

POLITICS: THE SPIN WE'RE IN

Much ado about a do

"[Oregon state Rep.] Lisa Naito called and left a message for Gail, asking, 'Is that you?' We've heard a lot of that lately," admits Carter Headrick, campaign manager for Gail Shibley, an openly lesbian candidate who is running for the Portland City Council.

Anyone who has followed Shibley's career since she was first appointed to the Oregon House in 1991 knows what we're talking about: A headshot of the progressive and pragmatic public servant that appears in her latest campaign litera-



The faces of Gail Shibley

ture looks more than a tad different than the Shibley of days past.

The hairstyle has changed. The makeup is more pronounced. The eyebrows appear plucked and shaped.

"I don't know if I'd say she's more femmey," says Headrick, when asked about Shibley's apparent makeover, "but looks do matter."

"Gail had her hair done for that photo and I think that made her forehead stand out differently," adds Headrick, who "swears" he doesn't "advise" Shibley on what to wear or how to apply her mascara.

"I think it's a positive attribute for Gail to look good. When I told her people's response [to her current look] may have to do with the fact that she now looks so great, well let's just say that she said a few things that you probably couldn't print," Headrick says kiddingly.

I don't think I said that...

On a more serious note, the Shibley campaign is making noises that another candidate in the City Council race, Portland attorney Jim Francesconi, is using "veiled" and "coded" tactics that may be designed to churn up voters' fears about Shibley's sexual orientation.

Headrick says he has heard that the Francesconi camp did a poll which asked respondents: "If you knew one of the candidates was a lesbian, would that change your vote?"

Headrick also says Rick Taylor, who hosts an early morning program on KNRK, an FM radio station geared toward the alternative music crowd, told Shibley that Francesconi remarked during an earlier private discussion that Shibley was a "lesbian who only dealt with gay issues in Salem."

"I don't think I ever said Gail was a single-issue legislator," counters Francesconi, who says he does not want to make anyone's sexual orientation an issue.

"I went to [prominent gay rights advocate and Democratic politico] Terry Bean at the beginning of this campaign to get advice about how to make sure this kind of thing *didn't* happen," says Francesconi, adding that human rights activist Kathleen Saadat and former Portland Police Chief Tom Potter, a longtime friend of the sexual minorities community, have thrown their support behind him.

"[Bean] said if I talk about 'family' that could be viewed as a code word, so in all of my house

parties and public speeches I specifically say that 40 percent of Portland's families are not like [my wife and I]—that families include grandparents and single mothers and gay couples," he says. "I've even said that to the Kiwanis Club."

According to KNRK's Taylor, meanwhile, Francesconi did comment to him during a private conversation that Shibley "was a single-issue candidate dealing mostly with civil rights."

Taylor says, "I don't know how he meant the comment [and] I don't think it was a comment he meant to make openly and publicly."

As for the alleged poll question, Francesconi



campaign manager Phil Donovan says his camp hasn't used any language that wasn't explicitly used in Shibley's own campaign literature. A "Gail Shibley for City Council" campaign flyer does in fact tout Shibley as the "first openly lesbian member of the Oregon Legislature."

"We didn't ask whether that would change a person's vote," says Donovan. "We just used her [descriptive] of herself in her own candidate comparisons."

He adds, "There was some concern about whether we should use it, but the fact is she used it in her own literature."

When asked whether the Francesconi campaign would have mentioned Shibley's sexuality if she hadn't, Donovan replies: "I don't know. Probably not."

Francesconi, meanwhile, says he "let the political people handle the poll."

He's not the man we used to know

"Either Tom Mason is schizophrenic or he's totally dishonest. Who knows what's going on with him?" blurts Portland attorney Lisa Maxfield, co-chair of Right to Privacy, Oregon's largest lesbian, gay and bisexual rights organization.

Trying to establish a psychological low-down on Mason, a Portland Democrat who is running for the Oregon Senate District 6 seat (which covers portions of Multnomah County), may prove fruitless for Maxfield. Nonetheless, she says she is oddly fascinated—and grossly disappointed—by what she views as Mason's about-face on gay, lesbian and reproductive rights issues.

You may recall that Mason served eight terms in the Oregon House before losing his seat in 1994 when opponent Anitra Rasmussen soundly defeated him in the primary.

Mason resurfaced when he jumped into the current race for state Sen. Dick Springer's (D-Portland) seat after Springer announced he would not seek re-election. Mason, who very likely has the best name recognition in the race, faces a few opponents in the May 21 primary, including Frank Dixon, an openly gay candidate who is pro-choice and supportive of gay and lesbian rights.

According to Maxfield, two years ago Mason did "extremely well" on an RTP questionnaire that the group uses to assess candidates and subsequently make endorsements.

"He was pro-choice. He said he would denounce the [Oregon Citizens Alliance's] anti-gay initiatives. He said that he would sponsor an omnibus civil rights bill. He said gay people should have the same rights to become foster parents or adopt, and to have the same custodial rights as heterosexuals. He said he supported legal marriage for same-gender couples," she says.

