

## An Open Letter to the Governor, Senate, and House of the State of Oregon,

What is the measure of good governance? Is it democratic rule? Is it equal justice under the law? Is it seen in the populace's enthusiastic eagerness to freely engage in civic duties and discourse? Or is it something else entirely? What is the measure of good governance?

It is no secret that our nation has been wrestling with this question since its founding. In a time where slavers (some of whom were my own ancestors) pondered and penned such high ideals as Liberty, Equality, and Justice while whipping and beating men, women, and children who were bought and sold as little more than livestock, one may look back at these people with disdain and even revulsion – and one would be hopefully blameless for doing so. But what of *our* time? What shall *our* descendants say about *us*? When we had the ability to firmly and decisively say with resolute finality that hatred and bigotry has no home here, we lacked the courage? That we were afraid of offending the sensibilities of those whose sensibilities ought be offended? That we condemned entire groups of loving, hard-working, dutiful, patriotic, and good-hearted Americans to persecution?

And when this state – a state that for so many decades has been the leader of progress and change in this very nation – had the chance to, with that same resolve, once again lead the way in protecting our queer neighbors, what did we do? That is a question that you all get to answer very soon. You get to answer this question with your voices and with your pens and with your votes. How will future generations view you? How will history view you? How will your neighbors view you? When you walk out of your respective chambers, will you be able to look

your queer constituents in the eyes when you tell them that you have damned them to further persecution and violence? Will you even have the courage to tell them yourself?

What is the measure of good governance? Is it protecting the vulnerable? Is it lifting up all who are oppressed so that we may all be free? Is it holding those who would further oppress accountable? Or is it something else entirely? What is the measure of good governance?

It is no secret that our state has been wrestling with this question, as well. I harbor no fallacies that the sundown laws did not exist, or that redlining was some of the most egregious in this state, or that the reason for this state's founding as a non-slave state was insidious in its own right. And we reckon with that history every day, much to the bad-faith efforts of those who would seek to tell a different story. Some of those who would erase the insidious history of both our state and our nation lurk the very halls of governance that I am writing this letter to. And I would like to speak directly to those people right now.

If you have made it this far, I would like to start by saying that I do not respect you. I do not speak to you from a place of respect, because you have – time and again – shown me that you do not deserve it. You actively seek to endanger those whom I love, and those who are your neighbors. For some, you do this all in the name of a Messiah who commanded you to love and heal and serve and lift up. You say words and commit acts of violence and hate in the name of Yeshua ben Yosef, knowing very well what He said that He would say to you on the day that you gloat such actions to Him. And you may say, “But I never committed violence.” Every time you vote to further oppress those who are already suffering under the yoke of oppression is an act of violence. And you should be ashamed.

But I have no doubt that you are not.

What is the measure of good governance? Is it channeling your convictions to better the lives of those around you? Does this conviction come from a place of religion or spirituality? Or is it more secular and logical in nature? What is the measure of good governance?

My fellow Oregonians, we have this distinct moment in history to show the nation that we are willing to take up the mantle of leadership in eradicating conversion therapy, a cruel and inhumane instrument of torturous hate that for decades has been at the forefront of the oppression of our LGBTQIA+ neighbors. We cannot erase the sins of the past or the present, but we can make damn sure to take a stand for the future.

I am not ignorant to the fact that HB2458 is being heard and debated on the day that is most commonly associated with love. In fact, I find this to be quite amusing. On this of all days, we as a state can drown out the frothing screams of vitriol, bigotry, and hate with a unanimous chorus of love.

We have this chance to plant yet another seed in a garden that others will eat from. And is that not the measure of good governance? All eyes – past, present, and future – are upon you. Make the right choice.

With regards,

Robert Mountainspring-Wood, Cottage Grove, Oregon.