

Basic rights

Legislation simply brings fair, equal civil rights to all Oregonians

It was a spur-of-the moment decision that took me to Salem on March 12 for the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on Senate Bill 2. This bill, when passed, will ban discrimination based on sexual-orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations. SB 2 is one of two pieces of legislation expected to come before lawmakers this session. This first bill is not intended to provide for civil unions; that will be the task of House Bill 2007. SB 2 simply brings fair, equal civil rights to all Oregonians.

I repeat this twice because, from listening to the opponents' side of the testimony, you'd have thought the bill would be giving gays, lesbian and trans folks the right to inherit the earth. Which, by the way, we do have.

The hearings were opened by state Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, at 5:40 p.m. My heart sunk a little when she announced that all oral testimony would close at 9. I had an earlier hour in mind. Because I hadn't made it to the morning hearing, I came to the evening with the expectation that there'd be little or no opposing testimony. I had visions of lines of Basic Rights Oregon volunteers—sorry, Aisling and Melissa—parading up and reading, over and over, basically the same standard script. I was expecting to squirm with boredom. As I'm starting to repeat frequently here, "I was wrong."

Those who signed up to speak were called forward in groups of three: three opponents followed by three proponents. Very fair, very organized and very intense. People came with baggage. Baggage packed full of fear, prejudice and ignorance.

Because it's so very important that you understand the need to be back in Salem for the next round of hearings, here are a few gems of testimony as presented by the "opponents." Keep in mind, please, these folks believe what they are saying.

- "Basic freedoms and rights of the common man would be censored. Goodness, beauty and truth-based religions will be replaced with the subjective world of pleasing one's genitals."

- "I believe that the bottom line of this legislation is to sexually indoctrinate children from the earliest age. Since the '60s, the old adage has been 'sex at 8 or it's too late.' With this legislation, the doors would be open even wider for access to our innocent children."

- "We are Christians and do not believe that Senate Bill 2 is moral or fair. This Legislature is not allowing the voice of its constituents to vote. It is the will of the people to make the choices in social reform."

- "It is clear these bills, as formulated, if passed, would be severely damaging to religious freedom in this state."

- "Christian children are more persecuted than anybody. [Bullying] children are like chickens. They will peck away until they have killed."

- "The 'homosexual agenda' attacks Christians, the only people who are praying for them."

- And, my favorite, "Gays have higher income and better lifestyle, as indicated by the Home and Garden Channel."

What became clearer and clearer as the evening drew on was that there are two camps in this battle: Christians and everyone else. Christians fear that they are now the target, that "Christian-bashing" is the new hate crime. What they don't understand is that they fear they will be treated in exactly the same manner that they have always been allowed to treat gays and lesbians. They fear an equal playing field. The Christians who oppose the bill oppose the Christians who support the bill. The testimony was fraught with fear and misunderstanding. Tired old clichés were drug out. Gay men only live to be 40, blah, blah, blah. The children of Oregon are in danger of attack from men in dresses prowling in women's restrooms. It would seem to me that anyone with a television, computer or newspaper would know that the pre-eminent danger to children comes from white heterosexual men stalking kids on Web sites. How many times has *Dateline NBC's* "To Catch a Predator" set up camp outside a gay bar?

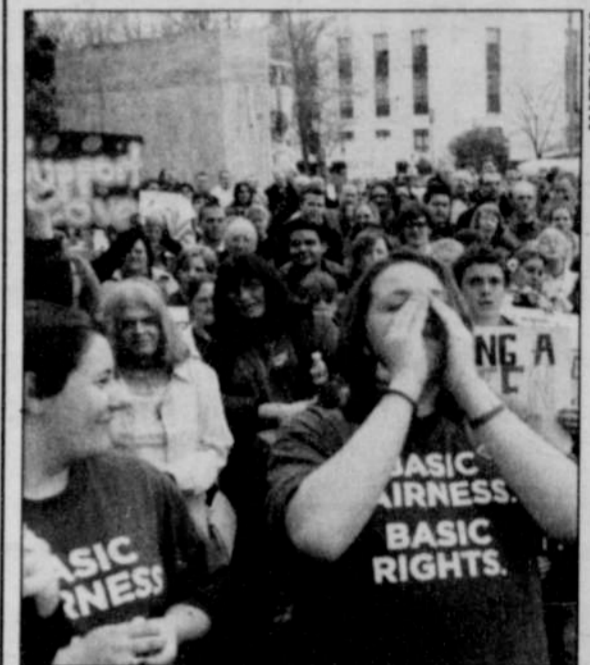
The greatest danger facing the children of Oregon is their parents' ignorance.

