

George Speaks

Excerpts from March 21 interview with Newberg senator

Stephen Marc Beaudoin: Why are you sponsoring this repeal initiative?

Gary George: I've had people approach me for special rights for homosexuals, and I don't believe anyone should have special rights. I've had members of the gay community come in and ask, and I'll say, "I'm sorry, I don't give anyone special rights."

SMB: What sort of special rights do you feel that the Oregon Equality Act offers?

GG: First off, I thought that was a fabrication of definition, in the sense that you gave special rights, it picks out another group, a lifestyle group, and says hmm, you have all these protections.... [If] that person's gay, so what? Forget it, ignore it, as long as he's not making advances on you, which is against the law, he's fine. The main thing that bothered us with the whole bill was the fact that, here we go again, adding one more class of people that need to have special rights.

SMB: Can you give an example?

GG: If I discriminate in favor of you, it automatically requires I discriminate against someone else. I was hoping with your generation, we can stop calling each other "Asian American" or "Latino American."

There's one talk show host, and he has really severe, hard feelings against affirmative action. Because of the race that he is, I believe he's Italian, he was discriminated against because he's not black. I have dear, dear friends in the Legislature who are black, but sometimes I really get tired of hearing about their color.

SMB: What if an employee is fired because of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity? Isn't the Oregon Equality Act in place to guard against such discrimination?

GG: As an employer, I don't want to hear about it. This workplace is for work purposes. My advice to the gay community is shut up, just don't talk about it. If you walk around talking about what you do in the bedroom, you should be on the pervert channel. Do you believe you have a right to be homosexual? Then you believe I have the right to think it's a bad idea.

SMB: What is your reaction to the recent murders of out gay youth in Florida and California?

GG: Obviously, murder is murder; there's no excuse for that. Here's what I'm saying: I think we're seeing a backlash; in other words, if you push me too hard, don't be surprised if I react. Gays will tend to react violently if people are oppressive toward them. If gays are oppressive toward straights, then you'll see a violent backlash. You're going to have a point where these groups develop and say, "I'm tired of these special privileges."

SMB: Are you suggesting that gays, by virtue of being out and open, are inciting these types of violent reactions?

GG: You have to recognize for every action there's a reaction...we're obviously not going to tolerate anyone who beats up any other person.

If you do feel like you've been discriminated against as a gay, you have hard feelings. I remember when I was heavy and wore glasses as a child and I was picked on. We all know the gay person that nobody notices—I think that is where we need to head. Everybody knows where the line is, so when I see I'm offending someone, I have to back away from that. We have to adjust our behavior so as to not be offensive. If you push anyone too hard, they will react.

My plea to the gay community would be, hey, *mature*. We have brilliant, brilliant people within the gay community.

SMB: Who are some of those brilliant gay people?

GG: [Laughs] We know a bunch of them; they're some of the brightest and wealthiest people in the country. I go back to the '50s and '60s. We had friends that were quote homosexual, and they kept to themselves.

SMB: Who are some of those brilliant gay people you referenced a moment ago?

GG: [Bisexual former legislator and secretary of state candidate] Kate Brown, when Kate was practicing that lifestyle. She's one of the most brilliant people I know. I harken back to a conversation I had years ago with Kate Brown. She said you can do it all [gain the requisite rights for same-sex couples] with a contract, and I said OK what's that all about.

SMB: You talk about instances of "reverse discrimination" and wanting to "level the playing field." As a legislator, how have you addressed this?

GG: Maybe it is time for us to go through the law and find every point of discrimination and just eliminate it.... Do carpenters [for example] deserve a special privilege over someone else? There are a lot of things in Oregon law highly discriminatory outside of the sexual question.... It gets down to this: Let's just end any kind of preferential treatment for any group. If I had my way, we would start backing out of discrimination laws.

SMB: What is your relationship with [anti-gay former state Sen.] Marilyn Shannon?

GG: I've known Marilyn for years.... She was an encourager of my campaign. We have common friends who said: "You know what? Something needs to be done about this, and it needs to be aired in public." Marilyn has handled campaigns since she's been out of Legislature, [and] we respect her abilities.

SMB: What do you think is the likelihood of these repeal initiatives to pass?

GG: We have no idea.... For the last five years there's been a systematic assault on the right of the people to make law. What we've seen the Legislature doing is the idea that we're continuing to tell people they don't have the right to speak on initiatives. You have every right to participate in this process, and so do I. This is the right of the people to speak. The Legislature right now is heading in the direction of professional politicians. 10

With George Out, Who's In?

District 12 race heats up
by Stephen Marc Beaudoin

Gary George's end-of-term exit from the Oregon Senate is imminent, but it signals yet another beginning: a battle for the seat he's about to leave vacant.

In the Republican-held grip of District 12, which includes large swaths of Yamhill, Polk and Benton counties, that means it's an uphill fight for Democrat Kevin Nortness, a Willamina city commissioner. In a surprise 11th-hour filing challenge to Rep. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, long considered the sole candidate for the seat,

Nortness has thrown his hat into the contest.

A self-employed litigation consultant and sometime pop musician, Nortness said he would work to attract new industries to the poorest parts of the district. He would also offer something his opponent can't: protection of equal rights for all of his constituents, sexual minorities included.

"The repeal of the Oregon Equality Act is a terrible idea, and I'm opposed as a citizen and a voter," he said. When asked for reaction to George's much-discussed *Just Out* interview, Nortness characterized the senator's comments

as "complete horseshit.... I mean, good Lord."

Boquist, meanwhile, did not respond to repeated e-mail and telephone requests from *Just Out* for comment on his candidacy. But according to the Oregon Family Council Voter's Guide, his record on equal rights for sexual minorities would seem to place him squarely in line with George's stated ideology: "I don't believe in special rights for homosexuals."

Nortness, for his part, is gearing up for a real showdown with Boquist. "I'll give it my very best shot and everything I can," he said. "Every vote that I get will be well-earned." 10

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