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## WRONG WAY

**Nonprofit will continue funding Boy Scouts** by Jonathan Kipp

**T**he United Way of the Columbia-Willamette voted Oct. 20 to maintain its current stance with regard to nondiscrimination policies at its agency partners.

Although this means the Boy Scouts of America Cascade Pacific Council will continue to receive funding, the nonprofit did not vote on the ongoing controversy involving the Scouts, as reported by many Portland journalists. The votes simply upheld standing policies.

The United Way came under fire last summer when, after the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Boy Scouts' right to discriminate against gay men, it threatened to pull its financial support of the Scouts. The agency received hundreds of complaints from people threatening to pull their support should the Scouts lose their annual funding—leading to the policy review and subsequent vote.

Stacey Graham, United Way communications vice president, said the board never heard a motion or took a vote specifically about the Boy Scouts. It discussed policies that would be utilized to address the Boy Scouts controversy and future issues that might result in similar questions.

A 1984 policy established that the United Way would not attempt to "resolve differences of opinion as to the moral standards of the community," Graham said this policy was upheld by a majority vote during the closed board meeting.

She said the United Way cannot weigh in on every social and moral issue because it ultimately would divide the base support it enjoys and wouldn't be in keeping with its mission statement: "Helping people, changing lives, making every contribution count."

According to a press release, the agency's goal is to bring the community together regardless of individual values or opinions and to help people in need. It thinks this best can be accomplished by maintaining a neutral position on divisive community issues.

Some wonder how the gay and lesbian community became a value or an opinion. Multnomah County Chair Bev Stein, who sits on the United Way board of directors, said she doesn't see sexual orientation as a moral issue but a civil rights issue. "I was extremely disappointed with the position the United Way took."

Stein did not attend the meeting in which the vote was taken because she was on vacation. She disagrees with board members who insist the decision wasn't based on money. "There is a severe concern to losing money," she said.

Although Stein is sympathetic about a possible financial loss, she thinks the agency made the wrong choice. But she doesn't think the issue is over.

"The decision will go the other way," Stein said. "It is just a matter of time."

Greg Jackson, a former Eagle Scout and a gay man, called the United Way's decisions weak. He said if any other minority was at the center of this issue, people would be outraged.

Jackson hopes people will contact the United Way to express their disapproval. Beyond that, he said, he encourages people to vote with their pocketbook.

"As a member of this community, I speak out against the board's lack of courage to send a clear message that discrimination, for everyone, will not be tolerated," Jackson wrote in an *Oregonian* guest editorial Oct. 26.

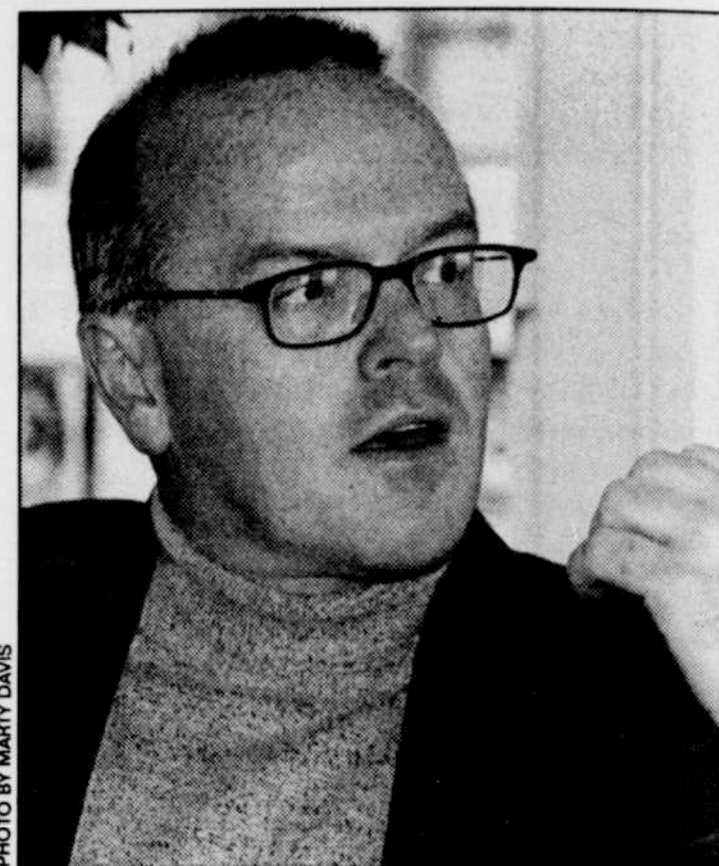


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS  
Greg Jackson

United Way board member Maria Rojo de Steffey, former chief of staff to City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, resigned in protest after the vote. She initially raised the issue of discrimination and her disapproval of the Scouts' policy. Rojo de Steffey was on vacation and could not be reached by *Just Out* for comment.

Saltzman said Sept. 26 that he supports withdrawing United Way funds from the Boy Scouts. "Civil rights is not a menu approach," he said.

Saltzman said if the United Way could not resolve the issue, he would consider approaching the City Council about removing the agency from the city's planned giving program.

Graham said the voting was not taken lightly. The board members agonized over the issue but remained focused on the agency's mission despite their personal opinions, she said.

Under current policy, the United Way is able to contribute money to organizations that discriminate, Graham said. Under federal law, the only protected class in delivery of human services are the disabled.

The United Way does have a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation for its board, staff and volunteers. Graham said the agency is against discrimination but doesn't require its partners to have such policies.

However, she expects the agency soon will send letters to its member agencies and funded recipients urging them to adopt a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation. The decision to do so also was voted on during the Oct. 20 meeting, reaffirming a policy adopted in 1992.

The United Way's donor-directed giving program, in which supporters can determine who will receive their money, had 83,000 donors who supported the needs of more than 450,000 people in 1999. The agency, the Boy Scouts' largest donor, contributes more than \$250,000 annually to the group.

Nationally, 19 United Way chapters have discrimination policies that have affected their funding to the Scouts. Six of those chapters adopted policies after the Supreme Court ruling.

To reach the UNITED WAY OF THE COLUMBIA-WILLAMETTE, call 503-228-9131.

To reach the BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA CASCADE PACIFIC COUNCIL, call 503-228-9131.