GUEST COMMENTARY

"Toward Justice"

A tough decision leads to opportunities ahead



BY JEANA FRAZZINI

Oregon passed Measure 36, amending the state constitution to specifically exclude samesex couples from the freedom to marry.

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.

way. Together we passed non-discrimination, domestic partnerships and safe schools legisladiscrimination against the transgender community and we're building meaningful alliances in Oregon. It's not a matter of if—only a the opportunities ahead, I am surprised at the 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 move the needle of public opinion and build 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.

even years ago this week, the voters of 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 It was a tough loss. Tough to understand when to go forward with a proactive ballot measure to achieve equality, instead of just ready to win marriage at the ballot. fighting back.

This represents tremendous opportunity and also a heavy burden. Never before has our there is no convenient time to fight for our community chosen to put our rights up for rights, choosing to walk into a losing battle is Since that devastating loss, we've come a long a public vote. To lose another public vote on not a path to victory. marriage would be devastating for the LGBT community, both emotionally and politically. tion. We have begun work to end health care Another loss would set us back even further.

> We're going to win the freedom to marry 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 the infrastructure we'll need to win at the ballot. And when the time is right, we'll go arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends "all in" to win this.

But the feedback we've gotten from the 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 com-The only path to win the freedom to marry munity leaders and campaign experts to help is through the ballot. The courts have refused 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

We are committed to winning-not just fighting for-the freedom to marry. While

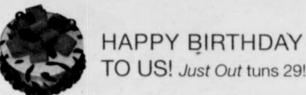
I'll come right out and say it: While I believe this is the right decision, I, like many of you, am deeply disappointed. But as I work through the disappointment and turn toward excitement I feel. I look forward to deepening the work we have begun and building a strong consensus for the freedom to marry.

At one of our Town Hall meetings last weekend, community leader KC Hanson reminded us of the quote from Dr. King, who said, "The toward justice."

Let's keep bending that arc. Our work doesn't community has been crystal clear: In our online 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.

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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

ere I am. Down here, at the bottom of the 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?

W in Portland and around the globe, on December 1. As the LGBTQ community grows and evolves, it is natural that we'll move ing. There you go—be thankful for that.

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.

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-knownas-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 V orld AIDS Day will be commemorated, 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 offend-