

PRIMARY PRIMER: JUST GRIN AND BALLOT

As in elections of the recent past, Just Out is forced to make some tough decisions regarding our endorsements. In a number of political contests, human rights advocates are in the rare position of being able to select from a pool of candidates friendly to many of the causes we support: discrimination protections based on sexual orientation, equal legal marriage rights for same-sex couples, recognition of and support for sexual minority youth, equitable foster-parenting and adoption policies, economic equality for marginalized communities, protection of a woman's right to choose, protection of the environment, increasing the minimum wage, removal of racial and ethnic bias in all levels of government and in the courts, protecting the basic civil rights of all immigrants, and the basic principle of abolishing anti-human laws and initiatives.

Since Just Out also bases its endorsements on issues that extend beyond sexual orientation, there were some tough races to decide—particularly those Democratic races in which gay men and one lesbian face off against opponents who deserve serious consideration. In this issue we focus on these contests, as well as the race for the U.S. Senate. We focus on the Democrats in the U.S. Senate race since we could not consider Gordon Smith or Lon Mabon as viable options on the Republican side. From the point of view of the queer voter, openly gay Republican Chuck Carpenter, who is running for Oregon House District 7, is not facing a difficult race.

In the May 17 issue we will feature Just Out's full list of endorsements, just in time for the May 21 primary.

Though issuing dual endorsements may have been easier in some of these races, it is Just Out policy not to: We believe you expect us to make the hard decisions.

Analysis by Renée LaChance and Inga Sorensen

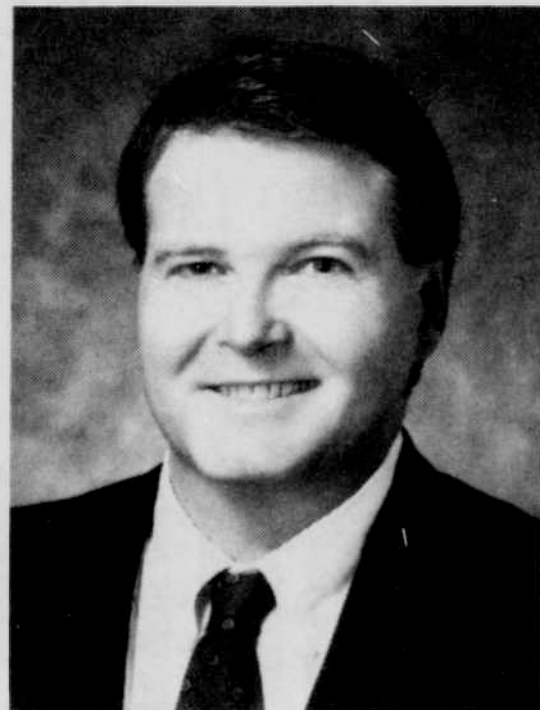
OREGON SENATE DISTRICT 6

Four Democratic candidates vie for this seat: Ginny Burdick, Frank Dixon, Tom Mason and Kent Snyder. Though all are supportive of lesbian and gay rights, we're focusing on two candidates, Mason and Dixon.

Tom Mason has name recognition in this race, since he served as an Oregon state representative for 16 years. Mason served the lesbian and gay community well for a number of those years, and Just Out has endorsed him in the past, however, he has recently changed his positions on a woman's right to choose and lesbian and gay rights. Four years ago Mason was progressive on these issues, now he is opposed to same-sex marriage and equitable foster-parenting rights for lesbians and gay men. His turnaround on these issues mirrors a previous about-face: Three days before the 1994 election for Oregon House District 11 Mason—who had favored a woman's right to choose—sought the endorsement of Oregon Right to Life, an anti-choice organization.

Mason has become a candidate whom the lesbian and gay community should be extremely wary of, should he get his party's nomination.

For us there is one clear choice in this race—Frank Dixon, an out gay man who is a progressive, pragmatic Democrat who advocates for education, neighborhood livability, basic civil rights, community policing, affordable health care and women's reproductive freedoms. He is the only candidate who has consistently worked for lesbian and gay rights. He has been endorsed by the Right to Privacy PAC, the Portland Rainbow Coalition, the Sierra Club and the Oregon AFL-CIO. He will make a strong, articulate state senator. Frank Dixon has earned our endorsement.



Frank Dixon

OREGON HOUSE DISTRICT 12

One race that posed a difficult choice involves the Democratic primary race for the Oregon House of Representatives District 12 seat being vacated by Rep. Gail Shibley, who is running for the Portland City Council.

Four candidates are running in this primary: Chris Beck, David Bragdon, Bob Duehmig and Laurie Wimmer. All four support equality for lesbians and gay men. Voters cannot go wrong with any of these candidates.

Both Beck and Bragdon support basic rights for all Oregonians and each mentions that fact in his statement in the Voter's Pamphlet. Though neither Wimmer nor Duehmig follow suit, Just Out believes these two candidates are of particular interest to our community.

Wimmer is the director of the Oregon Commission for Women, and Duehmig, an openly gay progressive, is legislative specialist for the Oregon Federation of Teachers, Education and Health Professionals.

Laurie Wimmer, 38, is a lifelong Oregonian and unabashed women's and children's rights advocate, who has been a long-time supporter of gay, lesbian and bisexual rights.

Wimmer has testified at state legislative hearings supporting antidiscrimination legislation based on sexual orientation; actively campaigned, with her young children in tow, against discriminatory ballot measures 9 and 13; and is a member of the Keeston Lowery Democratic Club, a lesbian and gay political club.

