

An 89-year old. A 3-month old. A 6-year old and her paralyzed mother. People from 26 countries around the world. All of these, and 200 more, are now registered to take part in Oregon's Walk for Truth, Justice and Community, which will wend its way from Salem to Portland between June 12 and 18.

The Rural Organizing Project, in coalition with Oregon Action (an economic and social justice organization) and Causa (Oregon's immigrant rights coalition), is organizing the walk, which seeks to highlight the allied causes of funding human needs, demanding economic justice and protecting civil rights, immigrant rights and civil liberties.

ROP, according to its mission, exists to "strengthen the skills, resources and vision of primary leadership in local autonomous human dignity groups with a goal of keeping such groups vibrant sources for a just democracy." Active in a variety of issues that affect rural Oregonians, ROP has consistently stood as a major force for queer civil rights around the state. The organization was formed in the wake of the Measure 9 fight in 1992 and has broadened its focus to multi-issue, grassroots work. Its vision of community is united in communities across the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation and class.

The Walk for Truth, Justice and Community is designed to formulate common response to the "war program"—the real costs of war for rural communities—to unite in action, to declare resistance and to celebrate a vision for the future.

Rural Oregon communities will send off their contingents of walkers at regional kickoffs June 12. Caravans around the state will rendezvous in Salem at 3 p.m. to commence the weeklong journey. The walkers will set up each

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

Oregonians walk together for truth, justice and community

by Sarah Dougher

night as a tent city—hearkening to the spirit of resistance and community created in the face of oppression and poverty throughout history and today in tent cities that house the nation's homeless. Each county in Oregon will fly its community's flag to declare its presence in the new community that the group is building together.

June 13 will see the group in Salem greeted by flags, banners, drums and giant puppets. The group will make its presence known at the Legislature, then gather that evening for a hoe-down, joined by progressive legislators and Salem allies.

The walkers will move June 14 toward Woodburn, stopping at Chemeketa Community College, where they will pitch their tents and discuss why democracies require education opportunities and tax fairness. In Woodburn, immigrant and worker allies from Causa and Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United will join the march in the shared commitment to economic justice and human rights.

The group will gather at the feast table on the evening of June 15 and hear stories of the successes and struggles of the workers who plant and harvest Oregon's fields.

The walkers will reach Oregon City by June 16. Here, they will affirm democratic values, demanding protection for the Bill of Rights and equal rights for queers and their families.



Rural Oregonians rally at the state Capitol to drum up support for the Walk for Truth, Justice and Community.

The walkers will march June 17 on Portland welcomed by urban allies at Oregon Action. They will carry their message to the federal government via U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith's office at the downtown World Trade Center.

Joining the walk will be activist Suzanne Pharr, who just finished her five-year tenure as the first female director of the Highlander Center, a civil rights organization in eastern Tennessee. She was instrumental in the initial anti-Oregon Citizens Alliance organizing and will soon start work with Southerners on New Ground, which works for cross-issue organizing in the sexual minorities community. "I love the

ROP, I love Oregon and love rural work, so I guess I just had to come out for it," she said from her home in Knoxville, Tenn.

Walkers have differing motivations for taking up the challenge, but all seem to agree that solidarity with fellow progressives from around Oregon ranks high on their list of reasons. Dancer Davis of Roseburg says, "This time calls for a broader political analysis of the current state of our grassroots progressive movement that values all of us and our environment." She also recognizes the passage of Measure 36 and the Democratic scapegoating of same-sex marriage as directly affecting her holistic response and desire to connect with other Oregonians.

Karen Beesley, also of Roseburg, has been working in her community to do outreach for people who want to communicate their concerns but who can't necessarily go on the walk: "I've ordered T-shirts and gotten people to sign postcards that we will deliver to the governor and Legislature when we get to Salem. I've done some recruiting for the walk at local supportive businesses around town. I've found some peace activists who are marching in a local parade here on the weekend of the 18th and got them to carry our signs, as well." Beesley, whose activism includes environmental action as well as queer issues, sees the march as an opportunity to connect the topics that are important to her.

Stuart Henderson from Florence concurs: "I want to take part in the movement to change America's direction. As an artist, I've used paint to try to call attention to the misplaced priorities of this administration. Now it's time to take a walk with my progressive brothers and sisters in this show of support for a different kind of vision." ■

To register for the WALK FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY call the Rural Organizing Project at 503-543-8417.

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