

SLEEPS GROUP CRITICAL OF COUNTY ACTIONS

Sometimes a camping ban is more than a camping ban, according to Eugene homeless rights activists with Safe Legally Entitled Emergency Places to Sleep (SLEEPS).

Eugene's municipal code prohibits the use of sleeping bags, bedding, tents, stoves and fires on public property, and SLEEPS says such prohibitions put a barrier between the homeless and staying alive.

SLEEPS has been calling attention to the plight of the homeless by camping in public places such as the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza and Eugene City Hall. Campers were evicted from both places. This is a similar experience to that of many homeless people, SLEEPS representatives say.

Controversy increased when Lane County Administrator Liane Richardson called for "disinfection" of the Free Speech Plaza after the protest there. The plaza was ordered closed Dec. 11 by Richardson. SLEEPS activists returned to defy the barrier erected around the Free Speech Plaza after their first protest, and one protester, Alley Valkyrie, was arrested.

Eugene SLEEPS is asking people to write letters in response to statements from Richardson that indicate her belief that the homeless protesters created a need for the plaza to be "disinfected." In a recent press release, SLEEPS wrote: "Ms. Richardson grossly misled the public with her untrue allegations that SLEEPS campers had destroyed the lobby desk and bathrooms so that she could justify shutting down the plaza to protests."

SLEEPS is asking that Richardson apologize and have the Free Speech Plaza reopened, and says "Ms. Richardson has stooped to a new low in perpetuating stereotypes and hate mongering toward the unhoused." The group says Richardson's allegations, including that people "pooped in the plant-

ers" are "ridiculous and insulting and have been contradicted by county employees and SLEEPS' date- and time-stamped photos."

They called her comments "a phobic response to those who are unhoused."

Richardson made the statement about feces in planters to a gathering of protesters and news media on Dec. 13. The *R-G* reported, "The plaza's surface did not appear to have been fouled or littered during the demonstration earlier this week."

The plaza is a frequent site of protests, drum circles and other public gatherings.

The county says it does not yet know how much Richardson's requested clean-up will cost taxpayers, and neither Richardson nor the county spokesperson commented on the request for an apology, citing potential litigation.

Activist Valkyrie was arrested at the Free Speech Plaza during the second protest there, and she's been "trespassed" from the plaza and the county building. Valkyrie told *EW*, "Our position is that free speech doesn't have a curfew." She says, "The only thing more ironic than being arrested for exercising free speech in the Free Speech Plaza is being banned from exercising free speech there."

Michael Carrigan, a community organizer with the Community Alliance of Lane County (CALC), says that closing Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza seriously undermines the free speech rights of Lane County residents. "In all my years as a CALC activist, I do not recall that Free Speech Plaza was ever closed to the public," he says. "If Senator Morse was still alive I believe he would have crossed the barricades into the plaza with us [Dec. 13] as we defied the county's closure. If the closure remains in effect, I'll join additional protests, and this time I'll risk arrest by refusing to leave when asked by the authorities."

SLEEPS is accepting donations in cash and seeking the items listed at eugenesleeps.org/donate/ — *Camilla Mortensen and Shannon Finnell*

DEFAZIO: 'CONSIDER' ACTION ON MASS SHOOTINGS

Congressman Peter DeFazio, whose own hometown of Springfield made national headlines in 1998 with the deadly Thurston High School shootings, says this week that Congress "will need to address a number of critical issues next year and this [mass shootings] should be a top priority."

DeFazio says he agrees with President Obama and "many of my colleagues who have said we must have a dialogue about how to best address and prevent future acts of violence." He adds, "I am encouraged that Senate Majority Leader Reid and Senator Leahy promised to begin hearings to move towards such an approach in the next Congress and I would encourage leadership on the House side to do the same."

He says congress should look at reinstatement of the "so-called assault weapons ban," which expired in 2003; the reinstatement of a Clinton-era safe cities program, which helped partner local law enforcement with state, federal and other agencies to "comprehensively address the root causes of gun violence"; addressing "violence in the media, inadequate mental health services, stronger community partnerships to help identify individuals at risk of violence and get them assistance before they act, and better restrictions to prevent prohibited persons from getting access to firearms."

"I believe that the next Congress should promptly consider these ideas and any other that could effectively prevent future tragedies like this," he says, "Last week's violent rampage at Sandy Hook was an incomprehensible and devastating act."

Sen. Jeff Merkley's office did not respond by press time to a request for comment. — *Ted Taylor*

SUPREME COURT + GAY MARRIAGE = LOVE?

When the Supreme Court announced Dec. 7 that it would hear challenges to the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and California's Proposition 8 in the spring, gay rights advocates across the country rejoiced. Savage Love columnist Dan Savage, who just got married in Washington, would probably enjoy seeing his Oregon friends get wed as well. But rulings favorable to marriage equality won't immediately affect Oregonians; a 2006 amendment to Oregon's Constitution defines marriage as between one man and one woman.

Sasha Buchert of Basic Rights Oregon (BRO) says that Oregonians will have to pass a ballot measure changing the language in Oregon's Constitution to achieve marriage equality. "Both issues — even in the best case scenario for striking the Defense of Marriage Act completely and ruling Proposition 8 unconstitutional — would be an amazing event for our country and another step forward in getting the freedom to marry for all gay and lesbian committed couples across the country, but it wouldn't affect Oregonians directly because we don't have the option of going through the Legislature to remove the constitutional amendment in Oregon," he says.

A ballot measure might be in the cards for 2014, but Buchert says that BRO hasn't decided if that's the most responsible decision yet. "It's a very expensive process to run a ballot measure campaign," he says, "and we need to make sure that we have the grassroots support and support period in Oregon to move forward with this."

Buchert says that Oregon has faced more anti-LGBT equality ballot measures than any other state in the U.S., but even without a 2014 ballot measure for measure equality, things are looking up for lesbian and gay people in the Beaver State. "We've gone from those bad old days in the '80s to running proactive campaigns to win domestic partnerships and to win nondiscrimination protections and safe schools protections against bullying," he says.

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HAPPENING PEOPLE BY PAUL NEEVEL

MELISSA STOCK

The daughter of a film and video editor, Melissa Stock grew up in Orange County, Calif. "I was the 'La Mirada Matador,'" says Stock, drum major for her school's marching band, but also an accomplished musician. "I played percussion with several symphonies and sang with the Pacific Chorale." She spent five years at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago for a bachelor's degree in music in classical piano, then returned and became a music director at the Crystal Cathedral, home of the *Hour of Power* TV ministry. She met Eugene graphic artist and singer Matthew Stock when he came to perform. Two years later, in 2003, they were married, she moved to Eugene, and was hired to teach at Northwest Christian University. That fall, she and the NCU Concert Choir held the first Candlelight Carols concert for an audience of 50 in the school chapel. Since 2005, when she founded the NCU Community Choir, Candlelight Carols has grown. "This year we had 4,500 in attendance for three free concerts at the Willamette Christian Center," she notes. For the past two summers, Melissa and Matthew Stock have traveled to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to work at a nonprofit training center for girls rescued from sex trafficking. In February of 2013, they will move to Cambodia for two years to manage a second training center in Siem Reap. Follow their adventure at stockreplugged.org