

NORTHWEST NEWS

# Marching On? Assessing the Local Role in the National Equality March

By RAYMOND RENDLEMAN

"True equality can only occur with a vote by the Supreme Court or Congress," San Francisco activist Cleve Jones told *Just Out* this week in reference to his National Equality March scheduled for the weekend of October 10.

A march on Washington D.C. has long been a rallying cry for American civil-rights organizations, but Oregon's gay, lesbian, bi and trans community has so far shown lukewarm support.

For example, grassroots local advocacy is of primary concern for Dawn Holt, president of Portland's PFLAG chapter. "A national march strikes me as a bit of a distraction," Holt said.

PFLAG's response is typical of Oregon's gay, lesbian, bi and trans advocacy organizations.

"With the economy the way it is and this march being so far away, I don't know a single person who's planning to make the trip out there," said Laura Calvo, treasurer of the state Democratic Party and interim president of the Democratic Party of Oregon GLBT Caucus.

From her standpoint as regional director of the National Stonewall Democrats, Calvo also cited "bad timing" for getting GLBT activists to make the trek to Washington. In Portland, Basic Rights Oregon has its 27th annual dinner and auction on Saturday, October 10, and Cascade AIDS Project holds its annual fundraising walk on Sunday, October 11.

There's yet additional strain in the prospect of taking political trips two weekends in a row. "A lot of our Democrats will be going to the DPO Oregon Summit [in Central Oregon] the following weekend [October 16-18], so they're saving their travel time and energy for that," Calvo said.

Jeana Frazzini, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, said that BRO's annual dinner was planned long before the equality march on the Capitol. Even if BRO's dinner could be postponed without much cost to the organization, Frazzini would need a lot more persuading to do so: "The goals of this national march have not been well-articulated."

According to the National Equality March's official website, organizers have "Our single demand: Equal protection in all matters governed by civil law in all 50 states."

Jones, 54, originator of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, argued that the march's goal is simply to demonstrate on the national level how fed up the community is about its second-class-citizen status. "The right to serve in the military, the right to adopt and the right to bring our partners across borders are all important, but they ignore the big picture of national equality," he said.

Frazzini maintained that, as a state-based organization, BRO must remain concentrated on Oregon. In her opinion, a state-by-state strategy is the most effective route toward

equal protection nationwide. "We have a great deal of work to do right here," she said.

The state-by-state strategy means that what happens in Maine this fall has a much greater impact on Oregon than a national march, at least in the eyes of BRO.

**"No disrespect to the people who have led the fight on the state-by-state level, but I think it's a failed strategy. We need to reject the old ways of working that have kept us divided for so long."**

— ACTIVIST CLEVE JONES

This year, the New England state became the fifth to uphold equal marriage rights, but a proposition referred to voters threatens to repeal those rights in November, much like Proposition 8 did in California last year. "If we go anywhere this fall, it'll be to the state of Maine," Frazzini said.

Jones asserted that bold action is needed. "No disrespect to the people who have led the fight on the state-by-state level, but I think it's a failed strategy," he said. "We need to reject the old ways of working that have kept us di-

vided for so long."


Frazzini added that Congress will not be in session on October 11, making it harder for face-to-face interaction with representatives: "To me that's got to be a priority if we're going to be getting people to Washington [D.C.]."

Jones asked, "How many people would we get if we had this march during the work week?" He scheduled the march on the weekend so more people can go, which he believes will make a strong statement to elected leaders. "A very representative group of people will make it," he stated.

As of press time, the march's official website, Equalityacrossamerica.org, lacked registry of groups from Oregon planning to attend. Kip Williams, the march's West Coast organizer, said, "We have a lot of people that have signed up, but we haven't had time yet to approve any organizations from Oregon." More than 30 states have at least one group signed on to attend the march.

Jones noted that enthusiasm was high, and momentum building for thousands of people to converge on the Capitol from all 50 states.

"I understand that a lot of people are excited so I would hope that we could all treat that weekend as national days of action," Frazzini said.

"That's a great idea," Jones agreed. "People that can't make it to Washington should hold actions in their local communities." 



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