

For organizations like Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), which promotes gay rights, bipartisan support from Democrats and Republicans like Morse is key. Personal stories like his make all the difference when it comes to breaking through to people who oppose equal rights for gays. "Fundamentally it's about personal connections," said BRO Communications Director Rebekah Kassell. "It might be about hearing a story that's compelling, hearing that a family member is gay."

Morse testified before the Senate in support of SB 1000, shared his family story, and urged the Senate to move to-

wards a policy of acceptance. The bill passed in the Senate, but was later defeated in the House.

"How do we recognize people in long-term relationships?" asks Morse. "That's the question before the Legislature, and we failed to answer it."

Now Morse's reputation with his conservative constituents remains in question. Morse recently announced plans to run for re-election after an independent survey (that he paid for) of District 8 vot-

ers showed that 46 percent of respondents held a favorable image of Morse, while 14 percent held an unfavorable image.

Corvallis was the first city in the state to legalize civil unions for homosexuals but Albany is far more conservative.

Other socially liberal Republicans are watching Morse closely. State Sen. Ben Westlund (R-Bend) also co-sponsored SB 1000 and will use Morse's race as a barometer for his campaign. "Morse is in

a more vulnerable position because he's newer," said Westlund's aide, Stacy Dycus. "Westlund has served as a representative for three terms so he has some name recognition."

But Atkinson is confident that Morse will be reelected if he runs. After the SB 1000 vote was complete in the Senate, "people for and against came up and shook his hand, because he was doing it based on principal and integrity," Atkinson said. ■

**'How do we recognize people in long-term relationships?
That's the question before the Legislature, and we failed to answer it.'**

— Oregon State Sen. Frank Morse

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