



## 200 trans rights advocates lobby Congress

Visitors from 29 states ask lawmakers to oppose gay-only ENDA

By LOU CHIBBARO JR., Washington Blade | Apr 16, 2:12 PM

Nearly 200 transgender rights activists and their supporters descended on Washington from 29 states this week to urge Congress to support legislation aimed at ending discrimination and violence.

Participants in a March 14 lobby day organized by the Washington-based National Center for Transgender Equality said they hoped to put aside the sharp disagreements that surfaced last year over a decision by House Democratic leaders to remove transgender protections from the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

"Our lobbying will educate lawmakers about our lives, who we are and why we are working hard to end discrimination against all people but especially people who face from discrimination because of their gender identity," said Mara Keisling, the Center's executive director.

In a reception Monday night at the National Press Club, the group presented awards to Reps. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) and Rush Holt (D-N.J.) for their decision to vote against a gay-only version of ENDA last year. Unlike many conservative lawmakers who were opposed to the bill altogether, Nadler, Holt and five others opposed it because it lacked a trans provision.

Nadler and Holt told the gathering they believed it was a mistake to take out the trans protection provisions of the bill, in part, because President Bush was expected to veto any version of the bill in 2007 or 2008 and transgender people should not be left out of the legislation on principle of fairness.

"Beware of the tranquilizing drug of gradualism," Holt said, in a reference to House Democratic leaders and some gay activists who said it was preferable to pass a more limited version of the bill now, with the goal of adding trans protections later.

In addition to pushing for a trans-inclusive version of ENDA, the transgender activists said they called on the Senate to pass a hate crimes bill that also includes transgender protections. Both the House and Senate passed such a bill last year in different forms. It died when the House rejected the Senate's version, which was attached to a defense authorization measure.

The trans activists said they also called on Congress to repeal or significantly amend the Real ID Act of 2005, a controversial anti-terrorism measure that requires states to turn driver's licenses into a national form of identification.

Civil liberties groups joined transgender activists in predicting the law and proposed rules would lead to legal liability and privacy violations for transgender persons who change their gender identities.

**Center officials, along with gay rights groups like the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, are calling on Congress to pass bills in the House and Senate, H.R. 1117 and S. 717, which would repeal the Real ID Act and put in place new protections against driver's license tampering to protect against potential terrorist acts while avoiding infringements on civil liberties.**

Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), who is gay, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) drew criticism last fall from many gay and trans activists when they disclosed that head counts showing a lack of support for a transgender provision in ENDA would likely cause the bill to go down in defeat in the House. Rather than lose a key vote on a longstanding gay rights initiative, the two said they and other House Democratic leaders chose to move forward with a gay-only version of ENDA, with the aim of pushing for a separate transgender rights bill later.

The House passed the gay-only version of the bill in November by a vote of 235 to 184. The measure remains pending in the Senate, with Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), its lead sponsor, saying he hopes to bring the House-passed version to the Senate floor for a vote sometime this year.

Keisling and Stephanie White, the Center's managing director, led an all-day policy briefing on Monday for the visiting lobbyists. The trans lobbyists then formed teams of two or more and fanned out on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, visiting offices of senators and House members to discuss issues that spokespersons said have a direct impact on their lives.

Among the Washington-area transgender activists participating were Earlene Budd of Transgender Health and Empowerment; Dana Beyer, Montgomery County, Md., Democratic Party activist; and Jeri Hughes, D.C. Trans Coalition.