

local news

Bitter brouhaha

A donation to Gail Shibley's campaign creates a political quagmire in an already difficult race

by Inga Sorensen

I think it's fair to say that this is a murky issue for our community," says Donna Red Wing, a Portland resident and national field director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, a watchdog group whose mission includes ending negative stereotyping of sexual minorities in media.

Red Wing, a longtime lesbian-and-gay-rights activist is talking about the recent brouhaha over Portland City Council candidate Gail Shibley's acceptance of \$9,000 in campaign contributions from the owner and two employees of Fantasy for Adults Only video stores.

Campaign contribution and expenditure reports show that Shibley, who is in an extremely tough Portland City Council race, received \$5,000 from Fantasy owner Tracy Blakeslee; \$2,500 from assistant general manager Rodney L. Rosean; and \$1,500 from comptroller C. Allen Brady.

"Let's face it. Would you want to have one of these places next to your home? I sure wouldn't," says Red Wing. "At the same time, I firmly believe that one's free expression and First Amendment rights should be protected."

Shibley was recently the target of what some consider a scathing attack by *Oregonian* associate editor David Reinhard, who took the openly lesbian candidate to task for her decision to accept money from what he calls a "pornography empire."

In an op-ed piece published Saturday, May 4, Reinhard, who described Shibley as a "champion of women and Portland neighborhoods," wrote, in part: "Somehow a lot of folks are having a hard time seeing what Tracy Blakeslee's Fantasy Video parlors have to do with improving our neighborhoods or the lives of women. Or how Shibley—a feminist who's presumably concerned about turning women into sex objects—could accept

the dollars of a porno king."

Reinhard goes on to say that Blakeslee's establishments "infect" neighborhoods. He maintains that the aisles of "X-rated videos are conveniently arranged by fetish or sexual orientation," and questions Shibley's "frightening amorality."

"My record of support for neighborhood livability is quite clear," says Shibley, a state representative and city employee handling neighborhood projects, particularly involving traffic safety.

Shibley says she is disappointed that a professional journalist would craft copy containing "unspoken, negative inferences" to "promote an attack on me."

Blakeslee has contributed copious dollars to campaigns over the past several years. In 1990 he gave \$500 to Gov. Barbara Roberts' campaign. Two years later, Secretary of State Phil Keisling's campaign received a \$250 Blakeslee donation, and in 1994 he contributed \$11,000 to state legislative races, as well as \$2,000 to Gov. John Kitzhaber's campaign.

Additionally, Blakeslee has contributed to Portland Mayor Vera

Katz's campaign and the No on 13 Committee.

"And it has never been a [media] issue until now. We wonder why now, with a lesbian feminist in a close race, this has all of the sudden turned into a big deal," says Barry Pack, executive director of Right to Privacy, a statewide gay, lesbian and bisexual rights organization.

For the record, Blakeslee contributed \$2,000 to Fred Neal, an openly gay candidate who unsuccessfully ran for Portland City Council in 1994. The media did not make that contribution a major campaign issue.

Pack says his group stands "fully behind Gail," and is "very concerned that there seems to be a continuing shift toward the right on the *Oregonian's* pages." Pack adds that Right to

Privacy has no concrete plans about whether or how to respond to the perceived shift.

"This did not feel like a homophobic attack to me. It felt more like an attack on pornography," says Red Wing, whose group is trained to pinpoint anti-gay and -lesbian bias in media reports. "But I do wonder whether *The Oregonian* would do this exposé if Gail were not gay. I say that because I have not seen this kind of examination of the campaign contributions received by other candidates at this level."

Shibley's campaign manager, Carter Headrick, meanwhile, says he's grateful that Reinhard's column ran on a Saturday, a day of the week known for lackluster readership. "I knew the column was coming, but I didn't know if it would be on a Saturday or a Sunday. I was really, really hoping for Saturday."

He says the Shibley camp will probably let the issue drop. "It hasn't had much of an effect," says Headrick, who estimates the headquarters has received about a dozen calls from concerned citizens. "Once we explained our position, they seemed to understand."

Shibley, who has served three terms in the Oregon House, says she's been approached by a number of individuals who were "indignant" over what they viewed as "vicious, one-sided" attacks on her.

Although he has often been the catalyst for controversy, the relatively soft-spoken Blakeslee, who has contributed to numerous HIV/AIDS and gay causes, says: "I don't think there's anything to be gained by me responding to [*The Oregonian*]."

However he does speculate that "the good ol' boys don't want [Shibley] in there," meaning on the Portland City Council.

"I write what I write," Reinhard tells *Just Out*, adding he didn't even mention Shibley's lesbianism in his column. "I even told Gail that I thought she was an able legislator."

Democratic club holds straw poll

The Keeston Lowery Democratic Club has released results of a straw poll conducted April 14. Members met with several Democratic candidates who are running in the May 21 primary.

The winners of the straw poll include: Tom Bruggere, U.S. Senate; Elizabeth Furse, 1st Congressional District; Earl Blumenauer, 3rd Congressional District.