"When we interviewed him in 1996, he said he didn't know whether he would introduce an omnibus civil rights bill. He said he was undecided about whether he would speak out against the OCA's anti-gay initiatives, saying he would have to first 'see what they looked like.' He said he was now adamantly opposed to gay people having the same foster parenting and child custody rights [as heterosexuals]. He said he would support an OCA initiative that [restricted] parenting and child custody rights for gays. And he said he was totally opposed to same-sex marriage. How's *that* for a total reversal?" says Maxfield.

This isn't the first time Mason has been accused of doing a major flip-flop on issues that many believe involve a person's fundamental values. In 1994, for example, Mason, who had favored abortion rights, shocked many when he sought the endorsement of Oregon Right to Life during the last week of the campaign.

"He switched his position three days before the [primary] election," says RTP Executive Director Barry Pack, adding that abortion rights groups responded by "pulling out all the stops" to defeat Mason. RTP, meanwhile, endorsed Rasmussen in the primary.

"I do think the OCA has been demonized," Mason tells *Just Out*. "And I have changed my

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position on same-sex marriage. I guess you could say that I'm getting more conservative when it comes to that."

So why exactly does Mason believe that same-gender couples should be denied the right to legally marry?

"We're seeing these single parents raising these boys who are getting into all sorts of trouble. Boys need a father figure in the home to keep them out of trouble," he says.

So marriage should only be available to heterosexual couples who vow to produce children? What happens to straight couples who don't want—or can't have—children? What about couples who have daughters, or what about a gay male couple who have a son—using Mason's logic, isn't that the best scenario imaginable?

"That's ridiculous," says Mason, who is divorced and has a 12-year-old daughter.

And how will denying equal access to legal marriage for same-gender couples lower the crime rate?

"Listen, I believe that all these things are connected, and I think daddies count," says Ma-

son, adding he supports health coverage for domestic partners and believes a woman should have the right to choose an abortion in the first trimester. "It gets more complicated in the second trimester and definitely should not be allowed in the third trimester," he says.

Maxfield says she fears that voters in District 6, which is largely Democratic and thought to be quite liberal, will assume Mason "is the person he used to be, rather than this new more conservative model."

"They're going to think, 'Hey I voted for him last time. He's good on issues.' Many won't know how dramatically things have changed," she says.

From Mason to Mabon

Recent media accounts have predicted the demise of the reign of Lon Mabon and his Oregon Citizens Alliance. They point to the group's dwindling membership and lackluster fund raising, and to the discontent aimed at Mabon—and his power-hungry antics—by a handful of ultraconservative Republicans who previously aligned themselves with the OCA.

As you well know by now, Mabon has announced his bid for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Mark Hatfield. He expressed his intentions after GOP hopeful Gordon Smith—who gladly accepted the OCA's endorsement just a few months ago when he made an unsuccessful U.S. Senate run against Democrat Ron Wyden—said he would not take the OCA's endorsement this time around.

Some claim Mabon is making his last stand—on very wobbly legs—but Bill Lurch, a political science professor at Oregon State University, warns it ain't over till it's over.

"I am predicting Mabon will do better in the Republican primary than expected," says Lurch, a longtime observer of Oregon politics. "I think he will get as much as a third of the vote, or at least a quarter, and he may raise \$150,000 through that Senate primary campaign—that's enough to keep him and the OCA in business, because it covers the rent and the salaries."

Lurch also says as Mabon is personally campaigning for office, he will be able to collect signatures for the anti-abortion-rights and anti-gay-rights initiatives the OCA is attempting to place on the November ballot.

Media accounts indicate the group is having great difficulty gathering signatures.

"Mabon's bid for the Senate could be an indicator that he's unsure whether they'll be able to get the signatures," says Lurch. "Of course, he won't say that publicly and we won't really know until the deadline."

Julie Davis, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the successor organization to the No on 13 campaign, also expects Mabon "will do better than people think he will."

"I think he'll get 15 percent and maybe as high as 25 percent of [GOP primary] vote," she says. "There are a lot of people who support Lon's stance on this issue."

According to Davis, all the talk of the OCA's downfall has hampered her group's fund-raising efforts, as well.

"When we contact people, the first thing out of their mouths is: 'Well, the OCA is dead.' So it makes it tough," she says. "The fact is, eight in 10 Oregonians still think that gays and lesbians are protected by law from being fired or losing our homes or our children. There's still a great deal of education that needs to occur, with or without the OCA in the picture."

She adds: "[The sexual minorities community] has been saying for the past few years how terrible it is that we have to be on the defensive and use all of our resources to fight initiatives. Perhaps this will be an opportunity where we can actually work proactively, by doing positive things, but that too takes support. We hope people are with us on that."

Reporting by Inga Sorensen