

the measure, forcing its withdrawal.

Opponents denounced transgendered people as “from Satan,” “sick” and “sexually deviant” threats to children and told the council that they risked the wrath of God if they enacted the anti-discrimination ordinance.

Supporters called opponents biased and irrational. More than 70 other cities including Portland and Bend have enacted similar transgender ordinances with little incident. Molesting anyone in a bathroom would continue to be illegal. Transgender people fear bathrooms and are more often the victims of violence rather than perpetrators, supporters said.

The Eugene Human Rights Commission plans to hold a public information session on the proposed gender identity code provisions at 6 pm Thursday, May 5 in the Eugene Council Chambers, 777 Pearl Street.

— Alan Pittman

NEUTRAL ON BIAS

A Eugene City Council subcommittee voted last month that the city lobby in support of a bill that critics oppose as discriminatory against Hispanics and unsafe. After being targeted with criticism, the city Intergovernmental Relations Committee (IGR) voted for the city to take a neutral stance on HB 2608, which requires proof of citizenship for driver’s licenses. But the IGR committee and full council declined to oppose the bill.

City human rights and police staff recommended that the IGR oppose the bill. “This bill codifies discrimination,” human rights staffer Greg Rikhoff commented. Officer Ellwood Cushman warned, “if a group of people are denied the possibility to obtain driving privileges, some will certainly operate vehicles anyway, and will not be able to obtain the insurance required by law. This creates a situation in which traffic safety, as well as financial protection to drivers and others using the roads, is reduced.”

City lobbyist Jason Heuser pointed out that driver’s licenses are frequently forged and making them de facto proof of citizenship documents could make them a tool for terrorist groups.

City Councilors Betty Taylor and Gary Papé voted on the IGR committee to support the bill before voting to take a neutral stance. Councilor Bonny Bettman voted against the bill. Bettman tried to get the full council to vote to oppose the bill last week, but failed.

“I feel pretty strongly about this. It’s dis-

crimination,” Bettman said.

The ACLU of Oregon testified against the bill in Salem. “Preventing immigrants from getting driver’s licenses is not going to protect our roads, and it will not protect us from terrorism. What HB 2608 does accomplish is to continue a regrettable practice of demonizing immigrants in times of national emergency.”

Right now, HB 2608 appears stuck in committee in Salem, but similar legislation is moving through the U.S. Congress.

— Alan Pittman

BILL SUPPORTS TOXIC BAN

Soon the foam in your furniture won’t be poisoning you. At least that’s the hope, with the recent passage of a state Senate bill that bans two of the three forms of a toxic flame retardant called PBDE (see “The Ever-More-Toxic Northwest,” EW 12/23/04).

PBDE (in its penta-, octa- and deca- forms) has been used for years to reduce the flammability of products such as furniture foam, carpet pads, dashboards and computer casings. A 2004 Northwest Environment Watch study found the chemical in every sample of breast-milk collected from more than 40 women in the Pacific Northwest. The Oregon women’s PBDE levels were twice as high as the study’s average and 20 to 40 times higher than levels found in Japanese and Swedish women. Two U.S.-based companies produce all of the world’s PBDE, and Americans buy more than half of it.

PBDE doesn’t just affect humans. Researchers also found high levels of the chemical in Oregon salmon, Puget Sound orcas and San Francisco seals. PBDE builds up in fat cells, accumulates up the food chain and persists in the environment without breaking down. Studies have found that even low levels of PBDE can impair memory, attention, motor skills, learning, behavior and sexual development in laboratory animals. The chemical isn’t necessary for fire safety; several companies have developed flame retardants that are just as effective as PBDE.

SB 962, which passed in the Oregon Senate on April 20 with a 25-2 vote, bans penta- and octa-PBDE and instructs the Oregon Department of Health to recommend a ban of deca-PBDE. The phaseout will be in effect by 2006. With the support of 18 medical, environmental and educational nonprofits, the bill will now move on to the Oregon House of Representatives. — Kera Abraham



KURT JENSEN

ZAPATISTAS REVISITED

While much of the world has been focused on the conflict in the Middle East, the struggle for democracy, justice and liberty is ongoing for the indigenous people of Chiapas and all of Mexico.

Eugene photojournalist Kurt Jensen traveled on a Pastors for Peace caravan to Chiapas last month, visiting schools, clinics and refugee communities. He says he and 19 other activists from the U.S. met with non-governmental and religious organizations who work with indigenous communities in Chiapas, where they delivered 8 tons of medical and school supplies, 35 bicycles, 8.5 tons of corn and one ton of beans. They delivered corn, purchased from a local co-op, directly to the Zapatista community of Polho, a village of

5,533 refugees. Jensen says the villagers are “unable to return to their fields due to the low-intensity war being waged by the military and paramilitary groups.” Within minutes of delivering the aid, Jensen says, he and the others were “stopped, searched and questioned by military personnel.”

The state of Chiapas is very rich in natural resources, agriculture, oil and electricity, but has the poorest population in the country.

Jensen will be speaking of his experiences and showing slides of the Chiapas caravan at 7 pm Tuesday, May 10, in room 175 at the UO Law School.

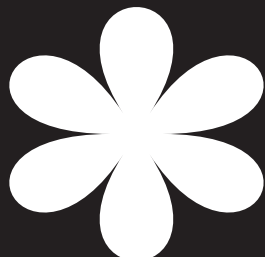
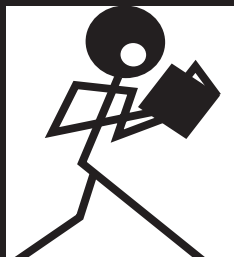
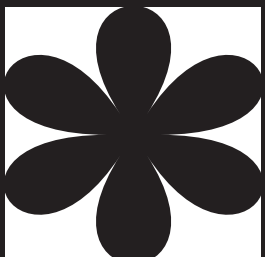
Jensen’s trip was sponsored locally by Eugene PeaceWorks and CISCAP, which will be holding a bake sale from 9 am to 4 pm May 10 in front of the UO Bookstore to raise money for the displaced people of Polho.

SLANT

- Downtown Eugene has tremendous potential to become a vibrant urban core with lots more art galleries, shops, restaurants and apartments similar to what’s happening in Portland’s Pearl District. But property owners on Broadway and Willamette have been holding back, sitting on buildings until the time is right. Well, this might be the time. We hear rumors that the largest property owners downtown, Tom Connor and Don Woolley, are talking about kick-starting local renovation and restoration. Conner & Woolley have saved some marvelous old buildings in urban Portland, and it’s great news if they decide to pump some time, creative energy and money into downtown Eugene.
- We laud Kitty Piercy’s decision to not attend next month’s Eugene-Springfield Mayors’ Prayer Breakfast. One of the founding principles of our nation is that religion and government must not overlap.
- Mothers Day gets exploited for all sorts of reasons, from appliance sales to an excuse for guilt-tripping. But we like the flowers and chocolates and sentiments (did we mention chocolates?). And what better way to celebrate Mum’s Day than by marching for gun control! Actually, it’s more about gun safety these days, and creating a Department of Peace. The Million Mom March begins with a gathering at 2:30 pm Sunday at EWEB and parades along the bike path to the Owen Rose Garden.

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