In statewide races: Phil Keisling, Oregon secretary of state; Jim Hill, Oregon treasurer; Hardy Myers, Oregon attorney general.

In state Senate races: Frank Dixon, District 6; Kate Brown, District 7; Avel Gordly, District 10; Kevin Campbell, District 28.

In state House races: Mike Sublett, District 7;

The issue, he says, is Shibley's acceptance of nearly \$10,000 in campaign contributions—"about one-tenth her campaign budget"—from what he dubs a "smut peddler."

Reinhard said he wasn't sure if he would be so outspoken on the matter if Blakeslee "had only given fifty dollars."

As in his column, Reinhard told *Just Out* he found it "ironic," "curious" and "strange" that as a feminist and neighborhood activist Shibley would take money from the likes of Blakeslee.

When asked whether he found it ironic that Gordon Smith—a conservative Republican and devout Mormon who is running for the U.S. Senate—recently received two \$5,000 contributions from the National Beer Wholesalers Political Action Committee and \$5,000 from Harrah's Entertainment Inc., which operates casinos, he paused, then admitted "there is a certain irony there."

There has been no mainstream media attention about those Smith campaign contributions.

Perhaps the oddest feature of this entire story is a comment made by Shibley to Reinhard, who writes in his column: "Shibley argues further that Fantasy Video is a legitimate business, so what's the problem? Is there any business, industry, or political outfit whose campaign cash she would refuse? Tobacco companies? Militia groups? Her answer: an astonishing 'No.' Even Mabon's OCA? Even Mabon's OCA, she says."

Shibley tells *Just Out* that it's highly unlikely such a scenario will unfold, thus the point is moot.

"I'm hoping Gail was just shooting from the hip with that comment. I mean, the OCA? Militias? What is that?" says Red Wing, who offers what could be construed as the most clear-cut analysis of the matter: "When Gail was first appointed, she was our Golden Girl. She was our hero. This campaign things have been different. The honeymoon is over."

Susan Lester, District 10; Anitra Rasmussen, District 11; Dan Gardner, District 13; George Eighmey, District 14; Steve March, District 15; Frank Shields, District 16; Mike Fahey, District 17; Margaret Carter, District 18; Bill Stewart, District 19.

Bob Duehmig and Laurie Wimmer received equal votes in the tough House District 12 race, thus no endorsement was made. The same is true for the House District 20 contest between George Kelley and Claudette La Vert.

Gail Shibley received a thumbs up for Portland City Council, as did Charlie Hales. Winners for Multnomah County Commission are: Dan Saltzman, District 1; Tanya Collier, District 3; and Sharron Kelley, District 4.

Rex Armstrong was selected for Oregon Supreme Court, Position No. 1.

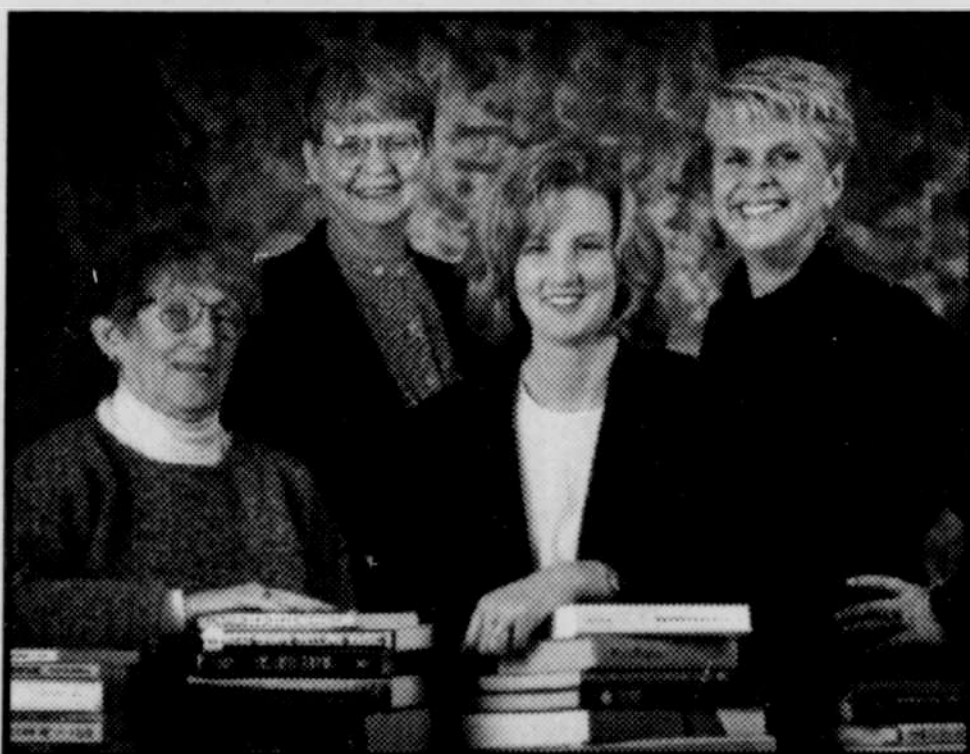
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Gail Shibley

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