

## GUEST COMMENTARY

## "Toward Justice"

A tough decision leads to opportunities ahead



BY JEANA FRAZZINI

Seven years ago this week, the voters of Oregon passed Measure 36, amending the state constitution to specifically exclude same-sex couples from the freedom to marry.

It was a tough loss. Tough to understand how we could work so many hours, knock on so many doors and contribute so much money and still not win. And tougher even to imagine how more than a million of our neighbors chose to vote against the dignity of our families.

Since that devastating loss, we've come a long way. Together we passed non-discrimination, domestic partnerships and safe schools legislation. We have begun work to end health care discrimination against the transgender community and we're building meaningful alliances across lines of race and religion.

But Measure 36 still stains our constitution. After facing five statewide and more than 25 local anti-gay ballot measures over the past two decades, Measure 36 is the only one still standing.

So for the last three years we've been building public support, slowly but surely, for the freedom to marry. This work is led by LGBT community members having heartfelt conversations with friends and neighbors. It's led by coalition partners engaging their members, by volunteers who stuff envelopes and knock on doors. And by donors contributing to the nation's most aggressive and sophisticated advertising campaign.

The only path to win the freedom to marry is through the ballot. The courts have refused

to take up our challenge to Measure 36 and the Legislature cannot amend the constitution.

Unlike all the previous ballot fights, we are finally in the driver's seat. We get to decide when to go forward with a proactive ballot measure to achieve equality, instead of just fighting back.

This represents tremendous opportunity—and also a heavy burden. Never before has our community chosen to put our rights up for a public vote. To lose another public vote on marriage would be devastating for the LGBT community, both emotionally and politically. Another loss would set us back even further.

We're going to win the freedom to marry in Oregon. It's not a matter of if—only a matter of when. Our entire Board and staff deeply want our state to be moving faster in the direction of equality and inclusion. We've been working tirelessly for three years to move the needle of public opinion and build the infrastructure we'll need to win at the ballot. And when the time is right, we'll go "all in" to win this.

But the feedback we've gotten from the community has been crystal clear: In our online survey, in the Town Hall meetings across the state and in countless individual conversations, you have told us that we should not proceed to the ballot until we have a reasonable expectation of success.

We formed an Advisory Group of community leaders and campaign experts to help evaluate our options. They reviewed our public

opinion research, which shows that when it comes to amending the state constitution to allow same-gender couples to marry, voters are evenly divided. While this represents tremendous progress since the 2004 vote, it means the chance of success at the ballot next year wouldn't be high.

After weeks of research, careful deliberation and an extensive effort to get community feedback, the Basic Rights Oregon Board of Directors made a tough decision. They voted unanimously to extend our education campaign to build public support for marriage equality and look beyond 2012 for a time when we'll be ready to win marriage at the ballot.

We are committed to winning—not just fighting for—the freedom to marry. While there is no convenient time to fight for our rights, choosing to walk into a losing battle is not a path to victory.

I'll come right out and say it: While I believe this is the right decision, I, like many of you, am deeply disappointed. But as I work through the disappointment and turn toward the opportunities ahead, I am surprised at the excitement I feel. I look forward to deepening the work we have begun and building a strong consensus for the freedom to marry.

At one of our Town Hall meetings last weekend, community leader KC Hanson reminded us of the quote from Dr. King, who said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Let's keep bending that arc. Our work doesn't stop—it carries on and expands from here. It's time to come out, to share our stories, to educate our neighbors, to build a movement. The political fight isn't the only measure of progress. We have to be in this for the long haul. Day by day, we are winning equality.

*Jeana Frazzini is the Executive Director of Basic Rights Oregon.*

## Right Cause, Right Message

Now for the right time...

page 3  
BY MARTY DAVIS

Here I am. Down here, at the bottom of the page, being all quiet and unassuming.

When I learned that Basic Rights Oregon would be making their ballot measure decision the same week that we went to press, I offered Jeana Frazzini my Page 3 space to speak to *Just Out* readers in greater depth about the process that went into the organizational decision-making. But then I went and kept a small slice of space for myself, just to keep checked in with y'all.

As you might recall from my last column in the October 21 issue, my thoughts on BRO's possible action were, "Right cause, right message—wrong time." While the decision makes sense to me, I can also understand how hard it was for some people and the emotional tugging that was and will go on for some time. I commend BRO for putting such effort into gaining community opinion, and using the information gained in the process. I will admit that I have not always felt that the organization placed much value on external opinions—but in this case I truly feel

that they listened to what the community had to say. For this, I commend them.

The conversations, the discussions don't end here, however. From what I've heard, in the entire one day since the announcement, there will now be a need for new questions and new discussions. What will be the main mission, the focus of Basic Rights Oregon in the coming years, two years at best? Will the organization need to maintain current staffing levels? Will fundraising continue at current rates? Should the community, the organization, be stockpiling funds for the day when it does seem like the opportune time to go forward with a ballot measure? Again, it's been one day, one day after weeks and months of hard work—and there will be plenty of time to address these questions and concerns after, say, the first of the year?

World AIDS Day will be commemorated, in Portland and around the globe, on December 1. As the LGBTQ community grows and evolves, it is natural that we'll move

on from some of our events and traditions as new days, new times erase and erode established needs and histories. National Coming Out Day might be one example of a day once meaningful in Portland, but then allowed to drift away due to lack of leadership, planning and greater community interest. World AIDS Day should not fall prey to a similar fate. AIDS is still with us. The pain, the loss of loved ones is still with us. The knowledge that the disease is still a part of a new generation of young people cannot be lost to us. AIDS is not over.

I have two opportunities for you to help me raise food and funds for Esther's Pantry in November. The first is our monthly Gay Skate night at Oaks Park on November 21. The second is the dance-formerly-known-as-Hot Flash, now Inferno, held at Cuda (formerly known as Barracuda) on Saturday, November 26. I will be there collecting canned food, personal sundries and raffling off door prizes. I will not have changed my name, by the way.

I'll see you back here in print on December 9—daily at justout.com and Facebook—and all about town in between.

Have a grand Thanksgiving, everyone. If you feel you have nothing to be thankful for, consider that at least we still have one holiday whose name we can use without fear of offending. There you go—be thankful for that. ☺

just out

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY  
TO US! *Just Out* turns 29!

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