



IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT US

A delegate to the Democratic National Convention, he says we aren't single issue people. What will follow the fight for equality?

Possibly the most interesting transition in Cris Land's life arcs from his roots in radical feminist anti-nuclear activism, through the Portland Lesbian Avengers, to his 2012 election as a Congressional District delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

Yes, there were other transitions along the way. But, it's more interesting to hear from Cris what happens when years of work in radical education and advocacy meet the stark realities of funding, budget, and enforceable legislation. This leads him to talk about "the merge" where by simply "bringing himself into the room" he is educating, and advocating, while also helping elect and advise those whose legislative actions drive million, and even billion, dollar budget decisions.

It wasn't always like this. He met his partner, Hillary Smith — a founder of the Portland Lesbian Avengers — at a downtown Portland street march. He'd worked for many years at OHSU, where he became the first employee to transition from female to male. Now, health care support for gender transition is clearly defined OHSU policy.

After moving to Columbia County, Cris made a conscious decision to become active in his local community. He recalls choosing to run for an open position on the local Port Commission. While discussing his plan with a known "progressive" member of this commission, he outed himself as trans, and was promptly advised to never mention this again to anyone in Columbia County politics. Yet, within a few years he was elected to serve as Chair of the Columbia County Democratic Party.

"It's not hard to do things first as an out trans person, now." But, he is clear how little that matters. What matters is for things to become normal. So he is hesitant to focus on his gender, focusing instead on broader concerns.

He's happy to talk about Democratic Party activism, stating he has never had a bad experience with party activists. More importantly, he says he has never once felt he was the subject of tokenism. Instead, he's found Democrats to be genuinely interested to learn about the lives of LGBT-people, and to do the work needed to achieve legal equality.

When asked about his many friends still active in radical politics, he says, "I get crap from both sides. I have friends who are fed up that the two parties are not different enough. Yet in my county party I get crap for not being radical enough, because, as it turns out, I'm not".

Cris believes that activists who get involved in organized political parties have been around long enough to see that it actually matters who sits in office. "It really does matter who is representing us in Salem and D.C. For me, this was an eye-opener." If we have Republicans dealing with Oregon's budget, the outcomes look very different than they are under Kitzhaber. If we had McCain or Romney in office, America would look very different than it does under President Obama, particularly for

It really does matter who
is representing us in Salem
and D.C. For me, this was
an eye-opener.

LGBT people, because elected officials write the laws and set the budgets that determine what actually happens, once the noise fades away.

What interests Cris most, though, is what happens once we achieve LGBT equality, because, "we are not single issue people." How do we feel, as a community, about economic justice, racial justice, gun control, and labor rights?

It's not all about us. LGBT people choose to come out because, on some level, we want to be fully engaged in the larger community as who we truly are. Now that we're starting to get there, we can begin wondering what's next. §

Leo Schuman is Just Out's political writer. Leo is a former lawyer and self-admitted political junkie. Reach him at Leo@JustOut.com