

"Once the government has the power to violate one person's rights – or a group of people's rights – it can use that power against any of us."

Fear and prejudice

These are the greatest threats to our civil liberties, says David Rogers, director of the ACLU of Oregon.

Rogers also sounds the alarm on pending ballot measures, digital privacy and criminal justice.

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

As a child, watching the "CBS Evening News" was routine for David Rogers.

Each night, his family gathered around a television set in their Hartford, Conn., home, engaged in lively debates sparked by the words of Walter Cronkite.

Rogers remembers that by age 5, he was already "politicized."

Growing up in an interracial home in the 1970s, he was well aware of discrimination from a young age, he said, but he also watched as his family fought for social justice. His parents met through community activism, and his grandfather diligently pushed for the first African-American studies program at University of Hartford.

Now, at 45, Rogers is executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon. And, in line with family tradition, he's been fighting the "good fight" for decades.

In 1998, he moved to Portland to work with the Western States Center, and later he headed Partnership for Safety and Justice.

Now he's six months into his position at the helm of one of the most recognized social justice organizations in the state – and he's energized.

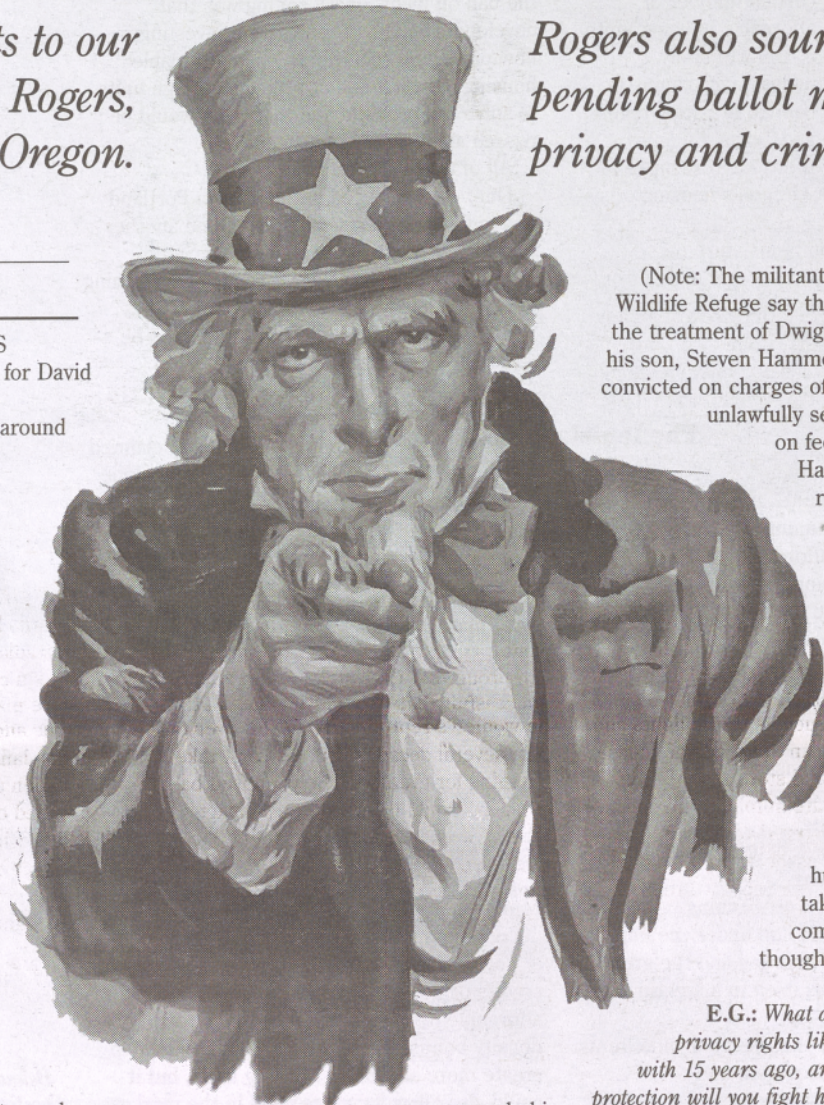
"I want to be working for an organization that has people's backs," he said.

From its work to educate and organize communities around important issues to its ability to strategically push legislation and file lawsuits, he said the ACLU of Oregon has a capacity few other state organizations possess.

Whether you're being discriminated against because of your race or sexual orientation or you're concerned about government oversight or invasion of privacy, "ACLU," he said, "has your back."

Emily Green: *What is the single greatest threat to Oregonians' civil liberties today?*

David Rogers: It's difficult to choose a single threat, but I would say it's the combination of intolerance, prejudice,



xenophobia
and fear of

the other – of

people who have different backgrounds, different races, religions and sexual orientations.

These thoughts and feelings are being tapped and exploited by politicians and pundits to move regressive policies. Fear and prejudice are driving a wedge between communities in the U.S. and creating an environment that is incredibly detrimental to advancing and protecting a range of civil liberties and rights.

We need to remember that once the government has the power to violate one person's rights – or a group of people's rights – it can use that power against any of us. For example, we saw the development of terribly unjust mandatory minimum sentencing schemes in the 1980s and '90s that were primarily a tool to target urban communities of color. But now we have white, rural ranchers who are making the national news – whatever you may think of them – over how they are being impacted by mandatory minimum sentencing enhancements.

(Note: The militants at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge say they are protesting the treatment of Dwight Hammond and his son, Steven Hammond, who were convicted on charges of arson in 2012 for unlawfully setting multiple fires on federal land. The

Hammonds each received a five-year mandatory minimum sentence under federal domestic anti-terrorism laws.)

Ultimately, fear and prejudice advance policies and a climate that hurts us all. It may take a little longer to come around for some though.

E.G.: *What are Oregonians' privacy rights like today, compared with 15 years ago, and what privacy protection will you fight hardest for over the next two years?*

D.R.: We are living in a unique time. Technology is changing so quickly, and our laws and policies are very much behind the pace of technological advancements. At the ACLU, we believe that technology may change but our rights shouldn't.

Digital privacy is a serious concern of ours. There is now an immense ability for corporations and the government to accumulate, aggregate and access information about virtually all aspects of our lives. In the age of social media, we may not be living super-secret lives, but that doesn't mean innocent people should be monitored or tracked by the government. Now, data about our medical, social, political, financial, legal and family lives can be pulled together by government that wants to control us, businesses that want to make money off us, and others who want to exploit it.

The 9/11 attacks provided the federal government the opportunity to expand the surveillance and police powers and did away with many of the checks and balances that

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