

POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS

BRO may push for vote

Jean Harris, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, says her group continues to explore the possibility of pushing a statewide initiative prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation—especially given the fact that (by press time) it appeared a similarly intentioned bill was stuck solidly in the state Senate.

"We're drafting some language," says Harris. "At the very least we can get a community discussion going on whether a proactive campaign should be waged."

Harris says BRO hopes to meet with community leaders this summer as well as host a broader community forum in mid-August to ponder the pros and cons.

Barry Pack, executive director of Right to Pride, a statewide gay, lesbian and bisexual rights group that has lobbied for passage of the Oregon Employment Non-Discrimination Act throughout the session, says RTP is "philosophically opposed" to the idea of putting human rights up for a majority vote of the people.

"After this session, I'm not so sure that representative government is much better," he chides, "but we also feel that the majority should not determine whether a minority population should be allowed basic rights."

At the same time, Pack says RTP is "open to discussion" on the matter.

ENDA leaves a beautiful corpse

Though it appears Oregon ENDA won't get a Senate vote, human rights backers are still applauding the proposal's movement this session.

The second version of the legislation, House Bill 3719, you may recall, cleared the Republican-controlled House on April 29 by a 40-20 vote. It marked the first time the bill passed that chamber in two-plus decades of attempts.

"That was very historic," says Pack.

During the past several months, supporters worked different channels to move the bill—including introducing the proposal three times in an effort to appease leadership and attract votes.

HB3719 mirrored HB2734, the first introduced ENDA, which had languished in the House Judiciary Committee. A slightly altered version, Senate Bill 1217, is the third and latest configuration of the bill.

ENDA managed to make it to the Senate due to some bold maneuvering by chief sponsor Republican Rep. Chuck Carpenter, who is openly gay, and GOP colleague Rep. Jim Hill, who banded with Democrats to force a House floor vote. (The Republicans' narrow 31-29 margin in that chamber allowed Carpenter and Hill's alliance with Dems to pose a serious threat to GOP-backed legislation.)

"I think Chuck really gained a lot of respect for his stance and what he was willing to do for it," says Pack.

SB1217, however, has stalled in the Senate Livability Committee and is poised for death.

Carpenter's star rises

Despite that, Carpenter is receiving kudos from coast to coast for his work on ENDA. He will receive a Leadership Award during the 1997 Log Cabin Republicans National Convention slated for July 23 to 27 in Washington, D.C.

"The Leadership Award is the highest honor given by Log Cabin," says spokesman Kevin Ivers.

LCR is the country's largest gay and lesbian Republican organization, with more than 50 chapters and 11,000 members nationwide.

"Chuck is an incredible role model," says Ivers. "We want to recognize the history he made in Oregon—and we feel gay and lesbian Republicans across the nation should look to Oregon to

see how it's done—from us electing our own, writing our legislation and fighting for it to the end. Chuck Carpenter did all of that."

According to Ivers, Carpenter has twice appeared on the cover of LCR's national newsletter, which he calls "unprecedented."

"Chuck is a member of Log Cabin who came up through the ranks," he says. "He's done a terrific job and we're looking forward to showcasing him at the convention."

Closer to home, Carpenter, Hill and state Rep. George Eighmey (D-Portland) will all receive "special recognition" during RTP's annual summer Garden Party on July 12 (see local briefs for event details) for their work on behalf of ENDA.

LCR elects a fighter

In other LCR news, Clement Knorr has been elected state chairman of Log Cabin Oregon.

Knorr, a New York City native, served as an aide to Richard Nixon and is a lifelong GOP activist.

He vows to "turn up the heat" on the Oregon Republican establishment and raise gay and lesbian rights issues "to the boiling point."

Knorr, a self-described "cantankerous old man" says, "Hell, I love a fight. I was at Stonewall that night we beat up the cops and turned their cars over. The likes of a [Lon] Mabon trying to take over my beloved Republican Party—the party of Tom McCall and Barry Goldwater—sure raises my hackles."

A former investment banker, Knorr is now retired and resides in Salem with his cats, Golda and Butch.

For more information about the organization, write Log Cabin Oregon, PO Box 4609, Salem, OR 97302; or e-mail LogCabinOR@aol.com.

Kitzhaber vetos ban on ban

Concerns over the Legislature interfering with a local school board decision prompted Gov. John Kitzhaber to veto Senate Bill 680, which sought to prohibit any school board, community college, state college or university from barring military recruiters from campus.

The measure, sponsored by Republican Sens. Randy Miller of West Linn and Shirley Stull of Keizer, was in response to the Portland School Board's approval two years ago of a recruiting ban on its campuses.

The board took that action due to the U.S. military's ongoing discrimination against openly gay and lesbian service members.

Political observers predict there are not enough votes for a veto override.

Jury's still out on SB44

Senate Bill 44 gained full legislative approval when it passed the House on June 24 by a 38-24 vote. The measure, which cleared the Senate on June 2 by a 21-9 count, moves to the governor.

SB44 in part prohibits employment discrimination against an individual by reason of his or her relationship or association with a disabled person.

While Pack and others applaud the dropping of wording that would have excluded transsexuals, there remain concerns over a clause that states "an employer may not be found to have engaged in an unlawful employment practice solely because the employer fails to provide reasonable accommodation to a person with a disability arising out of transsexualism."

Some fear that may negatively impact preoperative transsexuals who go to work wearing the clothes of the gender they are transitioning into—or who, for example, use a gender-specific restroom.

"We're not sure what the governor's going to do with SB44," says Pack, "because it's got some good parts, but it also has this."

Reported by Inga Sorensen

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