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From the Left

Does Steve Novick speak for Oregon?

by Jaymee R. Cuti



Steve Novick thinks voters need something different in the U.S. Senate. He hopes to be the change.

U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., is vulnerable. That's the message the Oregon Democrats have been trying to communicate since, well, since Steve Novick summed it up in the Jan. 31 *Willamette Week* article "If I Ran."

It's been echoed on the blogosphere, particularly by devotees of Blue Oregon, Loaded Orygun and the national site Daily Kos. Buzz has only increased since Novick announced his candidacy for Smith's U.S. Senate seat April 18.

Yet Novick—a political operative who is so smart, all the plasticine in the *Body Worlds 3* exhibit couldn't contain his brain—has yet to be embraced by a mainstream press still waiting for some better-known Democrat to step forward.

That wait might end July 31, when Oregon House Speaker Jeff Merkley, D-Portland, will reportedly announce whether he will run. Others on the short list of candidates—including liberal U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio of Eugene, state Sen. Kate Brown of Portland and former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber—have declined.

Meanwhile, say insiders, Novick's campaign is building credibility, especially since announcing that the candidate has raised more than \$190,000 in the second quarter.

While his record of demonstrated support for the queer community is somewhat sparse (he has attended some galas, has asked friends for money to support campaigns protecting gay rights and rocks a "Two Men, Two Women, What's the Problem?" bumper sticker), Novick talks the gay rights talk in a common-sense way—that gay rights are basic rights.

Novick stands 4 feet 9 inches tall. He was born without fibulas and sports a hook for a left hand, although he says he has never personally experienced discrimination.

The New Jersey native moved to Cottage Grove when he was 10 years old. He's worked as an attorney with the environmental division of the U.S. Justice Department, where he fought polluters who violated the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, and served as lead counsel on the notorious Love Canal pollution case in 1995.

In Oregon, Novick took on Bill Sizemore's Measure 91, which proposed a 20 percent state budget cut to schools, health care and public safety. In 1999, he became a critic of the Oregon Lottery's practice of favoring retailers over schools and instigated a successful lawsuit against the institution.

Despite the watchdog role Novick has taken on, he's no outsider in Oregon politics. He works as the senior project manager for Pyramid Communications, a consulting firm working primarily with nonprofit organizations. He was policy director for Tom Bruggere's 1996 Senate campaign and served as chief of staff to the Oregon Senate Democrats from 1997 to 1999.

Gordon Smith is vulnerable. The Oregon Democrats have made that exhaustively clear. But how would the "fighter with a hard left hook" represent Oregonians in the U.S. Senate? Read on to see if Steve Novick speaks for you.