

## EDITORIAL

## Marriage equality another block to a strong foundation

In this month of Gay Pride, we have seen real progress that all of us can celebrate.

State by state, the scales of discrimination against gay men and lesbians are falling away. In May, a federal judge struck down Oregon's ban on marriage for same-sex couples, declaring the exclusion unconstitutional. On June 4, the U.S. Supreme Court shot down an attempt by the National Organization for Marriage, the leading proponents of the marriage discrimination policy, to prompt a stay against weddings in Oregon.

While these are major steps toward equality –

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arguably among the most significant in a generation – there remains a long journey ahead.

In this edition, we see where the personal battles continue to be fought on a national stage.

Mia Macy had to first win the right to sue,

forcing the Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission to recognize that, as a transgender woman, she was entitled to protection under the constitution just as any other American citizen. She then won her case to protect the rights of all people facing workplace discrimination because of their gender identity.

Court cases, legal decisions, actions and reactions. They are the foundation in all civil rights movements. Yet the goal is still in the making. Equality – whether in terms of gender, race or social class – will always be on the horizon as long as prejudice and ignorance are left unchecked in our neighborhoods. It will always be a struggle as long as the next generation is taught the same disconnect between “us” and “them,” regardless of who “they” may be. They may be queer, they may be poor, they may be brown, black or white. They may be us.

It's true, the famous quote from Edmund Burke, that “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

The people opposed to marriage equality are still fighting in the courts. They will likely never stop. But the story of our friends and neighbors, our family and the people we love, cannot be reduced to legal briefs and judicial decisions. Lawyers alone didn't overturn decades of discrimination against gay and lesbian couples. The community – of every stripe – came together to not only demand equality, but also work tirelessly until it was achieved.

Only 19 states in the nation recognize gay marriage; fewer than half. We are a part of the foundation. Let's build on it.

## Keeping City Hall and our progress in perspective

The world is a complicated place. Of course, you don't need me to tell you that.

On my way home from work this week I stopped and talked to an elderly woman sleeping on the streets in Old Town. “Besides my aching back all I really need is a long, hot bath and a nice quiet place to read,” the woman told me. “I really don't need a lot.”

Her attitude, all things considered, was still

optimistic. Nothing about her life was simple. “Nothing ever is,” she told me. “This storm will pass.”

There's been a storm brewing in Portland over the recent proposed transportation street fee. The fee, proposed by transportation commissioner Steve Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales, has been met with some fierce resistance among both the business community and poverty advocates, including Street Roots. There's been a great deal of civic debate. There's also been a lot of mudslinging.

It's a complicated debate and easy to get caught up in the rhetoric. Saying that, it's also important to put things into perspective.

It was only a couple of weeks ago that this city council worked together to pass a balanced budget that supports Portland's community, including allocating an additional \$2.2 million toward our most vulnerable citizens.

Steve Novick, yes, that Steve Novick, the one you think doesn't care about Portlanders right now because he wants to pass the street fee, has been leading a committee for the past year charged with advising City Hall about how to implement its socially responsible investment principles. What does that mean?

It means rolling back the city's investments in businesses such as Wal-Mart, and other socially irresponsible corporations. The committee is specifically looking at health and environmental concerns, abusive labor practices, corrupt corporate ethic and governance, among others. The City of Portland's entire investment portfolio currently ranges from \$940 million to \$1.29 billion and averages about \$1.08 billion during the year. We're not talking about a commissioner that isn't thinking in very smart ways on how to improve the lives of poor and working Oregonians. We're talking about an elected official working to create real social change.

We also can't forget both Charlie

Hales and Amanda Fritz's work to stand by Portland's Right 2 Dream Too, one of Portland's two tent cities. Talk about political risk. Name me another mayor and a city council in the United States supporting homeless people in their effort to purchase their own land and I'll eat my words.

Saying that, nothing is black and white when it comes to equality.

That's why housing advocates, who on one hand work with the city, will also be protesting laws targeting people experiencing homelessness this weekend during the Rose Festival. Homeless people will soon be swept out of Waterfront Park for the month of June during the festival. Homeless folks in turn, will reclaim the streets for a day during the parade.

Then there's the Airbnb and the short-term rental debate. Some believe that expanding the short-term rental industry will further spur gentrification.

Companies such as Airbnb and VRBO help facilitate renting thousands of homes, or dwellings to visitors for 30 days or less. Many of those rentals are for very short periods of time, like an extended weekend.

Street Roots and a growing coalition of folks think any lodging tax collected from the short-term rentals should go right back into affordable housing. It's complicated.

Concerning the street fee – well, we have until November to figure it out. Like it or not, I think we can. Aren't you for better streetlights, sidewalks and safe roads? I am. The devil will be in the details and if we come together as a community we can get there.

After that Portland, it's easy breezy. All we have to do is get the Feds to adequately fund local governments, to challenge Oregon legislatures to take on real tax reform, raise the minimum wage, adequately fund our mental health and housing system, end childhood poverty, reform our drug laws and immigration policy, create real police oversight and tackle that thing called climate change. Did I mention equity for all, as in everyone? I'm sure I missed something, or someone.

My point is, both Portland residents and elected officials are working to make our city the best it can be. Do we always get it right? Of course not, but who among us has a track record of always getting things right?

Like our friend on the street says, Nothing is simple, nothing ever is. This storm will pass.



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

### DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org

#### Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the International Network of Street Papers.

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#### Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting guides, call 503-228-5657. Resources are online at [www.rosecityresource.org](http://www.rosecityresource.org).

#### Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢

goes directly to the vendor who sold you the paper

25¢

goes toward printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.