

PROGRESS REPORT

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"Many people—and I am the evidence of it—have opened their hearts, opened their minds and are trying to understand more," Smith said. "And while I may not be, they may not be able to help you with every issue, we can help you with most every issue."

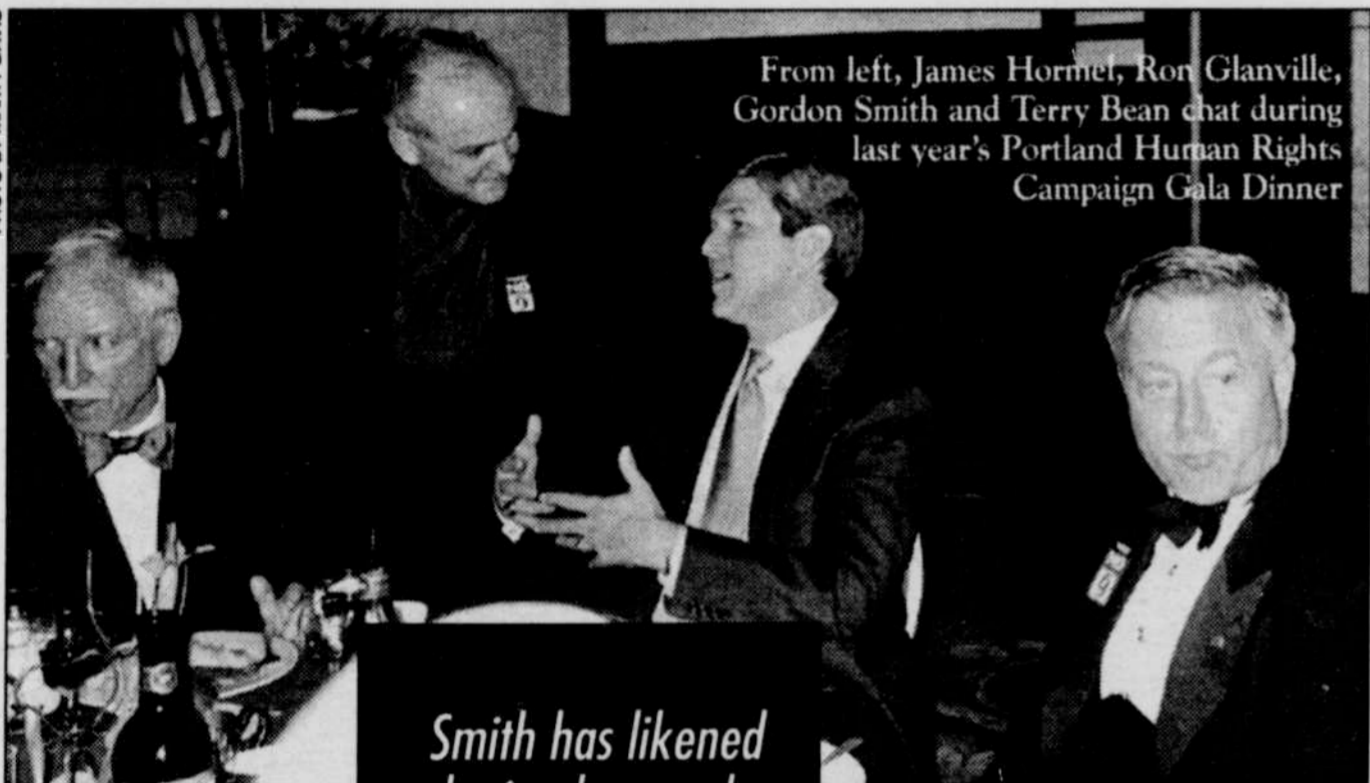
Bean, who has met with Smith regularly since the 1996 election, said he is "amazed" at how far the senator has come along. What started as a political relationship eventually turned into a good friendship, and they now are golf buddies.

arrange a significant meeting last April between then Texas Gov. George W. Bush and 12 gay Republicans.

About 300 people attended a breakfast Jan. 19 to kick off the coalition. Sheffo said Smith intended to attend but was unable to because of scheduling problems.

According to Francis, the coalition subscribes to a "don't ask, don't tell" type of philosophy. His group wants to make sexual orientation a "nonissue" in the Republican Party and to encourage candidates to reach out as never before to attract gay and lesbian voters.

Exit polling published by several news networks indicated Bush captured more than 1 million votes from self-identified gays, lesbians and bisexuals—25 percent of the gay vote. Those



From left, James Hormel, Ron Glanville, Gordon Smith and Terry Bean chat during last year's Portland Human Rights Campaign Gala Dinner

Smith has likened the intolerance he has experienced as a Mormon to that of sexual minorities. His spokesperson said he also deeply was affected by the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard.

"What I especially appreciated about his leadership and passion about these issues is that he took these positions in defiance of his own party's leadership," Bean said. "The man's got a good heart."

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"It probably can best be described as a slow evolution that has taken place over the past several years," Smith press secretary Joe Sheffo said. "He has slowly, as he put it to me, tried to open his heart and listen and learn from the gay community and keep an open mind and meet the gay community on its own terms."

Shepard's mother, Judy, will speak Feb. 11 during the opening program of the 2001 Oregon Hate Crimes Conference, during which Smith also is scheduled to make some remarks. Emily Gottfried, American Jewish Committee Portland Chapter executive director, said the senator was interested in attending from the beginning.

"I think we have to give him credit," she said. "He's really trying."

Gottfried said Smith has received a national award from her committee for his work on Jewish issues but has not previously worked with the Coalition Against Hate Crimes. "This conference will be a starting point, we hope."

Last month, Smith made major headway in fostering tolerance by serving on the host committee for the newly formed Republican Unity Coalition, a sort of "gay-straight alliance" for the GOP. The group is headed by Charles Francis, a gay D.C. public relations executive who helped

numbers contrasted sharply with a widely reported national survey conducted by the *Washington Blade* in October predicting he would receive only 2 percent of the gay vote.

Francis said he is confident that the new president will not discriminate despite a comment Bush made last February regarding appointments: "An openly known homosexual is somebody who probably wouldn't share my philosophy." Francis said the candidate personally promised him during their meeting that sexual orientation "would not be a factor" during the administration.


Smith was asked to serve on the host committee for the coalition because he had worked with its members before. "We reached out to specific representatives that we felt would represent all parts of the party," Francis said.

David M. Smith, HRC communications director and senior strategist, said the coalition is a good sign for the Republican Party. "I think any entity that works towards a better understanding of who gay people are...is something that should be encouraged and applauded."

David Smith wasn't surprised to learn Smith is working with the coalition. He said Oregon's junior senator was instrumental in helping get the votes necessary to pass the Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

"His leadership sent a message," David Smith said. "Obviously, he's not there on all our issues, but there is movement in the right direction with him."

David Smith cited former Vice President Al Gore as a good example of a politician who once was ignorant about gay rights and since has come around in a big way. He said he hopes Sen. Smith continues his progression.

"Almost every member of Congress...has evolved on this issue," David Smith said. "We need to find our common ground.... We definitely hope he goes further." 

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