

No "I do" for you

In the recent U.S. House vote on DOMA, DeFazio is the lone Oregonian to stand up for same-sex civil rights

by Inga Sorensen

The hostility was palpable. Funny thing is, it wasn't coming from gay men and lesbians, but rather from the congresswoman herself.

"Listen, I'm not in favor of a 14-year-old marrying an adult," snapped U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Furse when *Just Out* asked the Oregon Democrat whether she supports, on moral and ethical grounds, equal marriage rights for gay and lesbian citizens.

The question came on the heels of Furse's surprising vote in favor of the Defense of Marriage Act, a bill approved by the U.S. House that defines marriage—for the first time in federal law—as a formal union between a man and woman.

The measure, approved July 12 by a 342-67 margin, allows states to disregard same-sex marriages performed in any other state, and precludes spousal benefits, typically afforded partners in a heterosexual union, that are distributed by a range of government programs from Social Security to veterans services.

We spoke with Furse and U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, a Portland Democrat, one day after they cast their ballots favoring the discriminatory legislation.

The two, who have been considered allies of the gay and lesbian community, popped in at the Right to Privacy's Garden Party on July 13. RTP, Oregon's largest gay, lesbian and bisexual rights organization, had invited Furse to the fund-raiser as a featured speaker.

We caught up with Furse and Blumenauer at the event, and the duo served up rationales that some critics say sounded like prepackaged establishment gobbledegook.

"This was a plan by the right wing to distract and divide us," Furse told *Just Out*, adding she had previously spoken with the Human Rights Campaign about the issue, and claims the national gay rights group gave her the go-ahead to "do



Elizabeth Furse (left) and Earl Blumenauer (center, in white shirt) at the RTP Garden Party

what it takes" to get re-elected.

She faces what is expected to be a tough race in November against Republican contender Bill Witt. Last election, she defeated him by a mere 300 votes.

"Wedding Announcement" section.

When the women informed *The Oregonian* they were a same-sex couple, they were told that the paper only publishes "legal marriages."

Linebarier says while *Oregonian* employee Marty Prunty told her it was a "free service" to the community, it was solely available to heterosexuals because they are the only people who can be legally married.

"*The Oregonian* has steadfastly maintained for years that its Wedding Announcement section is a free community service. It needs to provide that service in a nondiscriminatory manner," says the couple's attorney, Renée Jacobs, of the Portland firm Crispin & Associates.

Linebarier says a letter was sent to *The Oregonian*—prior to the filing of the lawsuit—requesting that the newspaper voluntarily end its discriminatory policy.

"Sure, this may be a wedge issue, but there comes a time when you have to follow what's in your heart," says U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Springfield/Eugene Democrat who was the only member of Oregon's congressional delegation to oppose the measure.

"This is a hateful and dangerous precedent to set," he says. "I'm sure some legislative careers were ended over the [1964] Civil Rights Act...and I feel that if my actions backing civil rights mean the end of my [congressional] career, well then that's a pretty good way to go."

"HRC did not encourage legislators—even with a quiet wink and nod on the side—to vote in favor of the Defense of Marriage Act," says HRC spokesman David Smith. "I talked with our political people who work with the Pacific Northwest, and they simply don't understand how any congressperson could have walked away from a conversation with us with the impression that it was OK for them to vote yes."

Furse, clearly angry with our persistent ques-

example, reinstate legal prohibitions on interracial marriages.

Pressed for her personal feelings about same-sex marriage, Furse retorted sharply, "I don't know." Blumenauer, meanwhile, offered political jargon about safe streets and job security.

"Do you have a statement? I'll get you a statement," he said to me as an aide attempted to jam a prepared statement into my hands and scurry away with the representative.

"I want to know why you voted for this measure," I responded.

Finally, after fumbling for a few minutes, Blumenauer, who does not face a difficult race and represents perhaps one of the politically safest districts in the nation, said: "The picture of marriage that I have in my mind is of a man and a woman. That's where I'm at in my head. This isn't a political thing with me."

"We are baffled by Blumenauer's vote," says HRC's Smith. "We feel he's in a very safe district. We just don't understand it."

HRC, which contributed \$7,500 to Furse's and \$2,500 to Blumenauer's recent campaigns, says the marriage vote will be included in the organization's report card, which rates legislators based on their votes on selected gay and HIV/AIDS-related measures.

Smith applauds DeFazio's negative vote: "Some, like DeFazio, are profiles in courage. Some, like the president, are not."

DeFazio adds, "What do you expect when the president throws in the towel from the outset?" referring to Bill Clinton's eager pronouncement that he would sign the bill into law (despite tagging the measure as "gay-baiting").

