

in the creation and identification of a trans community, legal and legislative actions are constantly under way that affect the quality of life for trans people. Leaders struggle to develop strategies that can mobilize opinion and common purpose in the community in response to these actions.

"Since the trans movement, on a political footing, is still developing, we can't speak without reserve for the same constituency. There is no general sense of public leadership direction," Buckwalter says.

With a lack of political solidarity or identity, there is no organized voice to act or respond on behalf of trans people. According to Buckwalter, the Senate lacks civil rights advocates who are willing to support nondiscrimination measures.

Of significant concern is the status of gender identity inclusion in anti-bias legislation. Conference participants agreed that the extension of hate crimes laws to protect genderqueer people is an essential step toward creating a safe community, not only for trans people, but for all people. Buckwalter believes trans issues, like all diversity issues, share a similar process of exclusion.

"There is no excuse for there not to be full inclusion of gender identity in hate crimes legislation," she says. "There is a demonstrable need for it. There must be a clear message that all people have a right to live in safety. No other civilized culture abandons this notion in a group of people because of what they represent."

Legislation looming on the horizon threatens to chip away at the personal rights and safety of trans people. The hotly contested Federal Marriage Amendment seeks to define the institution as a union between one man and one woman, defining "man" and "woman" in concrete legal terms. Increased travel security policies enacted by the newly formed Department of Homeland Security mean close scrutiny of individuals whose gender presentation and identification are considered out of the norm. Trans people have already suffered great humiliation and civil rights violations in the wake of such measures.

Statutes such as these at the federal level are particularly significant because they have the power to supersede local law, Buckwalter says. "There is a lot of administrative hassle right now that threatens the fabric of local and state laws that people have used to survive and to facilitate their transitions. This is a really scary time." The institution of a federal law defining "man" and "woman" will affect passports, tax documents, Social Security and the transferability of docu-

ment changes from one state to another.

While Buckwalter believes discussions around gender theory and broad legal strategies are essential pieces in the development of community consciousness, her activism is focused on the effects of this kind of legislation. "There are more pragmatic things than grand natural politics. Things like legal identification, medical referrals and dealing with insurance issues. These are little things that are self-empowering opportunities for people."

Together with gender therapist Reid Vanderburgh, Buckwalter began the Identity Project in Portland to address such pragmatic concerns. Operating out of Outside In, the program provides resource, referral and financial assistance to people seeking to change their identification and accomplish other legal goals in relation to their transitions.

"The identification process is one of the incremental but invaluable processes when legality touches human beings," Buckwalter says. "In these crucial passage points of strength and weakness, there are some things that people can do for themselves. Identification—or medically and legally controlled identity—gives people access to possibilities."

This type of direct action was an important contribution to the conference, Buckwalter adds. "I think everyone recognized that local activism is a part of the conversation. There must be a way to weave pragmatic programming into the underpinnings of legal and public policy."

While no specific plans were made to hold another conference of this kind, Buckwalter is confident that a similar gathering of leaders and activists will be held soon. Ideally, she would love to see a larger regional conference that includes a greater and more diverse number of voices.

"Conferences are important in growing our sense of awareness," Buckwalter says. "People need to come away with successes and new ways to succeed."

Though she acknowledges the complex challenges facing the young trans and genderqueer movement, Buckwalter is optimistic about what lies ahead. "Some see gender as a cliff that exists in front of us. Rather than plowing into it, sometimes you start at the bottom and work your way up. Then, you turn around and offer someone else a rope. If we can all just keep our foot in the door of possibility, maybe eventually it will be opened." □

ERIC PLEMONS is a Portland free-lance writer.

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—Lori Buckwalter

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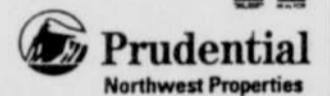
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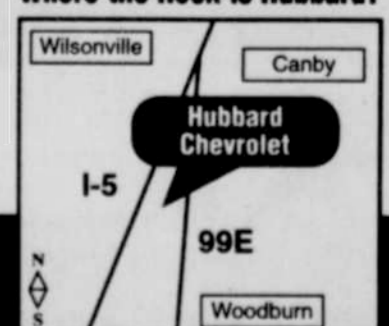
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