She was staunchly opposed to 1988's Ballot Measure 8, an initiative successfully pushed by Lon Mabon and company that rescinded a gubernatorial executive order barring sexual orientation discrimination in state government.

As director of the Oregon Commission for Women, Wimmer says she personally protested to state Rep. Kevin Mannix—a highly conservative Democrat who is running for state attorney general—when he unveiled his plans during the 1995 session to sponsor legislation that would have made it illegal for unmarried women to receive alternative insemination, and a bill that would have required government to favor and promote heterosexual marriages above all other relationships.

Wimmer supports equal marriage rights for same-sex couples, antidiscrimination legislation, and public funding for programs helping sexual minority youth. She has crafted a Children's Bill of Rights that specifically addresses the high suicide rate among sexual minority youth.

Wimmer, who is married and has two children, lives in Northwest Portland. She has been endorsed by the Portland Rainbow Coalition.

Some may say it makes perfect sense for Bob Duehmig to become the successor to the seat held by Oregon's first openly gay or lesbian legislator, Gail Shibley. After all, like Shibley, he is openly gay and a pragmatic progressive who possesses a civil demeanor sorely needed in Salem.

Unlike Wimmer, Duehmig is relatively new to Oregon, having moved here from the Midwest in 1991. Upon his arrival, the 31-year-old political junkie became involved in local efforts to elect the Clinton-Gore ticket. The pro-labor, pro-choice Duehmig also headed up the get-out-the-vote campaign for now-Gov. John Kitzhaber.

As a legislative specialist, Duehmig has spent the past three sessions "working on tax and education issues."

Education is, in fact, on the top of Duehmig's legislative agenda. He backs gay and lesbian rights, supports urban growth boundaries and tougher water and air quality standards.

He has received Right to Privacy PAC's endorsement. Duehmig lives in Johns Landing with his partner of seven years, Bill Griesar.

Both Duehmig and Wimmer know their way around the state legislative process. Both have paid their political dues. Wimmer has paid hers primarily in Oregon, especially lobbying in the Oregon Legislature, while Duehmig has paid his largely outside of Oregon. Duehmig's political activity in Oregon has revolved around mainstream Democratic politics, and he was involved only peripherally in fighting ballot measures 9 and 13, while Wimmer actively canvassed on those measures, plus Measure 8 in 1988.

While lesbians and gay men would be equally well served by either candidate, and although we'd like to see a gay man succeed Shibley's legislative legacy, Just Out's endorsement goes to Wimmer, for her long track record of fighting for the basic human rights of Oregonians.

PORTLAND CITY COUNCIL POSITION 1

Mike Lindberg held down this job for 17 years. Lindberg has been a champion of the arts, lesbian and gay rights, and many other issues of importance to the Rose City. His absence from the council will be keenly felt. Eight candidates threw their hats into the ring for this seat on the council—Just Out is focusing on three: Jim Francesconi, Gail Shibley and Eric Sten.

All three are good candidates; all three sup-

port lesbian and gay rights; all three would be a welcome addition to the council. However, some things stand out about each.

Eric Sten has the most experience in city government—he has worked in Portland City Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury's office for five years, three of those as chief of staff. Sten's area of expertise working for Kafoury has been housing. His ideas for providing affordable housing in Portland are cutting-edge, and his ability to pull people in to his way of thinking is enviable. He has done very good work for the residents of Portland without caring about getting the credit.

The only things that disturbed us about Sten revolve around his perceived "party animal" attitude. For example, several weeks ago KXL Radio's Victoria Taft Show arranged to speak to Sten and tracked him down at a local bar to conduct the interview. While the image is reminiscent of Bud Clark and the Goose Hollow Inn, it turned us off in this race. Frankly, we would like to see Sten continue to hone his political skills; we'd like to see him run for Kafoury's seat when it comes up.



Laurie Wimmer

Jim Francesconi posed an endorsement dilemma for us in this contest. Francesconi was endorsed by a number of allies of the lesbian and gay community: Avel Gordly, Ann Sweet and the Portland Rain-

bow Coalition to name a few. All these people had supported Shibley in the past. We wondered what was up.

Francesconi has touted his work getting 600 young people out of gangs and into jobs. He has worked with the African American community in many ways to enhance livability in North and Northeast Portland. He obviously feels passionately about a number of issues involving youth and people of color. That weighs heavily in our endorsement considerations.

The thing we found most confusing about Francesconi was how he could be an ally on lesbian and gay rights while being such a devout Catholic that he sends his three children to Catholic school. Lesbians and gay men know legions about the pope's homophobia and the often homophobic teachings of the Catholic Church. When asked to respond to questions about sexual orientation, Francesconi often seemed torn between the religious teachings of his church and his progressive political bent.

He was very clear that lesbians and gay men should have basic civil rights, and that lesbian, gay and questioning youth should have access to counseling in public schools by lesbian- and gay-positive counselors. He believes in a woman's right to choose. Where things got fuzzy was when we asked if he would support same-sex marriage. Francesconi responded that honoring people's commitments to one another was important. He said he would support same-sex marriage, even though it would be difficult for him to do so "because of [his] church." But he was clear that he "would not lead the charge."

Francesconi is an attorney who employs up to 15 people in his law practice. We asked him if discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was addressed in the personnel policies of his firm, and he said he couldn't say for sure whether it was in the language of the policy or not, but it certainly was his intention that it be included.

The thing we most admired about Francesconi was his habit of sitting down with marginalized community leaders and asking questions about

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