Testimony from those in support of the bill was powerful and moving. It was not merely a parade of the familiar activists and leaders, though those were present also. Two nervous lesbian moms and their daughter came from Eugene. Supporters of the bill drove in from around the state. Many had never done anything like this before. This was a defining moment. They gave voice to the testimony that we all need to give. Bonnie Tinker of Loves Makes a Family pointed out that she was a young woman when she first appeared before these hearings in 1973. Tinker, Charlie Hinkle and a handful of others have been battling for Oregonians' civil rights for 34 years. This year, let's throw them a grand victory party.

Before the party and the cake, there's more work to be done. The hearings will continue; as of now, the date is uncertain. BRO is closely working with Salem lawmakers and will get the dates to us as soon as they are known. *Just Out*, however, does not publish again until April 6, and the hearings might be scheduled before that time. We ask that you check our Web site and blog daily. The minute that the hearings are announced, the info will go up. Please plan on attending. You are needed. Bring your stories, bring your families, bring your children. This is their history. Pull them from school, if necessary; show them how our political system works. This is education also.

In closing, a big thanks to Ginny Burdick for the work she is doing for us. I know she had her eye—but not, I think, her heart—on the Portland City Council; regardless, Ginny, we need you now for the fine work you are doing in Salem. Maybe another time, OK?

Thank you. ☺



MARTY DAVIS

FEATURE

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• Equality legislation might be headed for passage

NEWS

8-15 NORTHWEST

New mixed bar opens; neighborhood cafe sees change; drug-resistant HIV detected in Seattle; YWCA reaches out to sexual and gender minorities; mayor weighs in on bias crime; Salem AIDS organization closes; Q Center coordinator resigns; ACLU's chief out in front on rights; conference gives kids a place to be themselves.

16-17 NATIONAL

Clinton addresses HRC; ID deadline postponed; GLAAD calls for Coulter ban; Arkansas bill would bar adoption; gay senior housing opens; trans activists nominated for SF Pride distinction; city manager fights for job; marriage debate heats up in Maryland

18-19 WORLD

Gays sue Moscow mayor; Italian civil union bill shelved; European rights agency launches; Malta OKs transsexual marriage; French court nixes lesbian adoption; Iraqi gay activist reports "sexual cleansing"; Nigerian assembly advances anti-gay bill; Buenos Aires supports same-sex marriage

ARTS & CULTURE

35 BOOKS

Northwest authors address pop culture, teen angst

37-38 FILM

Early erotic masterpiece finally sees the light on DVD; woman falls for brother's girlfriend in screwball comedy *Gray Matters*

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Not your ordinary drag

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Tattle Tale

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Cheek to Cheek

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The Denver Scramble

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Not Narrow



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reflections

5 Years Ago in *Just Out...* volume 19 number 10, march 15, 2002

- Bonnie Mabon, Oregon Citizens Alliance secretary-treasurer, was hauled back into Multnomah County Court for a judgment debtor examination March 5 in photojournalist Catherine Stauffer's ongoing effort to collect more than \$40,000 owed to her for a 1991 assault.

- Kip Beardsley, who was in charge of gay health promotion for the Southwest Washington Health District, is now Arizona's AIDS director.

- Basic Rights Oregon recently added two staff members: field director Jessica DuBois and program coordinator Melissa Shepherd. Both are new to Portland, although each visited the area before settling here.

- The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee held a hearing Feb. 27 on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act featuring supportive testimony by executives representing some of the country's most prestigious corporations. If passed, the bill would ensure gay, lesbian and bi U.S. citizens have equal rights in the job market and workplace.



- The Portland Gay Men's Chorus proudly presents *Vintage Voices*, a multimedia show honoring the lives of gay and lesbian senior citizens, through March 24 at Reed College's Kaul Auditorium. The program includes choral, instrumental, dance and video programs.

- *Lesbian sing*. That was the sign, posted at the women's gathering in 1986, that announced the birth of the Portland Lesbian Choir. The group will celebrate 15 years of out-and-proud crooning with its spring concert, *A Musical Scrapbook*, April 7.

- When Portlander Julie Bulrice began playing racquetball 15 years ago, she had no idea she would end up the 2001 national women's doubles champion or a national mixed doubles champ.

- Something new is going on 'round Portland. Here's the idea: Every Saturday and Sunday evening, lesbians will descend on a bar and coffee shop, respectively, creating Dyke Night Portland. You don't need an invitation, just an e-mail listserv telling you the locations of the upcoming takeovers.