LOCAL news



Senate Minority Leader Kate Brown

uring the early 1990s, Oregon led the nation in terms of out gay, lesbian and bisexual state legislators. We had enough for our own caucus; heck, we even had an openly gay Republican!

Things are different these days, however, as we approach the new millennium. During this 1999 session, there is just one lawmaker who has publicly identified as a member of the sexual minorities community: Senate Minority Leader Kate Brown, a Democrat from Portland, has described herself as bisexual.

PARTY PAUSE

K, House Joint Resolution 29 got tabled-essentially meaning the anti-gay bill is kaput-U but don't pull out your partyware quite yet.

Seems that Republicans have turned to House Joint Resolution 4, which would put the definition of marriage as the union between a man and a woman into the Oregon Constitution.

HJR29 was crafted in response to a December ruling in Tanner vs. Oregon Health Sciences University that stipulated state and local governments must offer domestic partner benefits to samesex couples, and that gay men and lesbians are protected from employment discrimination.

HJR29 would have both defined marriage as the union between a man and a woman and invalidated Tanner. The more streamlined HJR4 specifically targets same-sex marriage.

"It's basically a clean [Defense of Marriage Act] bill," explains Jean Harris, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the gay rights group that is lobbying lawmakers. "On the one hand, I'm glad Republicans killed their own bill [HJR29], but at the same time, they seem committed to passing some piece of anti-gay legislation before they leave."



Left: Gail Shibley circa April 1996; above: Chuck Carpenter on the campaign trail in 1998

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

These days, things are pretty straight in Salem, but life goes on for queer lawmakers of yesteryear by Pat Young

Brown, when asked about legislative life without former state Reps. Gail Shibley and George Eighmey, both Portland Democrats; Rep. Chuck Carpenter, a Republican from the Portland area; Rep. Hedy Rijken, a Newport Democrat; and Rep. Cynthia Wooten, a Democrat from Eugene.

So, where are they now? Just Out is still trying to track down Rijken and Wooten, but here's the scoop on the others.

Then Gail Shibley was appointed to the Oregon Legislature in 1991, she became "It's quite lonely down here in Salem," notes | the state's first openly gay representative. She

was re-elected twice before making a failed bid for a Portland City Council seat.

Last summer, she headed to Washington, D.C., where she now serves as the public affairs director for the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration.

Oregon is very much her home, however, and she considers her tour of duty in D.C. temporary. Still, she says it's a duty that's brought her tremendous enjoyment.

The FHWA makes sure the bridges and roads get built. You know, all the things that make it easier for us to get around town.

eorge Eighmey was a state representative from 1993 through 1997. Term limits stopped him from running for the post again, and last year he made an unsuccessful bid for a Multnomah County Commission seat.

Eighmey retired from his law practice and is currently the executive director of Compassion in Dying of Oregon, an organization that deals with issues pertaining to end-of-life care.

Getting back into politics is always an option, but Eighmey says he likes his work and may do it for a few more years. Occasionally he goes to Salem to discuss death with dignity matters with lawmakers.

Eighmey says it's a privilege to work with



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George Eighmey in May 1998

Last year, he lost an excruciatingly tight Oregon Republican primary race to conservative Bill Witt, sponsor of a slew of anti-gay bills this session.

Carpenter recently received a master's degree in business administration from Portland State University. He is the executive director of Manufactured Housing Communities of Oregon, and sometimes interacts with the Legislature on landlord and tenant issues. And that's about as close as he wants to get to politics. While Carpenter says he enjoyed being a state representative, he has no desire to run for office again.

Why? He says existence as a politician was very demanding and left little time for his personal life. He's at the point now where he wants to spend more time with his partner.

Carpenter comments that life goes on and, yes, he's still a Republican.

s for Kate Brown, well, she misses the gang L but really likes working with Barry Pack, a Democratic caucus administrator and former Right to Pride executive director and gay rights activist.

As Senate minority leader, Brown spends her hours focusing on myriad issues important to Oregonians, and she strives to make sure the process works smoothly and people are treated

Like HJR29, HJR4-if approved by the Legislature-would go to voters. The measure was passed June 16 by the House Judiciary Committee on Civil Law.

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Reported by INGA SORENSEN

people facing life-ending decisions.

"It's renewed my faith in people's commitment to help others. And that's what I want to do," he says.

n 1994, Chuck Carpenter made history when I he became the first openly gay Republican in the nation to win a state legislative office.

fairly on the Senate floor.

In the past, Brown honed in on more specific items such as domestic violence, women's issues and mental health.

She says being in a leadership post has its challenges, but overall she's pleased. So pleased, in fact, she wants to stay in office and be reelected.

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