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Prop 1 is an affront to Anchorage

Arliss Sturgulewski

It's hard to believe, but I recently celebrated my 90th birthday. As a former Republican member of the Alaska Senate who represented Anchorage for 14 years, I've spent decades immersed in Alaska politics.

And let me tell you: Proposition 1 is one of the most divisive, harmful initiatives I've seen on the ballot in our beloved city.

Proposition 1 would repeal non-discrimination protections for our transgender neighbors and friends—and send an embarrassing message to the rest of the world that Anchorage is not the welcoming city we all know it to be. Other cities have passed initiatives like Prop 1, and we have seen the consequence: businesses, tourists, and major events went elsewhere. This spring we have a chance to learn from their mistakes. We'll say loud and clear that although Anchorage is welcoming, we do not welcome discrimination.

I have seen Anchorage grow from a small frontier town with one paved road to become a diverse, modern city with a thriving economy. I have seen a booming university pop up in my backyard, and seen wooded hillsides transform into neighborhoods. How did we get here? Sure, we can thank our military base, our strategic location, and careful urban planning. But for me, the heart of Anchorage's success has always been bigger than that. It's about our people—we are tough, we work hard, and share the belief that if you treat others well, you can live your life as you please.

[*\[Prop 1 is solution in search of problem; vote no\]*](#)

This initiative puts our values to the test. Let's be clear: Proposition 1 targets transgender individuals who want to safely and privately use public facilities, just like the rest of us. Most transgender individuals have been harassed using public restrooms, and many have been physically assaulted. The current non-discrimination law provides them with the freedom to choose the facilities in which they are comfortable and safe. That freedom should belong to the individual, not put up for a citywide vote.

The language we use matters, and the language I have heard from proponents of Proposition 1 inflicts real harm on our community members. Proposition 1 backers have promoted ugly messages that promote fear and stereotypes, mischaracterize the non-discrimination law, and scapegoat transgender individuals. Fear has always been used as a tool deny rights to others. We must reject attempts to create panic or smear our transgender neighbors. I will

continue to stand with my neighbors against those harmful messages.

For those who have concerns, I would ask just this: talk to your transgender neighbors, listen to their stories. I suspect you'll be moved. There is a certain but unquantifiable dignity to being treated equally under the law. On the flip side, being relegated to the margins of society — constantly depicted through slurs and stereotypes — takes a profound toll. A recent national survey showed that 41 percent of transgender individuals attempt to commit suicide in their lifetimes. Forty-one percent. Anyone who claims to care about the well-being of people in this city must grapple with that horrifying statistic. Proposition 1 all but says that transgender individuals are not welcome in our public spaces. That is why I will vote No on Prop 1. It is the least I can do to be my brothers' and sisters' keeper.

Looking back now, I cannot differentiate between the history of this city and my own history. Anchorage and I grew up together. Together, we have weathered the hard times, we have matured, and we have changed. I feel profoundly grateful to call this city my home, and proud of the ways I have helped shape that home. So for me, this ballot initiative feels personal. It would reverse the progress we have made, and welcome discrimination back into our city. I will do whatever I can to make sure that doesn't happen. This spring, I hope you'll join me, and vote No on Proposition 1.

Arliss Sturgulewski is a longtime Anchorage civic leader, former member of the Alaska Senate and former Republican candidate for governor.

<https://www.adn.com/opinions/2018/02/05/prop-1-is-an-affront-to-anchorage/>