

Continued from Page 1

"Kroeker Repent." Another sign read, "Stop Supporting Sodomy."

The forum's sponsors hoped the meeting would spur constructive dialogue between Kroeker and the community. The encounter was the first for him since he took center stage in the controversy spurred when the *Portland Alliance* released several tapes it discovered during a background check containing his controversial comments about homosexuals, AIDS, women, abortion, the justice system and the discipline of children.

The recordings were of several speeches Kroeker made to conservative Christian police organizations while he was employed by the Los Angeles Police Department. The chief, a Christian fundamentalist, called homosexuality a perversion in the tapes and blamed the AIDS epidemic on society's unwillingness to legislate morality.

Since October, Kroeker has insisted the comments were made in a religious context and therefore are private. Because of that, he has refused to make any remarks about the recordings.

Some in the community immediately asked for Kroeker's resignation when the tapes became public; others wanted him fired. His boss, Mayor Vera Katz, came out in strong support of him just days after the comments hit the television airwaves and newspaper pages in the City of Roses.

The statements and ideas presented at the forum will be turned over to the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, which plans to review the information, devise an action plan in hopes of rebuilding trust between the gay community and Kroeker and consider future meetings. The monthly roundtable serves as a bridge of communication between the police bureau and the sexual minorities community.

Although the forum's organizers hoped to stay focused on issues and consequences surrounding Kroeker's anti-gay comments, many who showed up were intent on addressing him about a litany of other issues: police accountability, excessive force used by officers, the May Day protest and the bureau's new dress code, among others. Others wanted to ask him about his views on women, his description of using a boat oar to discipline children as well and his disparaging comments regarding the judicial system.

One person criticized the forum's organizers for attempting to focus the forum on gay and lesbian topics, saying the issues can't be separated.

The chief attempted to answer the question "Who is Mark Kroeker?" before taking on the audience's questions and comments. He outlined his decades-long service to others, listed awards he has received as a result and spoke of events in his life that helped shape him as a man.

But Kroeker also spoke more directly about his personal beliefs than ever before. In the weeks after the tapes were uncovered, he adamantly defended his right to his personal and religious views and refused to answer the media's questions about his present stance concerning gays.



Caught in the cross fire, Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeker repeatedly refused to answer questions involving his religious views

"I have changed substantially in my life in the way I view the world," Kroeker said, stopping short of speaking specifically about the issue of homosexuality.

He said he recognizes that trust has been broken because of the comments he made on the tapes. "Trust is very delicate, very precious and very fragile."

The chief added: "As one solitary man, charged with the leadership of Portland, I ask that you invest in me your trust. I want your trust, and I ask you to hold me accountable for my actions as a police chief, as a neighbor and as a fellow Portlander. This is all I ask."

Kroeker then fielded questions from the audience for almost two hours. But many at the forum thought he avoided the very accountability he requested minutes earlier. He repeatedly refused to answer questions, stating he would not discuss issues involving his religion or his religious views.

Some acknowledged and even supported Kroeker's right to his personal and religious views. But others said the rules about privacy changed when the taped comments, made in what one called a "quasi-private setting," became public.

"You started it," Mitch Gould said to Kroeker. "Your tapes are out in the world."

The tapes were discovered to be for sale on the Web site of a conservative Christian police organization in the United Kingdom. Kroeker has said he didn't know his comments were recorded or for sale. He requested that the organization remove the tapes from the Internet after they were discovered.

For some in the community, the issue isn't Kroeker's decade-old comments or his religious beliefs. The issue, they say, is the consequences of his words.

How can Kroeker lead a police force and

SORRY SEEMS TO BE THE HARDEST WORD

condemn intolerance and bigotry among his officers when they have heard his own intolerant words? Others worry about the fallout. What will this crisis lead to in the daily lives of Portland's sexual minorities? Is the city as safe today as it was before the taped remarks were revealed?

While scores of Portlanders continue to ask for Kroeker's resignation, others have sensed the controversy is dwindling. But just before his scheduled appearance at the forum, the bureau experienced the first consequence that can be traced back to his tapes, possibly adding more energy to the ongoing debate about his appropriateness as police chief.

Portland officer Rob Blanck blasted gays in the December edition of *Rap Sheet*, the police union's monthly publication. His column, "Poyntblank Perspectives," explained that the city would be violating

said as the crowd groaned in disapproval.

In an earlier interview with *Just Out*, Kroeker said that if one of his officers espoused anti-gay, racist, sexist or anti-Semitic rhetoric in a public setting that it would be problematic and that disciplinary action would be taken. However, he was uncertain what the bureau's legal options would be.

"I'm restricted, I'm afraid," Kroeker said when *Just Out* pushed him to explain to the forum's attendees how he would handle such public comments like those made by Blanck. "When a police officer uses an epithet, displays bias in his work or so forth...we have steps we take."

Kroeker declined to elaborate on those steps. **J**

What's next? A MULTI-ISSUE PUBLIC FORUM WITH POLICE CHIEF MARK KROEKER starts 7 p.m. Jan. 9 at Lutheran Inner-City Ministries, 4219 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. For more information contact LMFamily@teleport.com. The forum is sponsored by Love Makes a Family, which spearheaded the Police Chief Concerns Group, a consortium of organizations and individuals concerned with the Kroeker tape recordings.

The next SEXUAL MINORITIES ROUNDTABLE meeting, open to the public, starts noon Jan. 9 in the Chief's Conference Room on the 15th floor of the Justice Center downtown.

JONATHAN KIPP is a *Just Out* staff reporter who can be reached at jkipp@teleport.com.

Title VII if it required diversity training that conflicted with employees' religious beliefs, and he called for officers to protest by refusing to attend.

But Blanck's piece, titled "Cultural Diversity for Everyone," was more about his disdain for the gay and lesbian community—referring to one gay man's "deviant lifestyle"—than for his dislike of sensitivity training. "The militant gays and lesbians...have gained power by intimidation and rhetoric like no other group in the history of our nation," he wrote. "We, as employees, are being indoctrinated into the so-called diversity."

Blanck encouraged Kroeker, "Chief, stand up for your faith and don't apologize for it."

When *Just Out* asked Kroeker to respond to the column, likely read by hundreds of union police officers in Portland, he refused. "I have asked the city attorney for advice and instruction. It has been asked of me that I specifically not discuss this because it's a civil matter," he



Forum participants lined up to tell Kroeker how his words have affected the sexual minorities community