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surge in sexually transmitted disease. We know how it is happening. We also have the knowledge to reduce the incidence of infection. What is missing is the fundamental ownership of responsibility by some in our gay community.

So where are we missing the connection between knowledge and practice? Number one, we must recognize that a personal choice is made anytime someone chooses to engage in sex in an unsafe way. What is involved is a choice about one's own health and the health and welfare of the chosen partner. Each individual is responsible for choosing safe over risky.

Secondly, messages to the community should be directly aimed at challenging each and every one to step up to the plate. Messages regarding HIV and STDs, fearing a negative impact on self-image, have become obscure.

"Blaming and shaming" have influenced the messages from the agencies whose charter it is to educate our community. While working to develop positive self-images for gay people, the messages regarding disease transmission have become somewhat indirect. Our messages to the community can both develop a positive image of gay people as sexual people and give clear, direct information about health risks.

There is no blaming or shaming about pointing out a solution based on each person making the responsible choice. However, gay communities all over the country are becoming polarized around the message of individual responsibility.

Government regulation, as proposed by the outreach director of Cascade AIDS Project, is a failed proposition. Regulating morality and behavior is in itself a "blaming/shaming" approach. A sex-positive message with clear and

direct information about personal responsibility will resonate within the gay community.

We are intelligent, powerful, critical thinkers capable of hitting this problem head on. The gay community can and will accept the challenge of getting the current situation under control. Each of us can do a part. Start talking to each other, and reinforce a message of personal responsibility.

TIM SHUCK
Cascade AIDS Project Founding Board Member

What about the heteros?

TO THE EDITOR:
The recent articles in your paper and elsewhere on sexually transmitted diseases, and the organizations that prevent them, disturb me.

It's not that I don't believe in and advocate safe sex. I believe that we as gay people try to identify ourselves as "normal" in many ways; quite often we use heterosexuals for our example. The issue of heterosexual barebacking is seldom addressed in these articles, however.

AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are not exclusively gay. If heterosexual barebacking is overlooked, it only puts the gay mind into believing we are an oppressed group, which leads us to strive to be equal—in this realm, that if it's OK for heterosexuals to bareback, then "We damn well will, too!"

My heterosexual nephew just tested positive for HIV, and NO, he is not bisexual. I know him well.

Please, no more prejudiced articles putting us back in a closet? I encourage all to protect themselves!

TIM BEALER
Portland

Best foot forward?

TO THE EDITOR:
The Portland metropolitan area needs a GLBT community center as a central focus, as a meeting place, as a place to help people connect with our community and be our best foot forward with the larger society.

Unfortunately, the group that assembled in 2003 to develop this center does not have the organizational skills to achieve this. I should know: I attended their community outreach meetings during 2003. I have also sent them information on the successful operations of other GLBT community centers around the country that I have seen.

But this group does not return phone calls or e-mails and will not divulge its post office box number nor Web site address. They have become aloof, distant and mysterious. They willingly lose control of their meetings to those who are severely lacking in the spirit of cooperation, until those meetings become a deplorable forum for the depressed.

I have seen GLBT community centers work smoothly and contribute mightily in Dallas, Fort Worth and Seattle, interfacing with police, youth groups, entrepreneurs and senior citizens, gay and straight. With more than 100 such centers around the country, Portland is one of the largest cities without one.

At a time when regulators and the public expect greater transparency from for-profit corporations, this nonprofit organization could do better. They could contribute so much to the causes of social cohesion and hope.

RON RASMUSSEN
Vancouver, Wash.

Measure 30: Fair, necessary

TO THE EDITOR:
I'd like to urge other members of the GLBT community to participate in the Feb. 3 special election and vote YES on Measure 30.


I believe that Measure 30 is a fair and necessary temporary income tax surcharge. It is a progressive tax and will only cost about \$3 a month for the average Oregonian—\$3 that will go a long way to keeping critical services available in our state. Additionally, profitable corporations will be required to pay at least \$500 a year in income taxes, instead of the \$10 they pay now!

If Measure 30 doesn't pass, many important services will be lost:

- Schools will automatically lose \$400 million in funding—forcing them to cut even more days from the school year, lay off teachers and increase class sizes.
- About 85,000 people will lose their benefits from the Oregon Health Plan.
- Thousands of people who can't afford their life-saving medications will lose prescription drug benefits.
- Children's day care; adult mental health; treatment for alcohol, drug and gambling addiction; foster care and adoption services; and services for people with physical disabilities all face potentially devastating cuts.

Please be sure to mail in your YES on 30 vote. It will make a big difference for all of Oregon.

SARAH SWANSON
Portland



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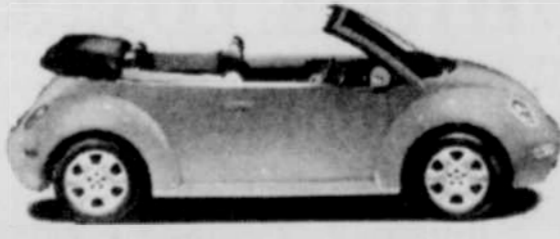
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