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A friend in need

Support an ally who has put her job on the line for us

In the past two weeks many of you have criticized me for questioning the process that resulted in Multnomah County issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Procedural questions aside, I stand in personal awe of the results and reiterate my respect and regard for the county commissioners. This is even more evident to me now, two weeks later, as the clouds and storms of anger and threats whirl about the commissioners' heads. Our supporters are under fire. What are we going to do to help?

The immediate task before us is securing the re-election of Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey. She has worked long and hard for us, and now is the time for us to return the favor. Prior to the decision to issue same-sex marriage licenses, Rojo was running unopposed for her seat. Now she is faced with a gaggle of candidates and the energy-depleting task of campaigning and fund raising. In the next few weeks there are three excellent opportunities for you to meet and visit with her. The best means we have now of thanking the commissioner is to bring out our checkbooks.

You can meet Rojo at 2 p.m. March 21 during the Portland Gay Men's Chorus' "Wedding Celebration." See the calendar on Pages 30 and 31 for additional details. On March 25, show your support 5:30 p.m. at Hobo's. And Blend Coffeehouse is hosting a coffee from 6 to 7:30 p.m. April 1.

Let's all come forward to give back to the friend and ally who has put her job on the line for us.

On March 17, I attended the City Club of Portland forum "Marriage: State of the Union." During the question-and-answer portion the panelists were asked their opinion on why same-sex marriage is so threatening to so many people. The answer, provided by Oregon State University sociology professor Rebecca Warner, was brilliant in its concise clarity: "I think we're challenging people who hold power."

Who are the people who hold power in the United States? People who hold power in the United States are older white men. They are being challenged and they are being threatened—and, worse yet, they are losing. Impotent with rage is an expression that comes to mind. At this point I suspect Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski might be one of these threatened and angry people of power. While powerless to stop Multnomah and Benton counties from issuing same-sex marriage licenses, he has directed that the state vital records unit will refuse to certify or recognize all same-sex marriages until the matter has been resolved, presumably before the Oregon Supreme Court.

While politically emasculated angry white men are seething, the elevated activity level in the gay rights movement is creating both concern and partnership among black leaders and activists. In Portland,

Bruce Broussard, African American activist, talk show host and candidate for the Republican nomination to run against U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, is named as one attempting to bring a lawsuit against Multnomah County. In the past Broussard raged against local gays and lesbians whom he blamed for restrictions on military recruiting in Portland Public Schools. He later chatted with me at a Basic Rights Oregon dinner and apologized for "the misunderstanding." I sense that all the misunderstanding has yet to be cleared up.

On a national level, members of the National Black Justice Coalition are taking a firm stand against the religious right and coming out in support of marriage equality. Gay activist and coalition president Keith Boykin promised that his organization would continue to confront homophobic right-wing groups seeking inroads in the black community.

On March 13 the Oregon Christian Coalition held a prayer rally and petition drive sign-up in Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square. It was a pretty dismal affair with a very low turnout. The coalition is the far right, the fringe and, perhaps by some, easily dismissed. However, the Defense of Marriage Coalition is not the far right. They are far closer to the center of the Christian fundamentalist belief. They are organized, they have money, and they are focused on their task. If they are able to keep up their momentum, they could be a formidable foe. Keeping up the momentum was one of the topics at the City Club forum, where it was suggested that the anger, the fury, the emotional wringing of hands might "go quietly into the night," as Oregonians and Americans turn their lives and attentions to

problems of employment, families, health care and day-to-day urgencies that impact each and all of us. While seeing promise and possibility in the short term, today we still have tasks at hand.

Finally, I'd like to share a tale of two women I met during the weddings last week at Holocene. They were visitors from another state, a state in the South. A state where a young man had recently been murdered because he was thought to be gay. A state that refused to air the "I'm a lesbian" episode of *Ellen*. These women came to Oregon to be married and they were terrified. Thirty-two years together and they couldn't say their names aloud to me. Women who in their very fear were brave enough to step forward in front of strangers in a city far from their home and proclaim their love and devotion for one another.

Two frightened and happy women who then took up their suitcases and headed back to a home state filled with fear and repression. No matter what the outcome of our battle for marriage rights, very few of us living in Oregon will ever know or face the fears of the two women who

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REFLECTIONS 10 years ago in just out...
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- Meet the Lesbian Community Project's new executive director, LaVeme Lewis, at the organization's annual membership meeting and volunteer recognition night March 30. All LCP members and friends are welcome to an evening of good food, socializing, committee reports and updates.
- The Clinton administration has developed grievance procedures for gay and lesbian federal employees who feel they have been discriminated against, according to U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass. The move marks the first time that the nation's Office of Personnel Management has said it will not tolerate discrimination against sexual minority people.
- State Rep. Terrance Tom introduced a bill into the Hawaii House that would exclude same-sex couples and their children from all legal, social, health and welfare rights and benefits that heterosexual couples and their children are entitled to.
- The Lesbian Community Project's Anti-Violence Line received 99 calls in 1993 to report incidents of homophobic violence, the organization announced March 8.
- More than one-third of candidates for school board posts across the state appeared to be a part of the radical right, according to a study by Right Watch, an Oregon political action committee.



ON THE COVER

Having met through a *Just Out* singles party at Unleash Yourself Dog Daycare, Leea Voetberg (left) and Tracey Vukovich were "leashed in love" March 8 at Lucky Labrador Brew Pub. The Rev. Susan Leo of Bridgeport United Church of Christ officiated. Sharing in their joyous ceremony were close friends Danny and Ron, who also recently married. A reception in the gardens of their home and a honeymoon of tropical snorkeling through Olivia Cruises will follow. The couple have two dogs: Buddy, a black lab, and Morgan, aka "Morgi the Corgi."

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