

## GORDON BE GOOD

Oregon Republican Sen. Gordon Smith continues to support federal hate crimes legislation by Jonathan Kipp

Despite considerable disapproval from his Republican colleagues, Oregon's Sen. Gordon Smith continues to support expanding the list of federal hate crimes to include those motivated by bias against gay men and lesbians.

"It's amazing how far he has come," says Ron Glanville, a member of the Human Rights Campaign Board of Governors.

By a 15-vote margin, the Senate voted June 20 to amend a defense appropriations bill with a version of the stalled Hate Crimes Prevention Act, sponsored by Smith and Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass. Only 11 Republicans voted for the amendment. Smith is said to be responsible for gaining most, if not all, of those 11 votes from his GOP colleagues.

In addition to actual or perceived sexual orientation, the act also would add gender and disability to the list of possible motives for a hate crime. (Current federal law defines hate crimes as those motivated by bias based on religion, race, national origin or color.)

Rich Tafel, executive director of Log Cabin Republicans, the nation's largest gay Republican organization, says his group applauds the support Republican senators, especially Smith, have shown for the amendment.

Not long ago, Smith was known to align himself with two of Oregon's most conservative and anti-gay religious organizations: the Oregon Citizens Alliance and the Oregon Christian Coalition. Both organizations are currently working to place a statewide initiative on the November ballot that many feel would result in discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

So how did Oregon's GOP senator move from what some consider a friendship with the far-right wing to sponsoring legislation of both real and symbolic importance to sexual minorities?

"One person: Terry Bean," Glanville explains, referring to the Portland businessman and nationally known gay activist.

According to Glanville, Bean has developed a close friendship with Smith in recent years. The two men, who sometimes golf together,



Sen. Gordon Smith

eventually had conversations about hate crimes, Glanville says.

Last autumn, Smith even spoke to more than 200 people at the annual board meeting of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest gay and lesbian political organization in the country, of which Bean was one of the founders.

"Gordon Smith is a very compassionate, intelligent man," Glanville says. "He's made a political transition."

Glanville adds that things are not always black-and-white, though. There still are issues

on which HRC and Smith disagree. But HRC works "one step at a time," Glanville explains.

"We didn't even think it [the hate crimes legislation] would make it to the Senate this year," Glanville says, adding, "HRC lobbied hard."

The House version of the defense budget bill does not include Smith and Kennedy's hate crimes amendment, according to the National Stonewall Democratic Federation. A joint Armed Services Committee will determine the fate of both pieces of legislation when Senate and House members meet to work out the discrepancies between their two bills.

The Stonewall Federation, a group with more than 10,000 sexual minority members, expects the fight for final passage of this hate crimes legislation to be an "uphill battle because of the House Republican leadership."

If the legislation does pass, federal authorities would have more power to assist local officials in investigating and prosecuting hate crimes perpetrated against gay men and lesbians. In addition, if local officials decline to prosecute a hate crime, federal prosecutors would have the option of pursuing the case.

■ To contact SEN. GORDON SMITH's office, call (503) 326-3386 or (202) 224-3753.

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Kevin Jennings insists teachers can believe whatever they want. They even can be "anti-gay." But he makes it clear that educators don't have a right to compromise the ability of a young student to learn.

"If you can't check your prejudice at the door, then you are not really professional," Jennings says in the video *Teaching Respect of All*.

The video, which explores the ways in which a safe learning environment is critical to the success of all students, was produced by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

GLSEN is the largest national organization that brings together gay and straight teachers, parents, students and concerned citizens to end anti-gay bias in schools. Jennings is the Massachusetts-based group's executive director.

Kelley Weigel has been travelling around Oregon presenting the Safe Schools for All program and helping organize groups to take action in their school districts to help keep all students, including lesbian and gay students, safe. Her presentation includes a portion of the GLSEN video. She has visited Bend, Roseburg, the

## SALEM SCHOOLS SAFE?

ROP's Safe Schools for All presentation sparks concern among Salem PFLAG members—but will they act? by Jonathan Kipp

Dalles, Seaside and other rural towns around the state in her effort to initiate a discussion about children's safety in school.

Weigel, a member of Rural Organizing Project, a group promoting democracy and discouraging discrimination, recently presented the video to Salem's chapter of Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays at a meeting attended by more than 25 locals.

The goal of the Safe Schools for All program is to bring people together and to determine what needs to be done to accomplish changes, Weigel explains.

"Schools play a vital role," Weigel says about the public debate regarding sexual orientation. She feels the schools have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which to learn.

We must address any force that stands in the way of students achieving to the best of their ability, Jennings says. He believes teachers have an obligation, no matter their personal feelings, to support all students.

Local teachers who attended the meeting expressed frustration over the handling of sexual orientation issues in the Salem-Keizer Public Schools district.

"Teachers are afraid," one teacher said, referring to colleagues' hesitance about taking a stand or trying to educate students in an attempt to curb anti-gay attitudes. "Why aren't administrators backing teachers?"

A gay middle school teacher said he doesn't tolerate hateful language, including anti-gay speech, in his classroom. But, he said, he also

presents himself as heterosexual to students, staff and administrators—even placing photos of nieces and nephews on his classroom wall. He added that most teachers don't say or do as much as he does to discourage anti-gay remarks.

"There is a fine line between what you can and can't do," he said.

Most who watched the video—and were clearly concerned about the well-being of students perceived to be gay or lesbian—did not offer to get involved with approaching the school district. Some thought the group should wait to take action.

But Joseph Arnold, a state employee and gay man, is concerned about waiting too long for action.

"We can't afford to wait," he exclaimed.

■ If you are interested in the SAFE SCHOOLS FOR ALL program, contact Kelly Weigel at Rural Organizing Project, (503) 543-8417 or [office@rop.org](mailto:office@rop.org).

Contact GLSEN-OREGON at (503) 973-8489; P.O. Box 20565, Portland, OR 97294-0565; or [GLSENOR@aol.com](mailto:GLSENOR@aol.com).

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