, Portland. What brought them all together was an affinity with PBA's mission—to build a sense of community among bi people and to secure for everyone "the freedom to follow love."

Workshop titles and presenters included: "Understanding Your Bi Child" by Ileana Strauss, board member of Portland PFLAG; "Intro to Bi Political Issues" by PBA President Sven Bonnicksen; "Queer Youth Speak Out!"; "Short Survey of American Polyamory" by Laury Weiss of Bisexual Community Forum; and "How to File a Successful Discrimination Complaint" by Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan, acting director of the Filisa Vistima Foundation.

"In the closing ceremony, people talked

GETTING BI

Oregon Bi Conference 2000 explores organizing and issues

by Christopher D. Cuttone

about how liberating it felt to come and be in a group where they didn't have to constantly explain themselves—everyone just understood where they were coming from," Bonnicksen says. "We hope to make this an annual event. There's a profound need for bisexuals to get together and talk with each other."

Another item on PBA's agenda for the conference was dubbed the Oregon Bisexual Council. The meeting, held on Sunday, represents an effort to foster more interaction and cooperation among bisexual groups in the state.

"Sunday we met to talk about how our groups can better work together," Bonnicksen explains. "It was an intimate conversation.

Everyone agreed on the need to create a common list of resources for bi people. We walked away with plans to create a shared Web site and a commitment to meet again, bringing more people to the table."

PBA publishes a monthly calendar that compiles information about its own events and those sponsored by Oregon's various bisexual groups. Organizations now included are: BiNet Oregon, Bisexual Community Forum, Portland Bisexual Women and the Bi Women's Caucus of Bradley-Angle House.

Add to that list a new group, Bisexual Unity, which recently organized in Corvallis, and it becomes clear that the bi community is more than just the third letter in "LGBT"—it's a vibrant common cause and political movement of its own.

■ **Contact the PORTLAND BISEXUAL ALLIANCE at (503) 775-9717; pba@biportland.org; or P.O. Box 412, Portland, OR 97207.**

CHRISTOPHER D. CUTTONE is a queer-identified bisexual and Just Out staff writer.