

# local news

## On the move

1996 could bring big changes for state Reps.  
Avel Gordly and Kate Brown

▼  
by Inga Sorensen

**K**ate Brown could soon be breaking new ground.

The 35-year-old Portland attorney, who has served in the Oregon House of Representatives since 1991, says she will likely run for attorney general. Brown, a liberal Democrat, also happens to be openly bisexual. If successful, she would become the first out bisexual in the nation elected to statewide office.

"It's going to be interesting—and it will be a tough race," says Brown, who is widely respected for her intellect and bridge-building abilities by legislative colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Brown says she began pondering a run after Oregon Attorney General Ted Kulongoski announced several weeks back that he would not seek re-election to another four-year term. His current term expires in January 1997. His successor will be elected during the November 1996 election.

"Let's face it," says Brown, a petite figure that stands not much taller than 5 feet, "people are not used to seeing a small figure—and a female one—in such a powerful position. As for the bisexual issue, well if I'm asked about it, I'm going to hit it head on."

Brown is a graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder and the Northwestern School of Law at Lewis & Clark College. She has specialized in family law since 1985.

In 1991 she was appointed to represent House District 13, which covers portions of Multnomah County. She served in the House again in 1993 and 1995. Before her appointment to the House seat, Brown was a lobbyist for the Women's Rights Coalition. She is staunchly pro-choice and pro-gay and -lesbian rights.

Brown says as attorney general she would focus attention on issues of sex abuse and domestic violence, areas of particular concern to her. She names racial and economic justice issues—as well as departmental consolidation and governmental efficiency—as her other areas of interest.

The attorney general controls and supervises all court actions and legal proceedings in which the state of Oregon is a party or has an interest.

The attorney general also has full control of the legal business of all state departments, boards and commissions that require the services of legal counsel. He or she prepares ballot titles for measures to be voted on by Oregonians and appoints assistant attorneys general to act as counsel for various state governmental entities.

The attorney general and Department of Justice also represent the state's interests in all civil and criminal cases before state and federal courts; consumer protection issues; and the establishment and enforcement of child support obligations for families who receive public assistance.

Brown, who lives in Southeast Portland, served as the co-chair of the House Judiciary Committee during the 1995 session—even though Republicans controlled the House; it was a sure sign that leadership respected her, despite Brown's often differing views on social and economic matters.

Brown was somewhat successful in promoting the Oregon Women's Wellness Act, a package of nearly 20 bills designed to enhance the well-being of

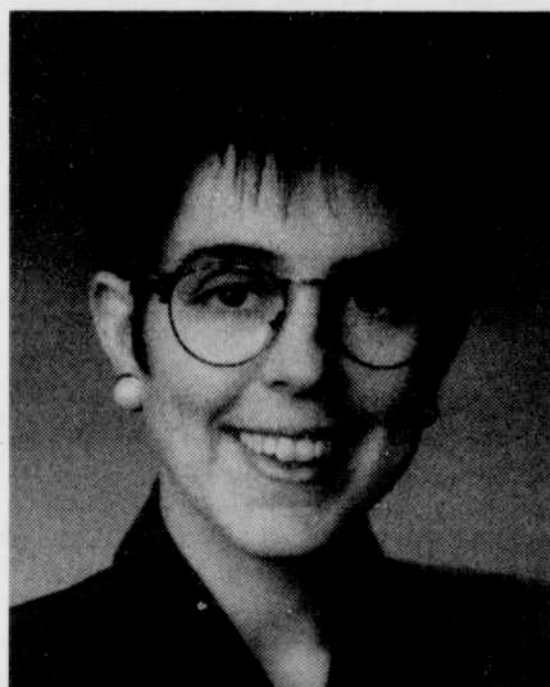
women.

Measures that passed include a bill that allows judges the discretion of creating (in restraining orders) a larger "safe zone" to protect domestic violence victims; a bill that prohibits insurance companies from treating pregnancy as a pre-existing condition in order to refuse coverage for maternity care or to underwrite a family; and legislation that prohibits the use of gender in setting health insurance rates.

Brown also introduced House Bill 3459, which would have prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, public accommodations and real estate transactions. Not surprisingly, the bill was killed.

Another person making noises about a run for the post is state Rep. Kevin Mannix, a conservative Democrat from Salem. Mannix, you may recall,

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Kate Brown

introduced a bill last session that would have barred unmarried women from receiving donor insemination. He also unsuccessfully promoted legislation that would have required the state to "favor" heterosexual marriages above all other relationships. He is anti-choice and known for his lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key stance towards criminals.

In other political news, state Rep. Avel Gordly has announced her candidacy for the Senate seat in District 10, which is held by Ron Cease.

Cease, a Democrat, announced a few weeks ago that he will not seek re-election in 1996.

Gordly, a liberal Democrat, says that policymakers have a "limited vision" because—simply put—people representing diverse backgrounds and experiences don't have a seat at the legislative table.

"I would like the opportunity to continue to work on behalf of Oregonians, particularly those who have the least access to the legislative process," says the 48-year-old Gordly, who is African American. "We absolutely need more women and more people of color to have an active role in government. If we did, I think you'd see more funding going towards Head Start than prison construction."

Last session Gordly, who is a longtime human rights advocate, promoted the Racial and Ethnic Justice Act of 1995, which was based on the recommendations of a state Supreme Court task force report that essentially found there are two systems of justice in Oregon—one for white people and a less equitable one for people of color.

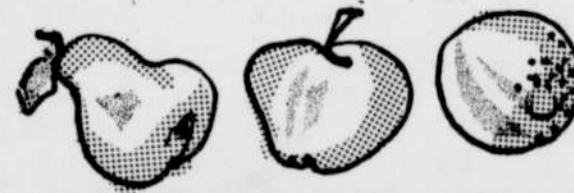
Gordly has represented House District 19 since 1991 and is the chief sponsor of a minimum-wage measure that will be on the November 1996 ballot.



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