Furse, meanwhile, told the Garden Party crowd she could have "been a heroine" by voting down the bill, but opted instead for political survival. She received a polite round of applause in an act one observer described as "the most self-loathing thing" he had witnessed "in quite some time."

RTP co-chair Lisa Maxfield says she's gone from "feeling heartsick to having steam come out of my ears."

"It's a devastating feeling," she says.

When asked why RTP chose Furse as featured speaker, Maxfield said, "We choose speakers that are gay and speakers who may be straight who 'get it.'"

Does Furse still get it?

"I don't know anymore," Maxfield responds, somewhat mournfully.

Lesbian couple sues *Oregonian* over discriminatory policy

A Portland lesbian couple has filed a lawsuit against *The Oregonian*, claiming the newspaper's refusal to print their wedding announcement violates city and state laws prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations.

The lawsuit was filed July 17 in Multnomah County District Court. The couple, Sandra Linebarier, 45, and her partner, Charlene Morris, 44, of Southeast Portland, say they contacted *The Oregonian* in early July to arrange for the publication of their wedding announcement in the paper's

recreation department is charging her and Morris the "wedding rate" fee to use the space.

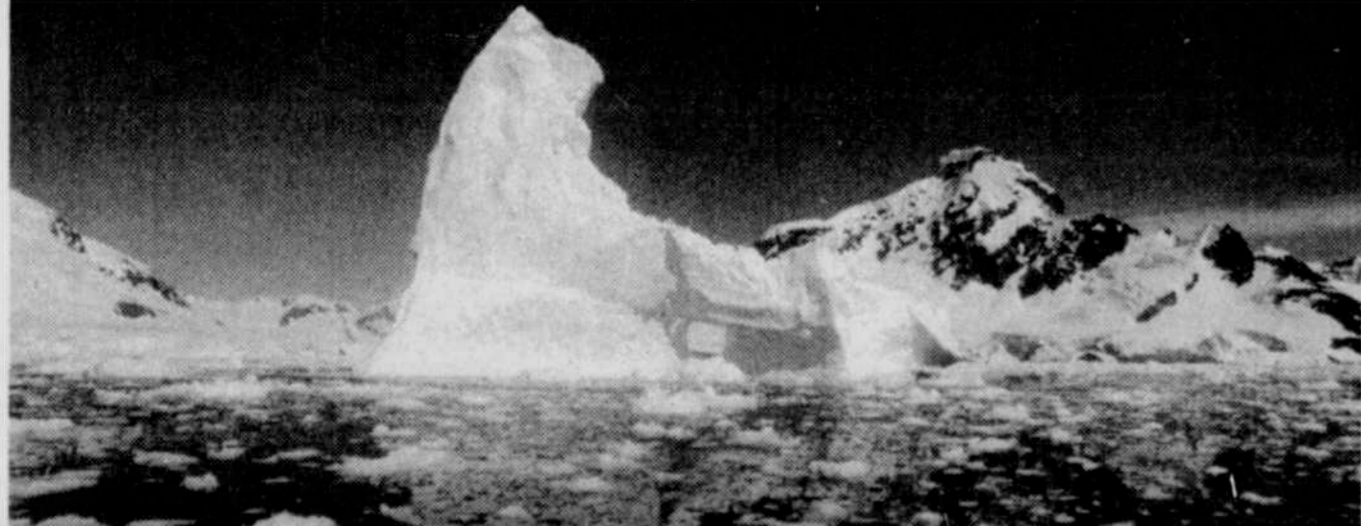
"I asked them if it made a difference that it was a same-sex couple's wedding," she says. "They said no, it's still a wedding."

Despite the growing list of mainstream papers that print same-sex couple's announcements, *The Oregonian*, which failed to respond to our inquiry, has held fast to its discriminatory policy.

Other couples who believe they have faced similar discrimination by *The Oregonian* are encouraged to immediately contact Maura Coffin at Crispin & Associates, 1230 SW First Ave., Suite 300, Portland, OR 97204; phone 224-2007; fax 224-0517.

Inga Sorensen

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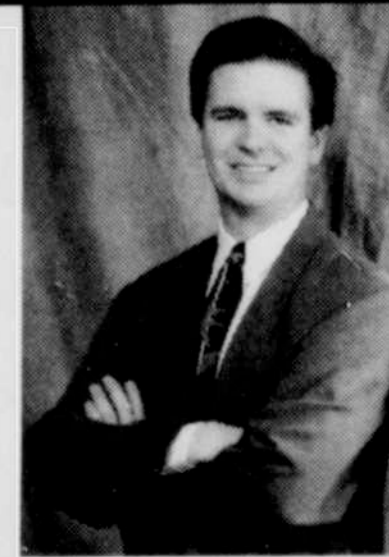
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