

PRIMARY PRIMER

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"Ken Griffey for President" bumper sticker is slapped on the wall.

Shibley seems relaxed, if not a touch tired.

"I'm Carter's second woman and first lesbian [candidate]," says Shibley, when Headrick comes to introduce himself.

"The first thing I thought when I learned Gail was a lesbian was that we had a base to work from," says Headrick, a lanky and polite fellow with an unassuming presence. "That's the way I view it."

That base includes many in the gay and lesbian community, as well as residents from House District 12, where, as a Democratic state representative, Shibley has been very popular.

Though she was just 32 when she first came into office, Shibley wowed the media, as well as Capitol colleagues and political observers—on both sides of the aisle—with her smarts, straightforwardness and work ethic.

Undaunted by her minority party status, Shibley, a pragmatic progressive, introduced family leave and environmental legislation within her first several weeks in office. Legislatively speaking, she's always been at the forefront of the push for a gay and lesbian rights bill.

Though so (relatively) young, Shibley was also seen as remarkably composed and focused—despite the fact that she was very much in the public spotlight. One must remember that Shibley took office roughly at the same time the Oregon Citizens Alliance launched its campaign to pass its "Abnormal Behaviors Initiative," later known as Ballot Measure 9.

It was a period in Oregon history when the issue of gay and lesbian rights remained buried far beneath the public consciousness. Yet Shibley hit the queer issue head on, coming out to the public almost immediately via a press conference. She was the first.

Five years later, the landscape is virtually unrecognizable: Oregon has been through two brutal statewide anti-gay-rights campaigns (and faces a third), and four other lesbian, gay and bisexual legislators now serve in the state Legislature.

"I haven't gotten adverse reactions in the past couple of years about my being a lesbian," says Shibley. "But certainly when I first came into office I got some funny looks, some death threats."

It's fair to say that being Oregon's first out lawmaker has its benefits. It significantly helped boost Shibley's name recognition, not only in Portland and Oregon but nationally as well. Her choice to be honest publicly about her sexual orientation—when nobody else dared—escalated her to a place of honor in the sexual minorities community.

Her visibility, however, may have led to increased scrutiny and higher expectations.

Following the 1995 session, Shibley was tagged as a disappointment in a *Willamette Week* article that evaluated the performance of Oregon lawmakers. The annual roundup, which quoted anonymous political sources, suggested Shibley was distracted and disinterested in her legislative work, due in part to the fact that she was, after three terms in the Legislature, still in the minority party.

"I think the *Willamette Week* article did a major disservice to Gail and totally overlooked the fact that she has matured tremendously when it comes to politics," state Rep. George Eighmey (D-Portland) told *Just Out* during an earlier interview.

Eighmey, who is the state's second openly gay lawmaker, is one of those who directly benefited from Shibley's barrier-breaking.

"To get anything done given the makeup of the Legislature, you have to do behind-the-scenes work, and that's what Gail really focused on this

session."

As for her work during the 1995 session, Shibley has said she is proud of her record, most notably the passage of a law that makes viatical settlement companies that do business in Oregon more accountable.

A more recent criticism is the claim that Shibley seems to think she has the gay and progressive communities vote in her pocket and therefore doesn't bother to do adequate outreach to those populations.

"If anyone has a comment or question, please call me at 223-7523," says Shibley, responding to the charge. "I would welcome the opportunity to talk with that person."

She adds: "How many other candidates have done the type of outreach to the gay and lesbian community that I have? I've done outreach at LaLuna on Queer Night, outreach through RTP and the [Human Rights Campaign] and Outside In. I've always been actively involved in this community."

"This is an incredible opportunity for the gay and lesbian community," says RTP's Pack, who believes the community has not fully considered the significance of the race. "It's one thing to have a supportive City Council, but *nothing* can replace having our actual seat at the table."

It's also the toughest contest of Shibley's political career. Francesconi, and to a lesser degree Erik Sten, aide to Portland City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury, are formidable campaigners. Francesconi has done an admirable job of elevating his name recognition, garnering endorsements, and stroking the progressive communities. He reportedly leads the pack in fund raising, which could make the difference in this race.

