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OPB demonizes gay families

TO THE EDITOR:

As a proud member of OPB, and a member of a gay family, I was deeply offended at your decision to air the now-famous "Sugartime" episode of *Postcards from Buster* at an irregular time in order to provide "parents the means to control the context in which they use the program to introduce this subject to their children" (to quote Maynard Orme, OPB president and CEO).

While I commend you for agreeing to air the episode in the first place, your "compromise" sends the message that gay families are controversial and that our existence should be treated with care and discretion. Tell me: Why is it appropriate to give parents the means to "control the context" in which same-sex families are presented to their children, but not other kinds of families (single-parent households, interracial relationships, etc.)?

Gay families exist. This is a simple fact that will not go away. That our existence has become politicized of late is through no fault of our own but rather because others have chosen to demonize us for their own ends. By treating gay families differently from other families, OPB has unwittingly taken the side of the demonizers.

In short, to be told that one's very existence is controversial can only be construed as an insult. I've come to expect this kind of shabby treatment from the Bush administration and the mainstream media—but OPB is different! I hope that in the future you will take a more courageous attitude in presenting the truth about people's lives.

MATT PEARSON
Portland

BRO ignoring reality

TO THE EDITOR:

At the risk of seeming divisive (once again), I'd like to make a few comments about my perception of gay marriage rights as I see them in Oregon.

There are several couples, as reported in *Just Out*, who are challenging Oregon's version of the Defense of Marriage Act, which changed our state constitution ["Couples Challenge Same-Sex Marriage Ban," Feb. 4]. Contrary to what reporter Meg Daly stated—that, "if successful, the case could mean the end of anti-gay ballot measures in Oregon"—I do not believe this challenge will change anything in the long run. To me, the challenge is based merely on technicalities that do not fundamentally challenge the denial of equal marriage rights. If the measure is found unconstitutional on these technicalities, the sponsors of the original measure will just rewrite it and submit another one that does comply with the law.

Basic Rights Oregon and others will be engaged, distracted and spending lots of money on a court challenge that may take several years to resolve, only to become moot when a corrected ballot measure of marriage discrimination is passed again. BRO must have had some idea of the tenuousness of its position, as it waited until the last day they could wait to file a challenge.

Before Measure 36 was voted on, three polls of voters showed the measure failing, except the one that BRO commissioned. I stopped my contributions to BRO at that time because of what I believed was ignorance in the face of reality.

Now, while BRO is challenging Measure 36, a Republican state representative from Bend is writing a civil union measure that could include gay couples. Do we really want a Republican defining civil unions for gays and lesbians? Just as national gay and lesbian organizations "got it

just asking

How would you market Oregon to out-of-state gay and lesbian visitors? What's the hook to bring in these tourist dollars? Should local businesses be rewarded with lavender money, or does Ballot Measure 36 warrant punitive measures?

Yes, bring all the gays and lesbians to Oregon that we can, but simultaneously identify "friends" and direct the tourists to businesses that actively support equal rights for all. The campaign contribution lists have the info needed to find out which businesses are not GLBT-friendly. Don't "target" them; generate lists of alternatives, and publish those lists.

As a lesbian, I will choose to patronize businesses that support equal rights for my wife and me. If I had a list of such businesses, I could be even more effective. Then bring on the tourists...and point them toward our friends.

ROSEMARY TEETOR
Portland

wrong" in underestimating the backlash of voters against gay marriage, BRO has it wrong in continuing this challenge.

I am a lifelong Oregonian (more than 55 years) and advocate sanctioning gay marriage in Oregon. I firmly believe in that part of the constitution that states, more or less, "No laws shall be passed granting rights or privileges to any group or individual that shall not be granted to all."

I feel BRO is once again ignoring reality. I believe that efforts should be directed toward approving a civil union ordinance that includes gays and lesbians for the present and make the long-term goal full marriage privileges for the future.

KIM BALLER
Portland

BRO responds

DEAR KIM:

Thanks for sending a copy of your letter to me; I appreciate it.

You might not be aware that BRO is working with key legislators—including state Sen. Ben Westlund, R-Bend, as well as Democratic leadership in the House and Senate—on the civil union issue and has drafted more than one bill to reflect different strategies and situations that might unfold. All the legislators we've spoken with have agreed that it is best to wait a few months before introducing any particular civil unions bills, so that the Supreme Court has a chance to rule in *Li vs. Oregon*, which may or may not give the Legislature some direction on the issue. Our lobbyist is very much on top of this, and I agree with you that framing this issue ourselves is very important and that it is prudent for us to support civil unions as a step in the right direction.

As for the timing of the lawsuit, there's no connection between the timing and the strength of the arguments themselves. In fact, I would think that if we had a weak argument that we would have filed it with a big splash the day after the election as a political move that

would have created a big stir. Instead, we have worked with attorneys and constitutional scholars to craft the very best arguments we can.

I am concerned, as you are, that to win on a technicality is not politically sustainable. That's why the first two of our arguments are made in a way that winning would preclude another ballot measure that just changed a word or two. The third argument—the one about "policy" vs. "law"—does leave that door open, and it was a difficult decision about whether to include it. The reason we did was that every attorney we spoke with felt that the distinction was extremely important to make and that without it, the credibility of our whole complaint was in question.

So we are indeed taking a risk, and it's one of those areas where legal and political concerns are not in harmony. I understand that you may not agree with this decision, but I want you to know that it was not made without many long and serious discussions.

BRO has two legislative priorities this session: passing the Oregon Basic Fairness Act, which is a broad nondiscrimination bill (the governor, by the way, didn't come up with the idea of this bill—he agreed to make it a priority because of our pressure on him) and passing a civil unions bill. It sounds to me like you probably agree with both of those priorities.

We are putting our energy and our money into creating a lobbying effort on both issues that is larger than anything our state legislators have ever seen or would predict. We are gathering 1,000 people to our Day of Action in Salem on March 3. I hope you'll consider joining us there, and I'd be glad to talk with you further about that day, or about any of these issues, at any time.

I appreciate your past support of BRO, and I am grateful that there are thoughtful, experienced people like you who are voicing your opinion and adding to the discussion about the direction of our work and our movement. Take care, and please do feel free to call anytime.

ROEY THORPE
Basic Rights Oregon

notables

Nikki Jauron (left) and Kristi Culver were legally wed Nov. 6, 2004, in Vancouver, British Columbia. It was a small ceremony witnessed by Jauron's youngest sister, Stacy Mills.

A reception will be held in the near future so the couple's friends can celebrate their marriage with them. Culver and Jauron are living happily in their Northeast Portland apartment with their two cats, dog and dove and hope to start a family soon.

