

SECRETARY OF STATE KATE BROWN

Oregon's Secretary of State, Kate Brown, is the highest-ranking openly bi-sexual person holding an elected office in the United States. She faces a strong Republican opponent in her re-election bid in November.

Twenty years of yoga will tone anyone's biceps. Add wit, feminist insight, deep legislative experience, and a passion for concrete results, and you'll start sketching Oregon Secretary of State, Kate Brown.

In Oregon, the Secretary of State serves effectively as Lieutenant Governor, and oversees seven divisions, including Archives, Audits, Corporations, and Elections. Asked if her title means she's Oregon's mini-Hillary, Brown laughs, "only in my dreams!" It's a good dream, though.

In her first term, Brown has focused attention on fiscal and performance auditing for State agencies — seeking "alligators, not mosquitoes", in her terms — with significant results: for every dollar her office spent on auditing in 2008, Oregon brought back eight; for every auditing dollar spent in 2010, Oregon brought back sixty-four. One clear example of the results is "an audit of the Department of Revenue collection practices, which identified 66,000 Oregonians who were paying Federal, but not State, income taxes, amounting to one hundred million dollars" in lost revenue for Oregon. "That's a lot of teachers."

But, the audits Brown directs are not always fiscal. "I'm a recovering lawyer who used to represent children and parents in the foster care system." This experience gave her direct insight into the hard realities of unemployment, poverty, addiction, and mental illness which impact thousands of Oregon families every single day. "We just completed an audit of this system, specifically looking at what the agency can do to be more successful at reunifying children with their parents safely. We made some very specific recommendations, and I'm going to partner with the legislature to make sure they are implemented."

Brown has also championed streamlined business registration and compliance processes in the Corporations division, including major technology improvements (business.oregon.gov), now used by two-thirds of Oregon businesses, through the Secretary of State's new Business Oregon program. Her office is also among the first nationwide to roll out task-focused mobile phone and tablet tools to help make doing business easier in Oregon. Earlier in her career, she played a key legislative role helping roll out Oregon's highly transparent election information and campaign finance reporting system (oregonvotes.org). This is a critical tool given Oregon's virtually unlimited campaign spending laws. But, some of her proudest moments to date arrived five years ago when, standing on thirty-two years of collective LGBT political shoulders, she led a Democratic majority in Salem to pass the Oregon Equality and Family Fairness Acts of 2007, ensuring fair treatment and legal equality for LGBT Oregonians and our relationships.

Since coming out in 1995 as openly bisexual, Kate Brown has helped carry Salem for Oregon's LGBT communities, while advocating for all Oregon families, including her own (she and her husband, Dan, have two children). She is the highest ranking openly bisexual elected official in the United States. In 1991, she was appointed to an open legislative seat, subsequently elected, and served for sixteen years in the House and then Senate, including serving as Senate Democratic Leader from 2004 to 2007. In 2008, she won the race to become Oregon's Secretary of State.

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