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NORTHWESTnews

PICKING UP THE TAB

Preparing to battle an anti-gay initiative, Basic Rights Oregon lunch passed around the kudos—and the collection plate By Jonathan Kipp

More than 400 gathered at Portland's downtown Hilton Hotel, ate their mixed greens and chicken breast, applauded for this and that, and then reached for their wallets. Many had already paid \$50 to attend the event, but most understood why even more funds are needed—and needed soon.

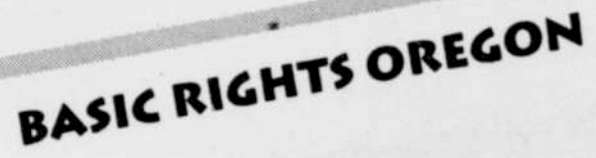
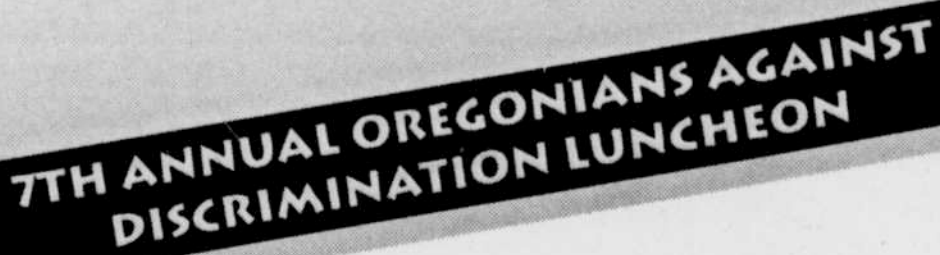
The June 1 luncheon was a fund-raiser, but this affair wasn't exactly like most others of its kind, for behind the niceties and the polite chitchat loomed bad news. And everyone there knew it.

gested to the large crowd, garnering knowing snickers from many.

Despite his sense of humor, Friedenwald-Fishman also showed his passion about the cause. He's been committed to BRO since its inception in 1994.

"We've got to send Lon Mabon a clear message—there's no place in Oregon for discrimination," he said.

The luncheon raised \$30,600 needed for professional polling. According to Jaime Balboa, BRO's executive director, the gay and lesbian rights organization wants to "test language" to

Those in the know had predicted the anti-gay Oregon Citizens Alliance would succeed in putting its so-called Student Protection Act on the November ballot, but at the time no one knew OCA head Lon Mabon would, less than a week later, tell Oregon Public Broadcasting his group has nearly enough signatures already and will continue collecting even more until the July 7 deadline.

The hundreds who attended the seventh annual Oregonians Against Discrimination Luncheon, sponsored by Basic Rights Oregon, want to reach voters before the OCA does.

Eric Friedenwald-Fishman, who gave closing remarks at the luncheon, said there are two things people can do to keep bigotry out of Oregon.

First, people must vote if the OCA measure is to be defeated, he said.

Pollsters have estimated that nearly 1.4 million voters will participate in the November election. Strategists for BRO say they want approximately 700,000 "no" votes.

But voting alone won't do the trick, Friedenwald-Fishman explained, introducing the second piece of his proposal.

The creative director and president of the public relations firm Metropolitan Group, Friedenwald-Fishman stood in front of the well-dressed crowd at the end of the hour-long luncheon. His job: to ask for money.

Using humor helped.
"Make [the donation] on your Visa. You won't even notice," Friedenwald-Fishman sug-

determine what its message should be and to find out what educational efforts are needed.

BRO officials expect that more than \$1.7 million will be needed to defeat the OCA's measure. (Nearly \$4 million was spent to defeat OCA-sponsored measures in the early 1990s.)

In 1992 and 1994, the OCA tried to convince Oregonians to vote for a constitutional amendment that essentially sought to legalize discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In 1992, the OCA's Measure 9 failed to win, snagging only 42 percent of the votes.

A 3 percent to 4 percent victory is considered a landslide in races like these, according to Balboa.

In 1994 the vote was closer. Measure 13 passed in 25 of 36 Oregon counties, but the proposal was ultimately defeated by a 4 percent margin.

The Student Protection Act, if passed, would not make a change to Oregon's constitution. The initiative seeks to make a statutory change in Oregon law. The act would preclude schools (including community colleges) from "the instruction of behaviors relating to homosexuality and bisexuality," in a manner that "encourages, promotes or sanctions such behaviors."

The OCA, joined by the Oregon chapter of the Christian Coalition in support of the Student Protection Act, is beginning to appear more frequently in the media.