

BY RYAN J. PRADO

When 2011 began, a majority of Oregon voters either upheld or evolved their positions on **marriage equality in Oregon**. The proof was in the polls, with just over 50 percent of Oregonians expressing support for statewide marriage equality. Hoping to become the first state to put gay marriage on the ballot and win, Basic Rights Oregon applied the pressure with public campaigning via television spots, online surveys and, at the zero hour, a network of statewide equality advocates to advise the organization on whether 2012 would be the year to give legal gay marriage a real go. Despite a majority of Oregonians responding that they favored marriage equality, the tough decision came down just weeks ago that BRO would not be moving forward on the issue for the 2012 ballot.

Leading the list of reasons to wait varied from the cost of waging an expensive campaign in the midst of an economic crisis to BRO's Board of Directors' fear that the slim majority of Oregonians in favor of gay marriage was not large enough to ensure victory. BRO executive director Jeana Frazzini noted that though marriage equality wouldn't be on the voting block next year, Oregon equality advocates are now in a better position to re-galvanize support in the future thanks to the flurry of education and visibility for the cause

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promoted by the campaign.

"We're going to win the freedom to marry in Oregon," said Frazzini in an op-ed piece for *Just Out* in November. "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."

Just days after BRO announced its decision, a group of marriage equality advocates in Washington state rolled out their own campaign to be the seventh state in the coun-



try to legalize gay marriage. Lead by Washington United for Marriage, a coalition of dozens of gay rights, civil liberties, labor and religious groups, the effort will pressure the Legislature to pass a marriage equality law in 2012. The group said it is prepared to defend the law from any referendum challenge, similarly to the case in 2009 when the state's "everything but marriage" domestic partnership law was approved, then challenged on the ballot as Referendum 71. The law was upheld by public vote later that year.

As reported by *The Seattle Times*, while

Washington's 2012 gay-marriage campaign will target the Legislature, the matter could wind up on that fall's ballot—either because a referendum clause is required to get enough legislative votes, or if opponents gather signatures to challenge it. Should that happen, Washington would be in a position to become the first state in the nation's history to legalize gay marriage by voter approval. State Senator Ed Murray (D-Seattle), himself openly gay, is the leading political figurehead of the current push, and has said that 2012 is the best chance the state has ever had to make marriage equality a reality.

Currently, Washington United for Marriage, with coalition member Equal Rights Washington, is pushing the agenda with a series of town hall-style meetings, phone banking and online opinion polls across the state.

Furthering Washington's equality scope, ERW was instrumental in passing legislation that recognizes all same sex unions from all jurisdictions as domestic partners while they are in the state; that updated the state's anti-bullying law to include state community colleges and universities and to require mental health and suicide prevention education; and that updated the state's Universal Parentage Act to provide rights, protections and responsibilities for domestic partnerships.

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