

NORTHWESTnews

If you are fiscally and socially conservative and a member of the sexual minorities community, where do you party when it comes to politics?

Gay, lesbian, bi and trans people facing this dilemma are forced to choose between the lesser of two evils. Some think they have nowhere else to turn but to the Democrats despite their liberal leanings.

Others are working from within the Republican Party to convince fellow conservatives that there is nothing "special" about wanting the right to work and live without being harassed and ostracized. To many Democrats, however, this is tantamount to betrayal.

This is the vituperation that sexual minority Republicans wade against. And it is widespread.

Jerry Keene, a Dorchester Conference board member who twice narrowly lost races for the Oregon Legislature, says the basic philosophy of gay, lesbian, bi and trans Republicans is to recognize that the source of bigotry is frequently ignorance. They quietly are influencing senior political leadership by personalizing the issue—by showing them sexual minorities are just people.

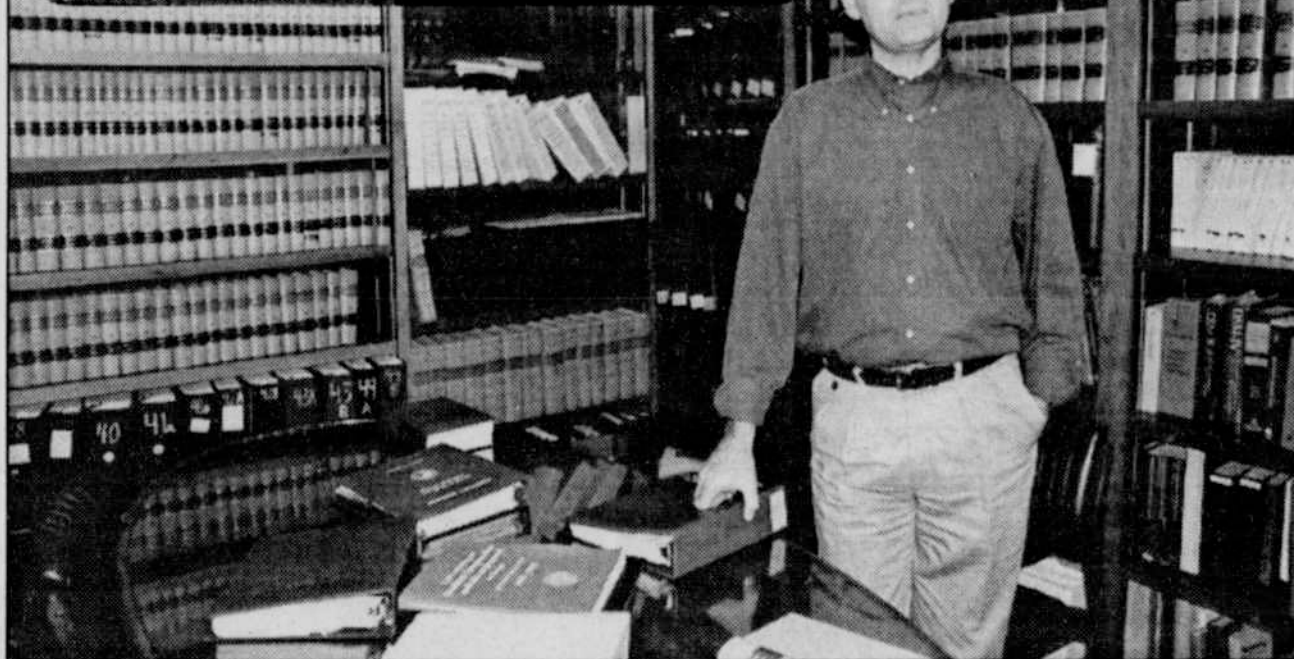
"I remember going to the Dorchester Conference dinner with my partner of 13 years," Keene says. "If my partner didn't show up to this dinner, fellow Republican political leaders would have asked, 'Where's your partner?' If you see yourself as a victim, you get treated like one."

When Keene came out during his candidacy, longtime Republican leader Larry Campbell

PINK ELEPHANT

Gay Republicans whisper for change

by Kelly Reilly



Jerry Keene sees a subtle shift happening in the Republican Party

thought about it and quipped, "Hell, it's probably an advantage." The rhetoric appears to be softening.

After Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson blamed the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on gay men and lesbians, among others, the outcry was intense. Even President Bush condemned the remarks.

Conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh said, "Suggestions of this kind are one of the reasons why all conservatives get tarred and feathered with this extremist, bigoted, racist, sexist, homophobic label or image that isn't true." Earlier this month, Robertson resigned as head of the Christian Coalition.

