

# Report Card

## Just Out polls lawmakers to gauge support in Salem

by Jack Turteltaub

**J**ust Out informally polled a range of lawmakers to gauge support in Salem. Some legislators indicated their support for the bills but declined our interview requests.

Just Out also contacted the office of state Rep. Karen Minnis, who sealed her negative reputation with the gay community when she single-handedly stopped a comprehensive bill from being voted on the floor of the House in 2005. She did not respond to our inquiry to affirm that she continues to oppose (or has changed her mind about) legalizing gay rights in Oregon.

### Sen. Kate Brown

Senate Majority Leader Kate Brown, D-Portland, whose district includes parts of the city's east side and Milwaukie, has been a strong supporter of queer rights for many years. "I've been working on this for 16 years; this is a lifetime fight," Brown said.

She's cautiously optimistic. "I'm certainly hopeful that this will be the year. But SB 2 and HB 2007 will only pass because of community support."

She urges constituents to stay involved. "I think the bills are fair. I think there is a critical mass here, [but] it is absolutely critical that the people who care about these bills stay involved."

She points out that both bills are "finely tuned." A strong religious exemption is included to protect freedoms guaranteed in the Oregon and U.S. Constitutions.

If these bills become law, Brown said, "I would feel humbled and grateful." The bisexual lawmaker attributes many factors to her hopeful disposition. "I think the dynamic changed with the leadership going Democratic."

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski also made fairness and equality an issue in his campaign, and there has been bipartisan support. "Ben Westlund [a Republican-turned-Democrat from Tumalo] and Frank Morse [R-Albany] have taken leadership roles."

### Rep. Diane Rosenbaum

In the House, Rep. Diane Rosenbaum, D-Portland, represents a district that overlaps parts of Southeast and Northeast Portland. She is serving her fifth term.

Rosenbaum is the speaker pro tempore. As chairwoman of the House Ethics, Elections and Rules Committee, she introduced HB 2007 based on the

recommendations of the governor's Task Force on Equality. She has also been a strong, consistent supporter of gay rights for her urban district.

Rosenbaum stated: "I have spent my political life, even before I was an elected official, fighting for LGBT rights. I worked to defeat Measure 36 and sat on the campaigns to defeat all the [Oregon Citizens Alliance] ballot measures."

How important are these bills to Rosenbaum? She responded, "Anti-discrimination and civil union legislation will be a top priority for me" in the 2007 session.

Rosenbaum vividly remembered the 2005 battle over SB 1000. "My colleagues and I in the House of Representatives attempted every parliamentary option available to have [the bill] brought to the House floor for a vote." She noted, "In this legislative session, Speaker Jeff Merkley [D-Portland] has been openly supportive of civil unions and anti-discrimination for GLBT Oregonians."

She is hopeful about the bills' chances. "The current makeup of the Legislature affords us the opportunity to make this a reality."

Rosenbaum is unwavering, regardless of threats of backlash. "No political risk would be worth abandoning such an important cause as equality. While I doubt that 100 percent of my constituents will agree with my support for civil unions and anti-discrimination, I am lucky to represent a district in which my support is shared by a majority of my constituents."

### Rep. Peter Buckley

Rep. Peter Buckley, D-Ashland, responded to our inquiries, saying he strongly supports the measures. Buckley's district includes Talent and Phoenix.

Buckley said, if the bills pass, "it will be a great day for our state. Civil rights are civil rights. There is no right that I enjoy as a straight male that a gay male, a lesbian or anyone else should not be able to enjoy." The lawmaker added, "I've been a consistent supporter of gay rights as long as I can remember."

Buckley believes his constituency will back him up, too. "This will come as no surprise to the people in my district. I was very clear on my support during my campaign for the Legislature in 2004."

### Rep. Carolyn Tomei

Rep. Carolyn Tomei, D-Milwaukie, represents a mixed urban and suburban district that overlaps parts

of Multnomah and Clackamas counties. She is serving her third term in the House.

Tomei said that she believes strongly in separation of church and state and that religious extremists have, in the past, blocked the rights due to nonheterosexual couples. She added, "Civil rights and responsibilities should not be dictated by religious beliefs, but rather by civil law."

Tomei also acknowledges legitimate religious concerns, noting, "Many of the people who voted against gay marriage did so because they favored civil unions, which don't carry the same religious connotations." She believes SB 1000 would've passed in 2005 if a vote had been allowed on the House floor.

Tomei's personal position is unequivocal. She supports both bills. "Gay and lesbian families should have the same rights as any heterosexual families. They should also carry the same responsibilities."

### Rep. Tina Kotek

Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland, a member of the queer community, is dealing with her first term and the recent death of her mother. She was elected in 2006 to her House seat representing parts of North and Northeast Portland. She has had to be a quick study in legislative folkways and procedures, but her work as a legislative advocate has given her some advanced preparation for the job.

Kotek shared her perspective on the bills, stating that she feels both are enjoying lots of support. "I think this may be the year. The world is changing. Democrats in Oregon campaigned on fairness and equality." She's pleased that the session is off to a great start. "I feel good about our priorities."

Kotek also appreciates how carefully the bills are written. She notes that HB 2007 is "a response to the post-Measure 36 world. It is a completely different statute than the marriage statute." She said, "The next step will be equal protection under the law."

Kotek feels that SB 2 is also a strong bill and contains provisions for specific protections, such as discrimination against students. Kotek believes passage of the measures would help "hundreds of



House Democrats gather for a huddle on the House floor.

same-sex couples in my district."

Kotek is eager to point out the importance of the bills to the economy and business. By increasing fairness and equality, Oregon would be a better place to live and work if the bills pass. As a consequence, more people will want to live and raise families here. Businesses may choose to locate here to take advantage of the benefits conferred to their sexual minority employees.

### Rep. Brad Witt

Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, has been a sawmill worker and union organizer as well as a lobbyist for 24 years. He has been secretary-treasurer of the Oregon American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations and works for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 555.

Witt strongly supports equality for Oregon's gay citizens. "I was a supporter of SB 1000 and have always been a supporter of equal rights. Those of us in organized labor have long believed that the measure of a person is the work that they perform."

Witt believes civil unions are important "so that society recognizes the importance of all families and so that families may enjoy the full legal protection offered under Oregon law." To those who oppose equality for sexual minorities, he said, "Oregonians traditionally have a high level of intolerance for intolerance."

Witt doesn't take this fight for granted. For both bills to pass, he says, "The chances would be significantly improved by a grassroots lobbying effort." jo

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