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## Speak Out

### Don't fence me in

TO THE EDITOR:

I think the idea of putting a fence around Waterfront Park during Pride 2002 is awful ["Big Changes Ahead for Pride 2002," Jan. 4]. The whole point of Pride is to create an open and inviting forum encouraging those out, coming out, unsure and even straight to participate.

What is this about treating "the event more like a private party than a public gathering"? What good does that do? How is having queers line up with \$3 any different from waiting to get into Silverado on a Saturday night?

What makes events like Pride and Peacock in the Park special is that they take place in visible and public locations, where just about anyone can happen upon them, inconspicuously mill about freely and explore the different booths. It is a somewhat anonymous atmosphere, which is good for those still insecure and discovering themselves.

Having a fence up will scare these folks off for sure. If I were closeted, I wouldn't want to stand in line and be so obviously pegged as queer by the general public. And if I were straight, I probably would avoid the event entirely.

It sounds to me like the whole thing is about money. Each year I am amazed at the diversity of organizations that set up booths. Driving the price up will dissuade some of these folks (and myself) from coming, which would be a shame. For Pride to continue to do what it is suppose to, it (like this publication) must remain free!

What about homeless queers who don't have three bucks? Or teen-agers?

And as a gay man I feel it is wrong for me to pay money to come to my own party. I'd rather save the dough to donate as I choose.

Also, aesthetically there is something perverse about having hundreds of queers corralled inside a chain-link fence, suggesting a concentration camp or human zoo.

Finally, as for the fundamentalist rabble-rousers, I think they are a paltry concern. We have a police force for this very reason; let them do their job.

Pride is not a private party. It is a public gathering, and its worth serves not only the queer community but also the community at large. Please keep it open, public and free.

CRAIG STROUD  
Portland

### Abandon the fight for gay marriage!

TO THE EDITOR:

But do not abandon the idea. Marriage is a concept that historically was created in the church and then attached certain legal rights by governments. The word "marriage" has a strong emotional attachment for people with strong religious beliefs because it is a holy, therefore religious, union between men and women.

So when we fight for gay marriage, we are attacking their religious belief system. This is clearly a fight we will lose.

Look at the Defense of Marriage Act and all of the other proposed legislation as examples. We are giving conservative religious groups a way to attack us openly.

But are we truly fighting for marriage in the eyes of the church? If we are, we should be going through the church and not through the government.

There should be a separation of church and state. We are fighting for legal rights and the recognition of a same-sex partnership by our government, not the church.

So why not use language that reflects our true goal and that will not offend our opponents? Call it "legal union" instead of "marriage."

And have them be equal in the law and allow the opposition to think they have defended the religious institution of marriage. Everybody wins.

A fight for "legal union" is a fight we can win. Even deeply conservative, religious people can understand that same-sex partners who have been living together in a committed relationship deserve certain human rights.

Some people might find this a compromise they are not willing to make. They might want to feel that a gay union is equal to a marriage. The question is: In whose eyes?

The church is not ready for that leap, but the state might be. Let's win a battle and not lose the war.

WILLIAM GEORGE  
Boston

### Rated R

TO THE EDITOR:

I have several friends who have restrictions placed on them by various agencies because they are drug addicts or alcoholics who are on probation, parole or post-prison supervision. They cannot go into places that serve

## transitions

### Janet L. Benke, 1944-2001

Former Portlander Janet Lonja Benke died Dec. 27 near Phoenix. She had stopped on the side of the highway to aid an injured dog and was struck by a passing vehicle.

She was born April 5, 1944, in Terre Haute, Ind. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Evergreen State College.

Benke worked as an environmental compliance officer for several corporations in Washington and Oregon, including Boise Cascade, Nestle, Washington Beef and Cascade General. She moved to Arizona last spring to begin a job with Romic Environmental Technologies Corp.

During her years in Olympia, Wash., she was known to many people as "Janet B., the Voice of Lesbian Radio" through her KAOS-FM program, *Alternate Route*. Her love of women's literature, art and music was

reflected in programming that included interviews with well-known Northwest authors, poets, composers and performers.

Benke owned and bred quarter horses and spent many hours enjoying their companionship. Friends say she was a little woman with a big heart who appreciated excellent writing, artful speaking, rodeo riding and roping competitions as well as the magnificent expanses of central and eastern Washington.

She is survived by her brother, Eric of Boston, and father, Paul of Jamestown, N.Y.

A memorial service will be held 2 p.m. Jan. 27 at First Unitarian Church of Portland, 1011 S.W. 12th Ave.

Remembrances may be made to the Arizona Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, P.O. Box 33334, Phoenix, AZ 85067.