



A NETWORK OF
HUMAN DIGNITY
GROUPS

December 2008

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The year 2008 has been full of hope, excitement, and change. But as our new president said on November 4th, "This victory alone is not the change we seek - it is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were. It cannot happen without you."

"You" are the 62 human dignity groups and over 7400 households who make up the Rural Organizing Project. Throughout the past decade, even as our civil liberties have eroded you have stood your ground for democracy and human rights. 2008 was no exception. Now is the time of year where we ask you to match your brave work with your dollars by paying your individual dues to belong to our shared organization.

Here in Oregon, the year started off with both a historic victory and a devastating setback. On February 4th Oregonians secured domestic partnerships for same sex couples making Oregon the 6th state in the US to do so. On this same day, Governor Kulongoski signed an Executive Order that took away access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants in Oregon, one of the few remaining states to have the common sense approach that all drivers should have the opportunity to be licensed, tested, and insured. **On this day, we simultaneously took a huge step forward and a huge step backward in the struggle for social justice, human dignity, and democracy.**

As we close out this year, we are once again facing historic gains and losses. As the results came in on election night, we celebrated victories including, most significantly, electing the first African-American president of the United States, but also defeating every single Sizemore and Mannix measure that crowded our ballot. As a state we rejected anti-teacher, anti-union, anti-tax, anti-education, and prison expansion ballot measures that would have bankrupted our state.

Through ROP, we collectively distributed 65,000 ballot measure guides by and for small town Oregonians in all 36 counties in the state and held 36 ballot measure forums in 22 counties this election cycle. This was **the most far reaching voter education campaign in the state.** While ROP and local human dignity groups were instrumental in mobilizing the numbers that defeated these ballot measures, looking county by county in rural Oregon, we know that in many of our communities, we did not create a local majority. And in one rural county in particular, the stakes were higher and the loss deeper than anywhere else in the state.

On election night in Columbia County, while we celebrated the historic victories of 2008, we also grieved the passage of 1 of 2 local anti-immigrant ballot measures. Voters in Columbia County passed a measure that took the pain and fear of a working class community on the brink of economic crisis out on undocumented workers and local businesses. Not even 24 hours after the measure passed, businesses were firing workers, families were packing their bags, and panic was spreading, but the economy and our immigration system was just as broken as it was the day before.

But what has changed in our rural communities through this election year is the legacy of one more year of steadfast and transformative community organizing in some of the toughest, most isolated, and most regressive communities in the state. For 16 years now, ROP has taken progressive organizing seriously in every corner of the state. We have stayed true to our belief that every person and every community counts. We have a "thirty-six county" strategy that doesn't play by usual campaign rules where the only value of success is 50% plus 1.

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In Columbia County, we started the **biggest conversation on immigration in any county in the state by talking to all but 5000 of the county's 26,000 voters** about immigration. We now have hundreds of new friends that we will organize to not only push back on this measure, but also to work for real economic justice for workers in the county and real immigration reform in the country.

In Central Oregon, ROP member group Human Dignity Advocates in Prineville started going door to door in May asking neighbors to “take your temperature on hot election year issues.” Over 400 neighbors were surveyed and 1000 households representing over 10% of the population of Prineville received a hand delivered voter guide. At the start of the year, the group had contacts with only 40 people in their county; they now have **more than tripled their network**. The voters this group mobilized were an integral part of our victories as a state and their progressive growth this year is the foundation for future victories in the county as well as the state. This is the value of ROP in tough times and in good ones.

Through it all, ROP has carried on with the hard work of creating the movement that will make fundamental social change possible. We have done this together in partnership with you and the human dignity groups that exist now in nearly every single one of Oregon's thirty-six counties. Organizing conversation by conversation, person by person, one database and email list and planning session at a time.

It is this foundation that is our hope for change. We now have an opening for change, but not a guarantee. If you have hated the last eight years, now is the time to organize like there is hope in sight - beautiful, fleeting hope that we must fight to turn into the future that we so desperately want and need. **ROP will be there, but we need you to be there for us.**

To make the change that we dream of, we need to believe and then we need to act. We know that fundamental change can only be reflected in historic moments like we are witnessing right now; it is made in the spaces between. We need you to believe in ourselves and the change that we can make together. We are asking you today to believe in our rural and small town communities and the change that ROP has made over the past decade and a half and that we will continue to make together by donating to ROP. **What is that change worth to you?**

For some, it will be keeping your dues current at \$35/person or \$50/household. For others, it may mean writing out a check for \$250 or \$500. Or starting a monthly deduction from your bank account to support an organization run by and for small town progressives. **Whatever you can give, we need all of you on record as a believer in the importance of rural Oregon to the change that we as a nation are demanding.**

2008 has been a significant year for ROP internally as well. We will raise a budget of \$200,000 in order to maintain our staffing of an additional full time organizing position. As always, our overhead and administrative costs remain extremely low and allow more than 92% of our funds to go directly to organizing in rural Oregon. We do this because our priority is not the organization called ROP that runs out of a converted 2 room house in Scappoose, but the power of 62 local autonomous human dignity groups and thousands of households organizing for human dignity and democracy in every corner of the state. You are our legacy and we are your organization.

Please keep believing in the power of our communities and the value of resisting oppression and advancing democracy in rural Oregon by investing in the change that we will make together in the months and years to come.

Towards the tomorrow that we are making today!

Marcy

Amy

Amanda

Kari

Sarah

On behalf of the ROP Board and 62 Human Dignity Groups