

Get Out of the Bathroom, Jim

Funny stuff from our former mayor

Bigots are so funny. When they run for public office, they're downright hilarious.

Wife and I would've had a good laugh at last week's Basic Rights Eugene-Springfield candidate forum if it weren't for etiquette. We took our seats in the public library meeting room, glad to see a decent turnout of our lesbian/gay/bi/trans/queer friends and allies – and free snacks. Who would've guessed we were in for a comedy show? On the wall hung a blue and white "Basic Fairness, Basic Rights" banner, which turned out to be a good idea because at least one of the candidates seriously needed a cheat sheet.



Our designated panelists looked calm and dignified (and adorable). They questioned incumbent and wannabe elected officials about issues of concern to the LGBTQ community. The audience listened courteously, not letting out so much as a giggle.

Jim Torrey's act was priceless. He kept gesturing toward the banner and emphasizing how much he stands for basic fairness and basic rights, while at the same time confirming his opposition to a ban on discrimination based on gender identity. "I have always been in favor of and supported basic rights," said the man who is, in fact, responsible for excluding transgender and gender variant people from the city's human rights ordinance. What a contortionist. Is he running for mayor or auditioning for Cirque du Soleil?

Ya gotta give the guy credit, though. He showed up to address an audience that wasn't exactly his peeps – a point about which he managed to stick his foot in his mouth. "I'm prepared to go anywhere, anytime to talk to people about their concerns," he said. "Even when anarchists tried to take over the State of the City address, I convinced them to calm down so we could meet later." It's a wonder we weren't slapping our knees and rolling in the aisles.

Torrey went straight (ahem) to the bathroom argument. "Tell me how our young people and our dressing rooms would be protected," he asked, not waiting for anyone to tell him because, of course, as mayor, he heard that kind of testimony up the yin-yang. He's sure tenacious about his idea that protecting trans people from discrimination leads to predators in public restrooms – all the while emphasizing that he stands for basic fairness and basic rights. Words streamed out both sides of his mouth like drool from an excited bull dog.

Torrey said that unless you require people to show medical documentation of their gender, "What's to stop some young man in a high school from coming to school one day, and in his mind, his perception is today he thinks he's more female-oriented than male?" Huh? Like that happens. Like people who don't conform to gender norms aren't the ones humiliated and beaten and killed for not fitting in. But let's not sully our political positions with facts.

Torrey was on a roll. The guy campaigning with a purported \$250,000 war chest against your mayor said banning anti-trans discrimination puts "people" (not the vulnerable ones, mind you) at risk. Wedging his foot deeper into his pie hole, Torrey expounded on risk. "Now, we had a situation in Springfield, and we didn't know what that young man was going to do, and if we had known it ... well, we can't know everything." Did Jim Torrey just equate trans people with Kip Kinkel?

What comedic timing.

Thank goodness Torrey's stand is contradicted by state statute.

Meanwhile, our current mayor, the Honorable Kitty Piercy, continues speaking out for inclusion and respect. "I want our community to be a welcoming one and one that feels safe for everyone," Mayor Piercy told the forum audience. Anyone not down with that?

Surely Torrey's capable of expanding his awareness. If he'd get his mind out of the bathroom and consider the reality of transgender experience, he might live up to his self-perception as a supporter of basic fairness and basic rights. The information is out there. He doesn't get it now, but I'd like to think he could. People change. Probably not in time for the May primary, though.

Sally Sheklow has been a part of the Eugene community since 1972 and is a member of the WYMPROV! comedy troupe. Her column, which began at EW in 1999, also runs in several other newspapers and magazines around the country and Down Under.

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