"We're running a solid campaign," says Shibley, "but it does take dollars."

Making the switch from representative to commissioner would expand Shibley's constituency more than 10-fold. District 12 includes about 40,000 constituents, most of whom reside on the city's west side. As commissioner, a \$68,000-per-year post, she would represent all of the estimated 495,000 Rose City residents, most of whom reside on the east side.

"The differences between being a state lawmaker and a city commissioner are profound," Portland City Commissioner Earl Blumenauer told *Just Out* when we first reported last fall on Shibley's decision to run for Portland City Council.

Blumenauer served three terms in the state House, beginning in 1972. He later moved on to

the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners before joining the Portland City Council in 1986.

"When you're a state lawmaker, you essentially pass laws and then go home. When you are on the City Council, you pass laws and then go upstairs and administer them. You really have to live day-to-day with the consequences of your actions," he said.

Shibley, who is a program manager for the city's Traffic Management Bureau, is responsible for the bicycling program and the community traffic safety program, which includes the "For Kids' Sake, Slow Down" program that encourages the public to drive cautiously in areas where children congregate, particularly near schools. She believes her job has given her insights into local government that will make her an effective commissioner.

Shibley has been involved with Kelly Rogers for a little less than two years, and the couple shares a home in Southwest Portland.

"She's wonderful. She's a partner in every sense of the word," says Shibley, an avid runner and tennis player.

Shibley is a native Oregonian who attended the University of Oregon, where she studied international relations before working as an aide to U.S. Rep. Jim Weaver for six years.

Chuck Carpenter Republican incumbent seeking re-election to Oregon House District 7

To put it simply, most of us would not want to be in Chuck Carpenter's shoes.

During the past year, the 34-year-old Republican legislator lost his job with Nike and generated a torrent of bad feelings among many within the gay and lesbian community due to his public campaigning on behalf of Gordon Smith, a failed (now resurrected) U.S. senatorial candidate who believes that it is a "special right" for people to receive legal protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Smith has also vowed to vigorously oppose any attempt to provide legal recognition to same-sex couples who wish to marry, and during his first U.S. Senate run, Smith publicly welcomed an endorsement from the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

Now Carpenter, who lives in a two-room apartment that doubles as a campaign office, is facing a GOP primary challenge from an ultraconservative candidate, Chip Wallace, who is backed by

the OCA.

"He's definitely to the right of me," says Carpenter, who estimates he has lost 20 percent of his support base due to his decision to back Smith. "If we have a low turnout, [Wallace] could be a real threat."

During the last election, RTP's political action committee, which contributes thousands of dollars to political candidates, endorsed both Carpenter, a first-term Republican legislator whose district covers portions of Washington, Multnomah and Columbia counties, and his Democratic rival, Jeanne Atkins. It was a very tight race and the favorable nod from RTP could have pushed Carpenter over the top.

This time, however, Carpenter, a social progressive but fiscal conservative, didn't even bother to fill out the questionnaire required by RTP when it makes its endorsement decisions.

"I didn't respond to their questionnaire because I think there's bad blood between myself and RTP," he says.

"I really don't know what to say about Chuck Carpenter," says RTP's Pack, seemingly bolstering Carpenter's conclusion.

When pushed for further comment, though, Pack responds: "The Gordon Smith thing has created some bad feelings—but we have been told that Chuck's presence in the state Legislature last session did make a difference with the Republican caucus. There's something to be said about that."

