

# northwest

## 'Then You Win'

Rally comforts hundreds fighting for domestic partnerships

by Jaymee R. Cuti and Julie Sabatier

**S**peakers at a Jan. 30 rally in support of domestic partnerships conveyed a direct message to the estimated 2,000 drenched and shivering attendees at Terry Schunk Plaza: We are right, we will win.

Jeana Frazzini, Basic Rights Oregon's new executive director, told rallygoers that because they were on the right side, their cause, implementing Oregon's domestic partnership law, would prevail despite setbacks. The snag, a judgment to temporarily suspend Oregon's domestic partnership law, is expected to be ruled upon in mid-February.

U.S. District Judge Michael Mosman ruled Dec. 28 in favor of a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction of the domestic partnership law, as argued by the Alliance Defense Fund. The law was slated to take effect Jan. 1.

The Alliance Defense Fund is suing Secretary of State Bill Bradbury and 12 county clerks on behalf of a group claiming to be "disenfranchised signers" of Petition 303, which would have resulted in a November referendum of the domestic partnership law had the ad hoc group collected 55,179 valid signatures. Of the 60,531 signatures gathered, 5,448 signatures were invalidated, leaving the group 96 signatures short of its goal. The Alliance Defense Fund seeks to have those signatures re-examined and rehabilitated, thus validating the referendum.

Both BRO and Our Oregon, a group that examines the state's initiative and referendum process, have filed "friend of the court" briefs.

"We will speak for ourselves," Frazzini said.

Several speakers at the rally, including Frazzini and former Gov. Barbara Roberts, described the opposition as "bigots" and "out-of-state fundamentalists" with the agenda of imposing their anti-gay beliefs on Oregonians.

Lesbian state Rep. Tina Kotek, D-North/Northeast Portland, inspired hope in listeners by stating that she believes Oregonians would vote in favor of domestic partnerships if Mosman deemed the failed referendum effort successful.

BRO attorney Margaret Olney foresees a major upheaval in Oregon's initiative and referendum process if Mosman rules in the Alliance Defense Fund's favor. While the organization is only asking for the signatures of its "disenfranchised petition signers" to be reinstated, Olney predicts this would mean a major procedural change. The Alliance Defense Fund is arguing that petition signers have the same constitutionally protected rights as voters. If Mosman agrees, the Oregon secretary of state's office will have the burden of verifying every last signature on every petition, instead of verifying a statistical sample, as it does now.

Rallygoers and speakers came from all corners



Alisa Simmons preaches the need for solidarity between oppressed communities.

of Oregon—Bend, Salem, Corvallis, Medford, Eugene, the coast—and from diverse backgrounds representing labor unions, faith communities, students, people of color, elected officials and many others.

Approximately a dozen elected officials and candidates attended the rally, including Portland Democratic state Sens. Jeff Merkley and Kate Brown, Portland City Commissioner Sam Adams and Multnomah County Commissioners Maria Rojo de Steffey and Lisa Naito.

One particular speaker had an imminent stake in the outcome. Erin Sexton-Sayler of Portland, who joined BRO in its motion to intervene in the lawsuit, spoke on behalf of her family. She and her partner, Melissa, are expecting their second child in May and planned to register as domestic partners prior to the birth.

"The last thing new parents should be worrying about is whether their newborn will be safe if some-

thing should happen to one of them," said Sexton-Sayler. "The bottom line is that this delay hurts families."

Emerging gay rights leader Alisa Simmons, executive director of Brother to Brother, courageously tied together the struggle for civil rights by African Americans and gays. "As black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people and allies of diverse backgrounds, these days seem all too familiar to the struggles fought by pioneers of equality that came before us," she said.

Simmons reminded rally attendees of a process identified by peace activist Mahatma Gandhi: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

"We are on our way to victory, have no doubt about that," Simmons said. "We will win!"

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