

Stonewall in Salem?

Members of a gay and lesbian business group want to know what gives with the gov

by Inga Sorensen

U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Furse has done it. So has U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, not to mention U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden. And hey, former Gov. Barbara Roberts did it *twice*.

So what gives with Oregon's current chief executive, John Kitzhaber? That's what Fred Elledge and some other members of the gay and lesbian community want to know.

"For years, we have been asking the governor to come speak to us," says Elledge, who co-founded the Portland Area Business Association in 1992.

With more than 200 members, PABA is an association designed to promote gay and lesbian—and gay-friendly—businesses and entrepreneurs. Elledge has referred to the group as a "gay and lesbian Chamber of Commerce."

"It's important the governor be willing to speak to us," maintains Elledge. "He should show his support for a huge community that has been supportive of him."

Since its establishment five years ago, PABA has hosted monthly luncheons featuring an impressive array of speakers including members of Oregon's congressional delegation, former Gov. Barbara Roberts (who as governor spoke to the group on two occasions), Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer, and leading business people. Despite the precedent, Kitzhaber has yet to make an appearance—even though PABA has made multiple requests over the years.

"I made two requests during the [1994] election season, and again after the election," says Elledge, adding that he followed the necessary protocol and sent the requests in writing. "I never heard a thing."

Other PABA representatives followed suit, going so far as to make the request in person to gubernatorial staff. PABA member Patti May was one such person.

May says she and PABA member Brian Marki personally met with Kitzhaber scheduler Patty Greenfield in October 1995. May and Marki were among a large group of lesbians and gay men invited to Salem for a brown-bag chitchat on gay issues with the governor. The duo decided it was a good opportunity to introduce themselves to Greenfield. May wound up leaving angry.

(May says she had previously sent a written request to the scheduler and followed up with "many" calls to Greenfield which went unreturned.)

"I personally felt [Greenfield] was very uncomfortable, if not homophobic," she says. "You could sense it by her body language and her tone." May says Greenfield was curt, and served up "excuses like the governor didn't get to Portland very much."

May says when she proposed times the governor could possibly speak, she was simply told: "No."

"It was like we were just shut out," she says. PABA made its most recent request, via letter, on Aug. 1. Unlike previous missives, this one did not specifically say PABA was a gay-oriented organization. Elledge says that's because Kitzhaber's staff already knew that.

"We asked whether there was any time between now and May [1998] that the governor

could appear," he says, adding PABA specifically worked to accommodate Kitzhaber's schedule by offering times at the breakfast, lunch or dinner hour, as opposed to the typical luncheon schedule.

"We did this for him," says Elledge.

When he heard nothing back, Elledge called Greenfield and proceeded to have what he dubs a "very unpleasant" conversation.

"She was very short...She said she didn't know we were a gay and lesbian organization—which wasn't true," he recounts.

Elledge says he told Greenfield the governor could talk about any issue he wished. He also mentioned the notable lineup of previous PABA speakers.

"But we weren't getting anywhere," he says, adding that he's starting to believe the governor's staff is stonewalling PABA: "I hope it's not the governor himself."

Elledge says he was even more upset when he



Gov. John Kitzhaber

saw a flyer for a Kitzhaber speaking engagement before the McMinnville City Club back in February.

"He can show up for that, but not for us?" he asks.

Greenfield tells *Just Out* the governor gets "hundreds of requests" from groups wanting Kitzhaber to appear. "We probably reject 95 percent of those," she says.

As for those who make the cut, she says, "We try to schedule engagements where the governor can address a large audience, so we can attract media coverage and can get our message out more...We also try to schedule events outside of Portland."

Greenfield also tells us she doesn't remember meeting with May and Marki.

"I don't recall that." Nor, she says, did she know PABA was a gay and lesbian-oriented organization. "It wouldn't matter either way."

When asked whether Kitzhaber personally knew of PABA's requests, Greenfield says, "Probably, I'm pretty sure I've let him know."

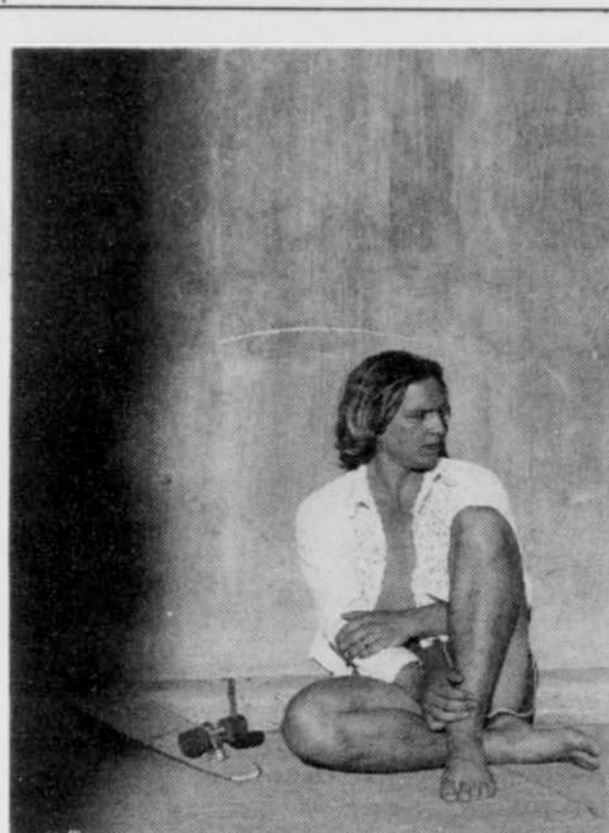
As for who makes the ultimate decision about the governor's schedule, she says "it's up to the whole group," meaning gubernatorial staff, as well as the chief executive.

We asked Greenfield whether PABA's most recent request may be granted.

"I don't know...when you sit down and look at the governor's schedule, you see how filled up it already is," she says.

For his part, Elledge says he's not giving up, and has asked state Rep. George Eighmey to make a pitch to the governor.

"We want this to happen," Elledge says.



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