"There is a subtle shift away from anti-gay

HRC ENDORSES SMITH

Oregon Republican gets nod for co-sponsoring hate crimes legislation

by Jim Radosta

As expected, the Human Rights Campaign endorsed U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith of Oregon for reelection in 2002. He was the only Republican on the list.

HRC released its initial Senate endorsements Dec. 10. According to political director Winnie Stachelberg, the election will have a significant impact on legislation promoting equality for gay and lesbian U.S. citizens.

"We are proud to endorse these 15 terrific candidates, all of whom have been reliable advocates and allies on Capitol Hill," she said.



Gordon Smith

"We hope our support will help them, as they have helped us, to form a winning, bipartisan coalition in support of equality."

Smith received the endorsement for supporting a number of HRC's key legislative priorities; he co-sponsored the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act and a bill to extend Medicaid coverage to those living with HIV. The organization also says he fought hard for

James Hormel's nomination as ambassador to Luxembourg.

Most notably, according to HRC, Smith has

galvanized support within his own party for the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act. He is a lead sponsor of the hate crimes measure and each day enters incidents into the *Congressional Record* to highlight the problem.

"Gordon Smith has earned our support by working for fairness and speaking out against discrimination," Stachelberg said. "His record shows that he is a true friend and a dependable ally who has the courage to go against the grain when necessary and do what is right."

HRC also endorsed incumbent Democratic Sens. Max Baucus of Montana, Joseph R. Biden of Delaware, Jean Carnahan of Missouri, Max Cleland of Georgia, Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, Tom Harkin of Iowa, John F. Kerry of Massachusetts, Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana, Carl Levin of Michigan, Jack Reed of Rhode Island, Robert Torricelli of New Jersey and Paul Wellstone of Minnesota. In addition, the organization supports challengers Tom Strickland of Colorado and Gov. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire.

messages," Keene says. "If you listen to the words that are being sent out, you are not hearing this anymore."

The Log Cabin Republicans is the nation's largest gay and lesbian GOP organization, with more than 50 chapters across the country. It was run mostly as a grassroots political group until the mid-1990s, when it became a lobbying organization in Washington, D.C.

Some in Oregon think the Log Cabin Republicans has been hijacked. Lee Coleman served as executive director of the Oregon chapter until January.

"When they endorsed that all-purpose bigot [U.S. Attorney General John] Ashcroft, I had had enough," he says. "Ashcroft gave 'em 20 minutes [for a meeting] and said to them that the laws that are on the books will stay there, but there will be no new laws. They'll kiss any ass in Washington."

Keene steers a different course.

"These guys in Washington have done a great job working with the White House and Congress," he says. "They do a ton of behind-the-scenes work that nobody ever sees, and then people say that nothing happened. I don't think people realize what a significant course change the White House made when it decided to keep most if not all of the Clinton administration policies on gay rights."

But is maintaining the status quo a fair standard by which to judge an organization's success? "If gay Republicans were not out there making things happen, if there was only one party for us, the Democrats, things would be a lot worse, because control keeps switching back and forth," Keene says.

The Log Cabin Republicans mission is to steer the party of President Abraham Lincoln back toward its inclusive roots. Meanwhile, the GOP faces a huge image problem: Only the party extremists are vocal; everyone else prefers to whisper.

Those voices might grow louder as the political pendulum continues to oscillate slightly toward the right. With Bush reportedly garnering 25 percent of the gay vote in the agonizingly close 2000 presidential race, the evidence is clear and somewhat surprising.

The Log Cabin Republicans will tell you this actually is helping the cause. The way they see it, if more sexual minorities join the GOP, more people will become aware that character is what counts, not who you sleep with.

Winston Churchill once said, "Politics begins in the nursery." It's now apparent that it doesn't stop in the bedroom. [E]

KELLY REILLY is a professional journalist living in Portland. Her e-mail address is kelly_reilly@hotmail.com.

All you need is one good frame!

Brian Marki Fine Art & Framing
 2236 NE Broadway
 located in the Historic Irvington District
 503 • 249 • 5659 Hours: 10-6 Mon-Sat
 Visit our new site: www.brianmarki.com

Wishing You Peace, Pride & Prosperity in 2002

Millynn James
 Associate Broker, GRI • ABR, Accredited Buyer's Representative
503.330.HOME (4663) • 1.800.825.9948
www.equitygroup.com/millynn • Email: millynn@aol.com

RE/MAX Above the Crowd! RE/MAX equity group

Great Wine Buys
 1515 NE Broadway 287-2897

Full service neighborhood shop
 Tastings
 Case discounts

over 100 great wines
under \$10