

LOCAL news

Representatives from Oregon's two leading gay and lesbian rights groups say they hope to work together in the future, despite a recent decision not to merge the organizations.

"I anticipate we'll work together, particularly when it comes to lobbying the Legislature," explains Katherine Tennyson, co-chair of Right to Pride, a 15-year-old group whose political arm raises money for and contributes to selected political candidates, while its education arm promotes lobbying efforts.

For the past few months, RTP has been exploring the possibility of unifying with Basic Rights Oregon, a more grass-roots oriented organization whose main thrust has been fending off anti-gay initiatives, and bolstering its Fair Workplace Project, which encourages businesses to promote gay-equitable environments and policies.

In early August, RTP announced it would remain an independent organization. According to Tennyson, the primary reason for the decision centered on the issue of control.

"That's really the bottom line," she says.

Tennyson says when RTP began exploring the possibility of unification, board members were interested in forming an entity in which RTP and BRO representation was equally balanced.

She says what emerged from talks, however, was a plan which gave BRO more decision-making clout (i.e. more board seats).

"It would have been more like a takeover, and

SEPARATE AND EQUAL

To merge or not to merge—that is no longer the question at Right to Pride and Basic Rights Oregon by Inga Sorensen

that's not what we were looking for," she says, stressing that both RTP and BRO serve vital, yet separate, roles in the queer community.

"We're both working for our political rights. We just do it in a different way," she says. "We have a role. They have a role."

Jean Harris, BRO's executive director, says she's disappointed by RTP's decision.

"RTP came to us and wanted to pursue this idea of unifying into one organization," she says. "So we spent time and energy taking a closer look at that."

Some proponents of unification say a coupling would have been a wise move because establishing one large organization would likely be less taxing on donors, and sharing office space and staff would be more efficient. (RTP and BRO are currently situated on opposite sides of the Willamette.)

According to Harris, BRO will continue to develop a candidate endorsement process, which is new terrain for the group.

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER



Jean Harris

"BRO will do endorsements, and we will target races and decide where we want to spend our resources," says Harris, "though that doesn't necessarily mean just check writing."

She says BRO may, for example, choose instead to make its lists available to candidates for fund-raising purposes.

"Candidates can come in to our office and dial for dollars," she says.

Tennyson, meanwhile, says RTP will do what it has done for the past 15 years: issue endorsements, support particular candidates and orchestrate a lobbying effort.

"That's what we're going to do," she says.

HRC SEEKS SUPPORT

The Human Rights Campaign Action Network is looking for volunteers to work of behalf of Oregon's gay-supportive candidates who are running for national office.

Volunteers will focus on the fundamentals of working in campaigns: message creation, fund raising and getting out the vote.

Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact Ellen Osoinach at 287-5578, or by e-mail at ellyno@aol.com.

HRC is the largest national lesbian and gay political organization, with more than 250,000 members nationwide. It lobbies Congress, provides campaign support, and educates the public to ensure lesbians and gay men in the U.S. can be open, honest, and safe at home, at work, and in the community.

OREGON SENATOR CONTINUES TO BACK HORMEL

Gordon Smith is trying to persuade fellow Republicans to approve the ambassadorial nomination of the gay philanthropist by Bob Roehr

The long-stalled nomination of James Hormel as ambassador to Luxembourg made news yet again in the Aug. 5 issue of *The Hill*, a newspaper covering the Capitol.

It reported Sen. Gordon Smith, an Oregon Republican, had lobbied legislative colleagues on behalf of Hormel at a GOP policy luncheon the previous week.

According to the publication, Smith handed out copies of letters from Hormel responding to charges the nominee is anti-Catholic, as well as letters of support for Hormel from the head of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, as well as some non-Catholic religious leaders.

Senate Republicans have blocked a vote on the nomination to protest what some have called Hormel's promotion of a "gay lifestyle."

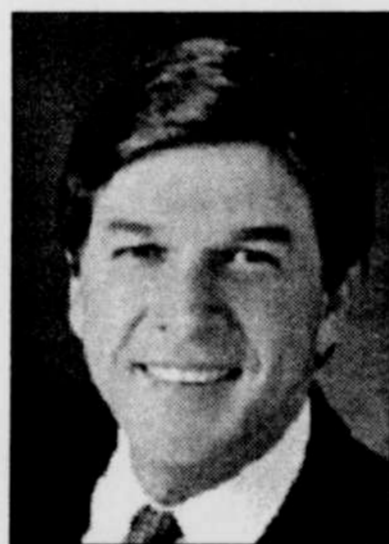
Sen. Tim Hutchinson, a Republican from Arkansas, maintains the nominee is anti-Catholic because Hormel refuses to denounce the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a San Francisco-based political action and social service group that dresses in nuns' habits.

Hutchinson and three other senators have placed a hold on the nomination. Majority Leader Trent Lott, a Republican from Mississippi, has the authority to lift the hold and move the nomination to a vote.

Hutchinson said he will not filibuster if Lott informs him before the nomination is placed on

the calendar for action.

"I'd make a statement about my concerns," Hutchinson told *The Hill*. "My whole point is that there are issues here that should be examined. I just don't believe that Mr. Hormel is an appropriate choice."



Gordon Smith

Meanwhile, Smith isn't the only Republican senator calling for a vote. In mid-June, New York Republican Alfonse D'Amato made public his letter to Lott discussing the matter.

"I fear that Hormel's nomination is being obstructed for one reason and one reason only: the fact that he is gay," D'Amato wrote. "In this day and age, when people ably serve our country in so many capacities without regard to sexual orientation, for the United States Senate to deny an appointment on that basis is simply wrong."

He added, "I am embarrassed that our Republican Party, the party of Lincoln, is seen to be the force behind this injustice."

Additionally, a June 22 editorial in the *New York Times* stated: "Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is outlawed in Luxembourg and in all the other countries of the European Union. It is illegal in San Francisco, where Mr. Hormel lives, and in Washington—except in such places as Congress, where the Republican leadership has made a fetish of it lately."

Hormel's nomination has already cleared the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (on which Smith sits) by a 16-2 vote.

Democrats and several Republicans—Smith included—have indicated their willingness to move for a vote on the nomination when they return from their recess in September.

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