

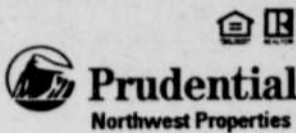
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NORTHWEST news

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PORTLANDERS HELP HOUSTON CAMPAIGN

Three Portland activists traveled to Houston to assist in a campaign opposing a measure that would prohibit the city from offering health benefits to partners of gay and lesbian municipal employees. The measure narrowly passed Nov. 6.

Kathleen Sullivan, who managed the successful campaign against Measure 9 last year, spent three weeks in Texas working to defeat the anti-gay ballot measure. Other activists came to Houston from Washington, D.C.; Boston; New York City; Louisville and Lexington, Ky.; and Santa Fe, N.M.

Sullivan later asked Basic Rights Oregon executive director Roey Thorpe and development director CM Hall to join her. They were in Texas from Nov. 1 to 6.

"The campaign needed some assistance from people with experience in this kind of work," Thorpe says. "We knew that it would be a close race in which we might be able to make a difference."

Because the campaign got off to a fairly late start, Thorpe and Hall focused all of their efforts on reaching voters on Election Day. They assisted in voter identification training and organized volunteers at polling places designated as most likely to have a high percentage of pro-gay voters.

The measure's language made the campaign even more difficult, Thorpe says. Asking for people's support with a "no" vote often leads to confusion at the ballot box, she explains.

Thorpe adds that voter turnout was a major disappointment. Of 1.9 million eligible voters in Houston, fewer than 50 percent are registered, and only about 27 percent actually bothered to cast a ballot this year.

"What progressive activists are facing in Houston is profound apathy," Thorpe says. "The gay community there needs to mobilize themselves as well as their supporters if they want to win."

But Thorpe says many lessons were learned during the campaign. She thinks an earlier, more aggressive voter identification program is key to achieving victory the next time around.

"Clearly, there's been progress made," Thorpe says. "Not only have times changed, but the work that activists have been doing has been paying off."

The narrow margin—51.5 percent to 48.5 percent—represented more than a twofold increase in support for gay rights since 1985, the last time a similar measure was considered. Grant Martin, People for a Fair Houston campaign manager, thinks this fact should not go ignored.

"No matter the final result, we made history today and should be proud," he says. "We've had an unprecedented coalition of leaders from the business, religious, African American and civil rights communities—all standing up for GLBT equality."



Roey Thorpe, Basic Rights Oregon executive director, just returned from Houston, where an anti-gay measure narrowly passed despite diligent campaign efforts

WORKSHOP DISCUSSES SCHOOL SAFETY

A Safe Schools and Community Training Project workshop will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 30 at First Presbyterian Church, 227 N.E. 12th St. in Newport.

The meeting will provide education about the important health and safety needs of sexual minority and questioning youth. The cost is \$25 a person, which includes lunch, beverages and a participant notebook.

The workshop is part of a statewide project involving the Oregon Department of Education; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Oregon State Council; and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. Local sponsors are the Coastal AIDS Network and the Lincoln County HIV Prevention Planning Committee.

For more information call Lynn Kauffman at 541-336-3770, Claudia Webster at 541-867-6135 or Nancy Bohlman at 541-265-6611, ext. 2408.

SUPREME COURT FAVORS PUYALLUP SENIOR CITIZEN

The Washington Supreme Court ruled Nov. 1 that the state's equitable doctrine, which has provided protection to unmarried heterosexual partners for years, also protects lesbian and gay families.

The rule protects those who have been in long-term, unmarried relationships if they separate or if one partner dies. Attorneys argued that the law should apply equally to lesbians and gay men, so they can use it to seek fair distribution of the couple's property in the same way heterosexuals can.

The case went to the Supreme Court after an appellate court ruling stripped Frank Vasquez of his home and business following the death of Robert Schwerzler, his partner of almost 30 years. The case has been watched closely by civil rights organizations who assert that denying lesbian and gay couples access to equity, while they also do not have the freedom to marry, puts these families in a doubly unfair Catch-22.