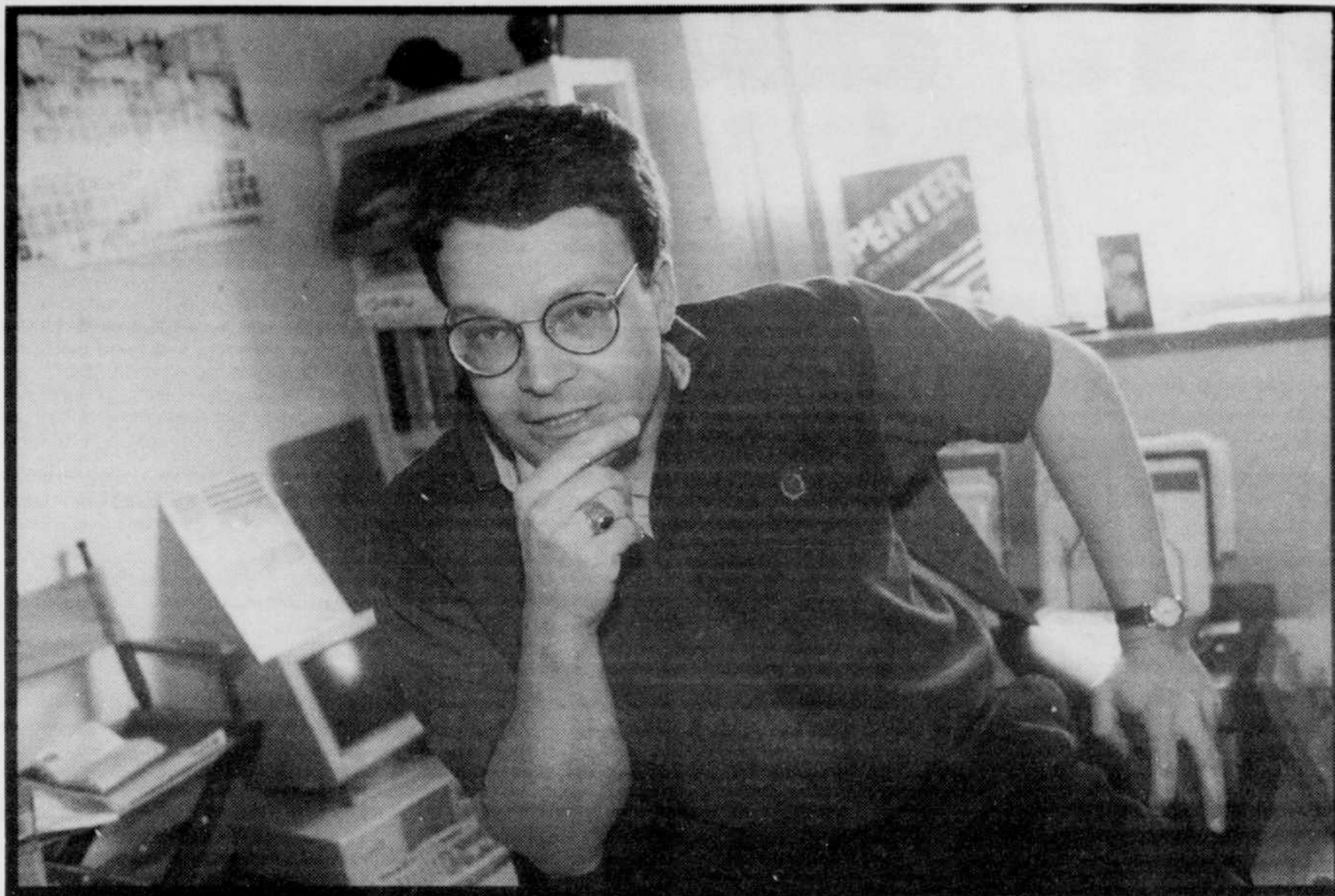
Carpenter astonished many people when he first backed the fiscally and socially conservative Smith over the more moderate Norma Paulus in the GOP primary for the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Bob Packwood.

In the general election, Carpenter again went for Smith over the gay-positive choice, Democrat Ron Wyden.

"I do get the cold shoulder now, and it sometimes feels pretty brutal to me," says Carpenter. "But I don't regret anything. I have a clear conscience."

Carpenter currently supports himself through temp work, but hopes to establish his own consulting firm. He says he is in a relationship, but did not wish to disclose any further information about that because his companion "is not out."

For more information about these campaigns, call Gail Shibley at 223-7523; Bob Duehmig at 244-9564; Frank Dixon at 223-3304; and Chuck Carpenter at 645-5789.



Chuck Carpenter