

Kafoury and Katz were two of the main supporters.

This was long before politicians thought about courting the gay vote, Nicola notes. "You can't imagine someone getting elected to the Portland City Council, for example, without the support of our community, but at that time, there was no organized community to speak of," he says. "So for Vera and Steve to give us the support they did, when there was no conceivable political payoff for them, that was pretty brave."

The bill almost didn't get out of committee. When it did, it was time to gather support for the public hearing.

Several members of the Second Foundation met at the Family Zoo, a gay bar in Portland, to write letters asking their representatives to support the bill. Word spread for people to come out and help. Nicola created a map so people could easily identify their representative. They cranked out letters and donated a nickel each for postage. "That was the level of our sophistication," Nicola laughs.

But it worked. Later, Nicola heard that many legislators were surprised to get letters from actual constituents rather than people not in their district.

The public hearing was held on a spring day in early May. The House Senate and Federal Affairs Committee laid out the rules: Testimony was to last for only one hour. This was a hearing, not a pep rally. There was to be no applause.

"There was an awful lot of emotional testifying," Hutchins recalls. When he first became involved with the bill, he says the atmosphere was partylike and friendly. "But when you actually get up to testify, it starts getting to where it is a gut-wrenching kind of thing to where you realize this is serious."

People spoke in general terms and specifics. One woman said she was fired from her job as a bartender because she wouldn't date men.

Another woman said she was evicted from her apartment. The Oregon District Branch of the American Psychiatric Association stated, "There is no proper medical basis to accord homosexuals less than full and equal protection under the law."

And then Rita Knapp spoke.

"I was counting on what the psychiatric group had to say as being so compelling that anything I could say would not be very important," says Knapp, who in 1977 co-founded the Portland chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

She couldn't have been more wrong. In a heartfelt tone, she talked about the importance of the rights of her daughter, Kristan Aspen, who went on to helm the Lesbian Community Project. The Oregonian reported that Knapp described Aspen and her friends as being socially conscious, intelligent, warm and happy. Knapp said people need to recognize that citizens have to be free to choose their own lifestyle. It was time to come out of the Dark Ages and disengage from the myths and fears. It was time to erase the laws that deprive homosexuals of their rights.

When she finished talking, she stood up from the table and heard a loud noise. At first she thought she must have knocked the microphone off the table. But then she realized it was applause. Everyone had ignored the committee's rules.

"You would have had to be absolutely heartless not to applaud her," Nicola recalls. "It was incredible."

The bill may have failed, but it was the start of more to come. "Going from the situation where we were sitting in a bar and having people handwrite those letters and pay a nickel for the stamp to what we have today is just amazing," Nicola says. **JN**

PAT YOUNG is a Portland free-lance writer and gay and lesbian historian.

## STILL WAITING

Once again, the Oregon Legislature disregarded pro-gay legislation during this past session.

Senate Bill 786 would have banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodation, public assistance and education. Senate Bill 816 would have added gender identity to the state's bias crime laws, which currently include sexual orientation.

Although both measures received successful hearings, Basic Rights Oregon executive director Roey Thorpe blamed "a logjam on social issues" for the Legislature's inaction. If SB 786 had passed, Oregon would have become only the fourth state to cover gender identity in its anti-discrimination law.

"We're very disappointed," Thorpe said. "Unfortunately, the Republican Party at the present time is controlled by the extreme right wing...and so it's very difficult to be a moderate Republican in our state Legislature."

Thorpe believes that BRO has enough votes to pass the legislation but that GOP leaders seem determined to prevent them from ever going to the floor. "I think that the state Legislature should be ashamed that 30 years have passed and they have still not acted on what, at the time, was a visionary piece of legislation and what now is just long overdue."

—Jim Radosta **JN**

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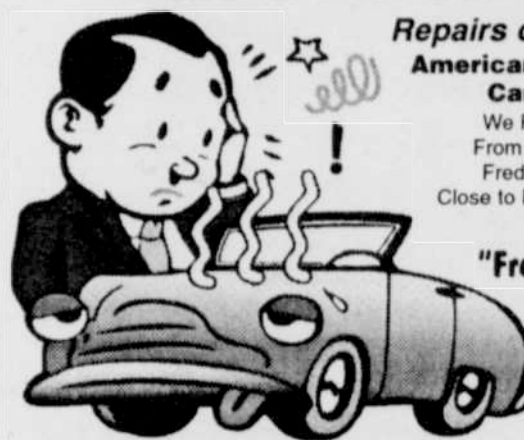
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