

POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS

DOMA DITTO

Oregon Sen. Marilyn Shannon, a Salem Republican, has introduced a second measure designed to prohibit equal marriage rights for same-gender couples. The legislation, Senate Joint Resolution 17, is a proposed state constitutional amendment which defines marriage as the union between a man and woman. SJR 17 also says same-sex marriages performed elsewhere will not be recognized in Oregon.

It mirrors Senate Bill 577, the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, which was introduced by Shannon in February.

While the two bills strive to bar equal marriage rights, SB 577 would do so via state statute, while SJR 17 would write the prohibition into the Oregon Constitution, and hence make it harder to alter.

In addition, SJR 17 includes a referendum clause, meaning that if approved by lawmakers it would circumvent a gubernatorial veto and go directly to the people for a vote during the November 1998 general election.

SB 577, meanwhile, could be vetoed by Gov. John Kitzhaber if approved by lawmakers. Though the state's chief executive still has not taken a public position on SB 577, a spokesman previously told *Just Out* that Kitzhaber "certainly believes that marriage doesn't need a defense."

It appears Shannon isn't taking any chances, says Barry Pack, executive director of Right to Pride, a statewide gay, lesbian and bisexual rights organization.

He further says given the fact that Republicans control both chambers, chances are extremely good that both SB 577 and SJR 17 could pass the Legislature.

"We're hearing that we'd lose some Democrats on the marriage issue, too," he says. "Both bills are going to be very hard to beat."

SB 577 and SJR 17 have been referred to the Senate Rules and Elections Committee.

According to Pack, all "social issues" bills are being sent to that committee to sit until proponents prove to leadership they have majority support. If they show they have the necessary votes, the legislation moves forward.

BASIC RIGHTS OREGON GETS NEW LEADER



Jean Harris

Longtime activist Jean Harris has been named the new executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the successor organization to the No on 13 campaign.

Citing a need for more "balance" in her life, former BRO head Julie Davis officially stepped down from the post Dec. 31 and has since moved to San Francisco.

Call it a swap of sorts.

For many years Harris was ensconced in the politics of the City by the Bay. From 1987 to 1991, she worked closely with Harry Britt, an openly gay member of the San Francisco Board of

Supervisors, where she successfully advocated for the recognition of domestic partners and the establishment of needle exchange programs.

Since moving to Oregon two and a half years ago, she has lent her political expertise to an array of electoral projects, including Ron Wyden's U.S. Senate campaign, Vera Pool's bid to become Multnomah County sheriff, and initiative campaigns promoting everything from open spaces to alternative health care.

"If you look at San Francisco, so much has already been done there," says Harris, assessing the challenges ahead of her. "In Oregon it's different, particularly when you're talking about things like domestic partnership coverage. It's all still fairly new, and there are lots of opportunities to make positive changes."

BRO grew from 1994's No on 13 campaign. Its purpose is to, in part, fight discriminatory measures. However, unlike its earlier incarnations, BRO was also created as a long-term, permanent and more proactive organization.

To that end, BRO has launched the Fair Workplace Project, whose centerpiece is an educational video highlighting the often-unknown truths about workplace discrimination experienced by lesbian and gay people, and the lack of legal protections.

Prior to leaving, Davis spent several months generating contacts explicitly within the corporate community, and the video has been viewed at several companies.

Harris plans to continue that effort, as well as maintain and update BRO's in-house voter file, which is essential if the community is confronted with another anti-gay initiative.

Oregon DOMA may be that first test.

"I think we have to work under the assumption that there will be some discriminatory measure on the ballot every two years," Harris says. "The great thing is, Basic Rights Oregon already has a tremendous infrastructure in place."

Nonetheless, Harris says the organization always has plenty of work for volunteers. "We do, trust me," she says. Anyone interested in volunteering should contact BRO at 222-6151.

ENDA ON HOLD

It's still uncertain when—or if—Oregon House Bill 2734, which bars discrimination in the workplace on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation—will receive a hearing.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Chuck Carpenter, a Portland-area openly gay Republican.

HB 2734 backers had hoped the bill would be assigned to the House Commerce Committee, which Carpenter had described as the most supportive.

The measure was instead assigned to the House Judiciary Committee, chaired by the far-from-gay-rights-friendly John Minnis (R-Wood Village).

According to RTP's Pack, Eldon Johnson (R-Central Point), chair of the House Commerce Committee, had anticipated the bill's referral to Commerce and had already assigned a March 13 hearing date.

"We were kind of scrambling to get the testimony lined up," admits Pack.

That effort, however, turned out to be moot. "Let's just say that Oregon ENDA seems to be on a hiatus right now," he says.

Perhaps that's why some more nudging is in order—which is exactly what RTP and Oregon Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays plan to do come March 25, when PFLAG members converge upon the Capitol for a day of lobbying.

"In 1993 we had all of these parents camped out in front of [then House Speaker Larry Campbell's] office. I think we got a hearing a week later," Pack laughs. "They love it, and they're good at it, too."

Reported by Inga Sorensen

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