

# just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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## COMMENTARY

# Truth in advertising

Smith opponents should consider a Plan B rather than a plan of attack

Whatever the production costs for U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith's "Matthew would have liked me" televised campaign ad, it's clear that the committee to re-elect got more than its money's worth as measured in the commerce of public attention.

Across the state, columns are being written, rallies are being scheduled, and letters are being e-mailed as opinions are hurled and sides are taken. All this over what is, in actuality, no more, no less than an ad promoting a fairly benign and simple message: Smith did indeed step up and promote federal hate crimes legislation. Yup, he did. That's the truth. It can't be argued.

Equally truthful is the fact that Smith picked an emotional subject matter with which to present his message. But is he "getting away with" something? No.

The ad refers to nothing other than his repeatedly documented work on hate crimes legislation. No lies here. No falsehoods.

The cause for the uproar from within our community lies in the feelings associated with the perceived exploitation of Matthew Shepard's murder rather than the facts of the message. It's emotional, it has a powerful impact, and it has rubbed raw and reopened the still-unhealed wounds of many angered, saddened and distressed by his tragic loss.

Yet, who better to judge Smith's sincerity than the mother of the victim? And who among us has the right to question her decision or values? We do not know her—we know only of her.

The ad is powerful also in that Smith potentially stands to lose as much as gain by damaging his traditionally conservative base of support as he reaches out to more moderate voters. Bold steps for a man who would not even take a public position on 2000's Oregon Citizens Alliance-sponsored Ballot Measure 9. How much backlash could he have faced for wearing a button or making a statement of support?

And it cannot be overlooked that the senator has yet to take a stand on any of the myriad additional inequalities facing the gay community—i.e., marriage, civil unions, domestic partner benefits and so on. Will he address these issues in the future? In its endorsement of Smith, the Human Rights Campaign obviously sees great promise and potential in him.

The TV commercial has brought forth a great many concerns and most decidedly raised the hackles of many in the political realm. This is a "good news, bad news" situation. The good news is that this is the first time ever—anywhere, apparently—that a campaign ad for a major office has positively addressed a topic relevant to gays. I find this a significant acknowledgment of the strength we have attained as a voting bloc.

**Now, reality check time. It's simply not that far-fetched of a notion that Smith will win re-election.**

The bad news is that this newly won recognition stands to be immediately tarnished as reactionary emotions take precedence over more carefully thought-out strategic planning and logic. It would be absurdly naive to put forth the notion that all gay men and lesbians should agree on a candidate, party or principle; however, it is to everyone's best interest to strive to minimize futile efforts and instead work to maximize our many strengths.

So here's how I view the current situation. There's no doubt that Bill Bradbury has a far better record of working for gay rights and has been a far better friend to our community. He's our man. No question.

At the same time, consider that KGW-TV released its latest poll Oct. 2 showing Smith leading 53 percent to 30 percent. With the Bradbury campaign immediately denouncing the accuracy of the statistics, two thoughts still come to mind. First, our energy, money, time and efforts are better served working for Bradbury than they are working against Smith.

Second, smart people usually will have a Plan A and a Plan B when working on really important matters—like who's going to be our junior senator for the next six years. Plan A would be that our unified efforts propel Bradbury to a strong finish and that the secretary of state wins the election.

Now, reality check time. It's simply not that far-fetched of a notion that Smith will win re-election.

So, what do we do? Do we send him back to Washington for six more years with the fresh image of gay men and lesbians rallying against him and mocking the efforts he has made to work on our behalf? What motivation would that provide for him to continue to further our cause?

A prudent Plan B would include thanking the senator for his work on hate crimes and acknowledging that he's shown "personal growth." We'll wish him well, then we'll direct all efforts toward the election of Bradbury—with our bridges still firmly in place behind us.

Wishy-washy? Too much sucking up for you? Not radical enough?

Reactionary anger has its place and can be powerful. But considering the long-term ramifications of this race, this is neither the place nor the time for short-sighted responses. Actions taken in emotional anger will come back and bite you in the butt.

We've been given this gift of acknowledgment and credibility for being a voting force and community of reckoning. Let's not immediately screw this up with infighting, divisiveness and misguided actions.

Let's stride ahead with Plan A and work to elect a known friend and ally—but let's also keep the door open for Plan B, just in case. Building bridges can be far more effective than burning them. ☐

## REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out... VOL. 9 No. 12, OCTOBER 1992



• During its annual convention in San Francisco, the American Bar Association voted to recognize gay men and lesbians officially and to support women's abortion rights.

• Just days after he was outed by the New York gay magazine *QW*, John Schlafley, the oldest son of anti-gay conservative leader Phyllis Schlafley, acknowledged he's gay in an interview with the *San Francisco Examiner*.

• A group called African Americans Voting No on 9 is forming in Portland. Members include Kathleen Saadat, state Rep. Avel Gordly, Joann Allen and the Rev. Paul A. Spurlock.

• Bonnie Tinker of the No on 9 Campaign and Scott Lively of the Oregon Citizens Alliance will debate Ballot Measure 9 on Oct. 5 at the Atkinson Memorial Church in Oregon City.

• Hate and censorship reared their cowardly side this past month at the Corvallis-Benton County Library. Four books about gay issues were vandalized to the point of destruction. They had been ripped, cut and mangled. One had been flushed in a toilet.

• About 200 gay and lesbian athletes gathered in Portland during Labor Day weekend for the Pride of Portland Athletic Association's second annual Sportsfest.

• KPDX-TV presented Cascade AIDS Project with a check for \$1,800 in September. Fox Broadcasting raised the money with a special national television concert and tribute to Freddie Mercury, founder of the rock group Queen, who died of AIDS nearly a year ago.

• The Portland Area Business Association, a new group for gay and lesbian professionals, has planned its first meeting. Lt. Col. Greta Cammermeyer, the highest-ranking officer to be discharged from the U.S. military because she's a lesbian, will address the group.

• An undercover police action against gay cruising in Laurelhurst Park resulted in few citations, much controversy and an internal investigation following a complaint filed by one of the victims.

• Gail Shibley plays host to a "john-a-thon" auction Oct. 4 to benefit the Council for Prostitution Alternatives.

• Ample Opportunity, a health organization for fat women, holds its 14th Ample Exchange, an over-size-18 clothing sale, Oct. 17.

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