

NORTHWESTnews

THE END OF THE LINE FOR SENATE BILL 1000

Basic Rights Oregon enters information-gathering phase

by Sarah Dougher

The spirit of the crowd July 20 was high; more than 800 supporters of Senate Bill 1000 gathered on the north steps of the Capitol in Salem to demand Oregon House Speaker Karen Minnis hold a vote on the civil unions legislation.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski was there. Portland City Commissioner Sam Adams was there. Basic Rights Oregon director Roey Thorpe was there. People had driven from as far away as Bend and Ashland.

Yet the following day, instead of bringing the bill to a vote, Minnis undertook what is called a "gut and stuff," basically taking the text out of

Supporters were again thwarted by Minnis, who seemed to use every legislative trick in the book to avoid what she knew to be not only a contentious but possibly successful attempt to create basic civil rights protections for queers around Oregon.

Minnis then went ahead and changed a 140-year-old rule in the House that would have allowed lawmakers to take any bill out of committee for an up or down vote, thereby cementing her own rule over the majority.

Both Republicans and Democrats were disheartened by the speaker's actions. "This move flies in the face of the will of the majority and standard parliamentary rule," said Rep. Steve March, D-Portland. "This is a tyranny move, and I oppose such a move. It is not appropriate to do this."

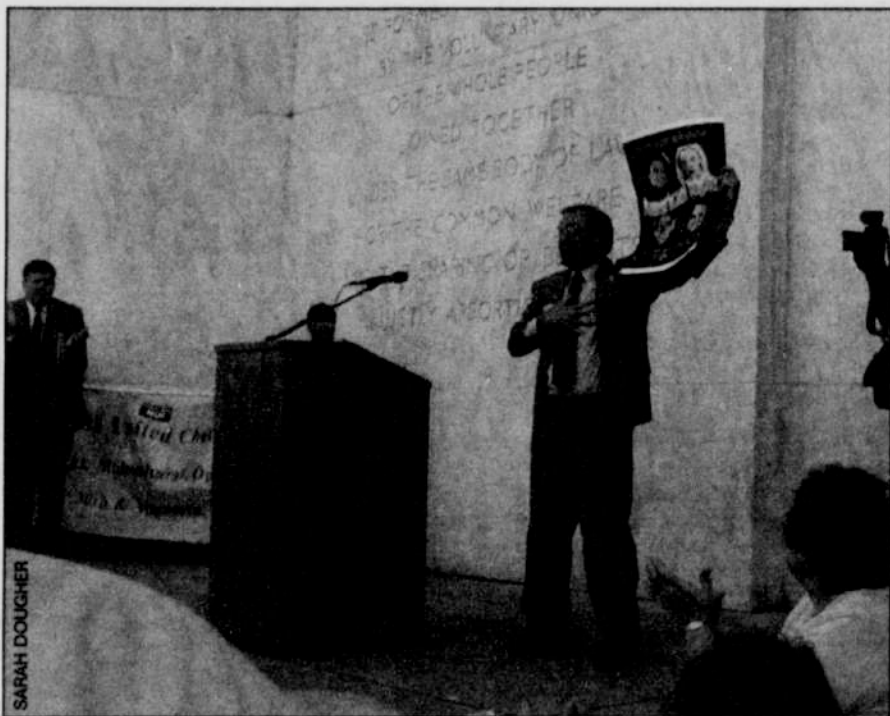
Rep. Billy Dalto, R-Salem, added: "I want to note my concern about this rule change. I am very sorry that it had to come to this."

WHAT THEN, YOU MAY WONDER, IS NEXT?

After a year of quick decisions and roller coasters of emotion on a variety of issues affecting the lives of queer Oregonians, the staff at BRO has entered a phase in which they hope to gather information and create a plan to move forward.

Spokeswoman Rebekah Kassel said: "We're not going to make a concrete plan until we know what we're dealing with.... We will go forward with a well-thought-out plan that involves a broad base of consensus."

In the coming months, BRO will undertake



Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski speaks forcefully to the crowd about his support for civil rights.

the bill and substituting the old reciprocal benefits text.

Then, she referred the bill to the House Budget Committee without discussion or debate. "Policy" bills like SB 1000 don't generally find their home in a budget committee, but the bill was placed there in order to circumvent any possibility of it reaching a vote.

Nevertheless, in an effort to keep the spirit of the bill alive, House Democrats introduced a new bill aimed at creating civil unions and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, employment, public accommodations and public services.

Sponsored by Rep. Mary Nolan, D-Portland, House Bill 3508 was also drafted, similar to civil union legislation in Vermont, to broaden appeal by including "reciprocal benefits" for those individuals not eligible for a civil union or marriage.

a broad survey of its members and the public, in addition to holding strategy sessions with a variety of people, to get initial thoughts and considerations before moving forward. If you would like to keep up to date and participate in this process, contact BRO via its Web site, www.basicrights.org.



The guys in ties are our friends: Sens. Ben Westlund (left), R-Tumalo, and Alan Bates, D-Ashland, stand among the more than 800 people gathered in support of SB 1000.

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