



A Matter of Opinion: The *Oregonian* Editorial Board and Sam Adams Epilogue

Unanimity was relatively rare in *Oregonian* editorial board meetings, but it did not take long for the entire board to reach agreement that the paper should call for Portland Mayor Sam Adams to resign. In his meeting with the board on January 20, 2009, Adams had repeatedly insisted that he had not begun a sexual relationship with then-legislative intern Beau Breedlove until the young man had turned 18, Oregon's legal age of consent. But the legality of the relationship was not the main issue in board members' minds as they gathered after their discussion with Adams. Board members agreed that Adams' election had been based on a lie, and that as such his mayoralty was illegitimate.

Editorial Page Editor Bob Caldwell penned the editorial himself on behalf of the entire board. He began:

You'd think, listening to Portland Mayor Sam Adams' apologies for his poor judgment in having sex with a teenager, that the whole thing was a passing mistake. A misjudgment, maybe, covered up by a pro forma lie in the heat of a campaign... He suggested that Portlanders need to weigh this behavioral blip against his two decades of public service and good judgment. We don't think it's as easy as all that.¹

Caldwell cited Adams' "all-out public relations assault" against Robert Ball, Adams' one-time mayoral rival, who had first brought to light rumors about Adams' relationship with Breedlove well before the 2008 election. He also cited Adams' admission that he had instructed Breedlove to lie on his behalf. He then continued:

Portlanders are left with a mayor whose election was built on a lie. Nobody knows how the election might have turned out if Adams' conscience had gotten the best of him in a more timely way. But he

¹ Bob Caldwell, "Sam Adams and his fight with the truth," *Oregonian*, January 21, 2009, http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/01/sam_adams_and_his_fight_with_t.html.

preferred not to put it to the test. Nobody—not even the mayor—knows if his sense of right and wrong will fail him again, but he is asking us to give him another chance. In his Tuesday news conference Adams responded to one question this way: “If it’s no longer in the city’s best interest for me to stay on, I will resign.” He’s already said he doesn’t plan to quit, but we submit that it is not in the city’s interest to have a mayor who cannot vouch for his own character under fire. He should resign.²

The editorial, “Sam Adams and his fight with the truth,” came out January 21, 2009, the day after Adams’ meeting with the editorial board and two days after he admitted the affair to Portland alternative weekly *Willamette Week*. Several other publications, including Portland’s leading gay and lesbian newspaper *Just Out*, also called for Adams’ resignation. Adams did not resign.

² Bob Caldwell, “Sam Adams and his fight with the truth.”