

outstanding

Outstanding Person of the Year: Portland Mayor-elect Sam Adams

by Stephen Marc Beaudoin

The glass closet finally burst into a thousand pieces when openly gay City Commissioner Sam Adams was elected mayor of Portland with 59 percent of the vote in the May primary election. Because of this august achievement and our belief in his wisdom, vision and courage as the first openly gay mayor of a major U.S. city, *Just Out* is pleased to honor him as our inaugural Outstanding Person of the Year.

At the same time that we offer up this scepter and crown to Adams, we also hand him a bottle of aspirin. As mayor, Adams will face massive city-specific challenges in the months and years ahead: a 43 percent dropout rate among high schoolers in the Portland Public Schools district; a litany of excessive force charges against the Portland Police Bureau; a lack of affordable housing and living-wage jobs that have vexed this city for at least a generation; and the question of how to grow Portland's economy and population without sacrificing the small-town, DIY charm that attracts the so-called creative class.

Adams will also face heightened scrutiny from the sexual minorities community. It would be easy to elevate him to queer martyrdom before he even takes office in January. That would be a mistake. Yes, we're grinning with pride about Adams' election to office and his banner year as a city commissioner, but we also hope Portland queers continue to challenge, question and debate with him once he's in the driver's seat. If there's one character flaw that might prove fatal to Adams as mayor, it's

his sprawling ambition. Adams never met an idea he didn't like, and he needs the queer community to help him stay on track.

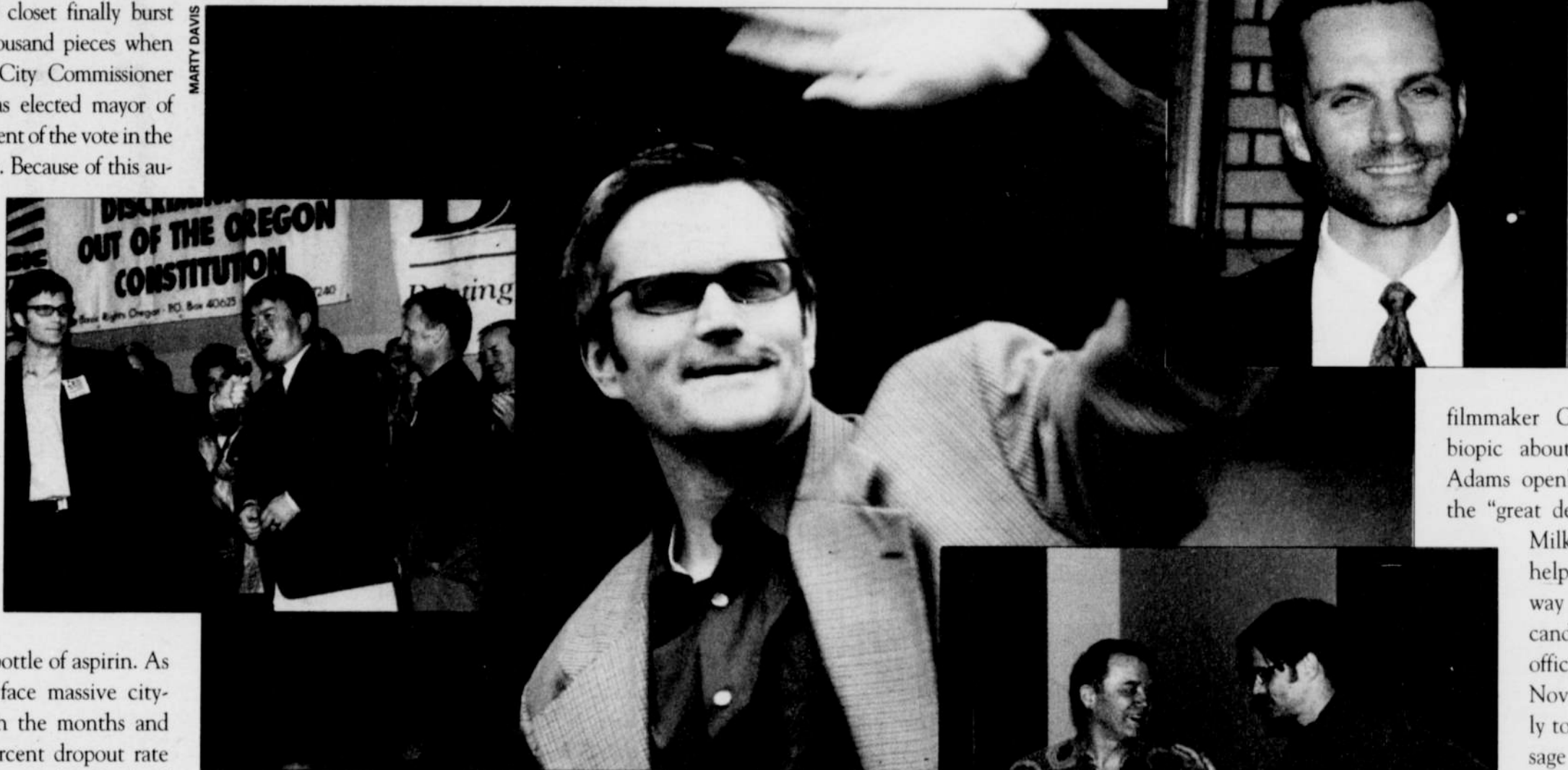
As mayor of Portland, what will his priorities be? Adams rattles off "reducing [the] high school dropout rate, reducing over 30 percent of Portlanders who are unemployed or on a poverty wage, and bringing Portland to a new level of sustainable practices" as some of his top places to press forward. He is also taking the unusual step of retaining his arts commissioner role as mayor; creative people across the city should be dancing in the streets about this. Adams has already embarked on an ambitious Creative Capacity Initiative that seeks to identify and open new funding streams for folks in the creative sector, from musicians

to marketing executives. He plans to unveil the next stage of this initiative in January.

And about that whole gay thing—Adams has not only been open about his sexual orientation for the better part of a decade, he's worked in smart and innovative ways to advance causes important to queers: He led the founding of Portland's facility for the sexual minorities community, Q Center, and he helped pass an ordinance prohibiting the city from contracting with anti-gay companies. And his mayoral staff, so far anyway, is stuffed with fabulous openly gay people like Shoshanah

a signature Milk rallying cry for his own purposes: "My name is Sam Adams!" he bellowed to wild applause. "And I'm here to recruit you!" **JO**

Celebrate the inauguration of Sam Adams during the MAYOR'S BALL Jan. 31, 2009, at The Nines Hotel, 525 S.W. Morrison St. Tickets will be available in early January; proceeds benefit Q Center and Creative Advocacy Network, an arm of the Creative Capacity Initiative. For details visit www.commissionersam.com.



Snapshots of Sam Adams through the years: as chief of staff to Mayor Vera Katz, as City Commissioner and now as Stumptown's mayor-elect.

Oppenheim, Cevero Gonzales and Wade Nkrumah.

This month Adams attended the red carpet world premiere of Portland

filmmaker Gus Van Sant's biopic about Harvey Milk. Adams openly acknowledges the "great debt" he owes to

Milk's work, which helped "pave the way for viable gay candidates to elected office." And at the Nov. 15 Portland rally to protest the passage of California's Proposition 8, Adams himself raised the spectre of Milk's extraordinary legacy when he grabbed a bullhorn, took the stage to roaring crowds and updated

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