



# The Task Force in the News

## Media Highlights

September 14 to October 7, 2005

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

### Quotes of the Week:

#### Planet Out

Matt Foreman of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said the example of happily married same-sex couples "showed the utter fallacy of our opponents' arguments and dire predictions. Not only did the crops not wither," he went on, "the Red Sox won the World Series and the Patriots took the Super Bowl."

#### Notes From Hollywood

With the controversial issues such as gay marriage and Supreme Court nominations at the forefront of our culture today, the work of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NLGTF) has never been more important.

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## Mass. lawmakers reject gay marriage ban

Ann Rostow, PlanetOut Network Wed Sep 14, 7:20 PM ET

**SUMMARY:** By an overwhelming vote on Wednesday, the Massachusetts Legislature defeated an attempt to replace same-sex marriages with civil unions.

Marriage equality advocates around the country breathed a sigh of relief Wednesday as the Massachusetts Legislature defeated an attempt to replace same-sex marriages with civil unions.

The overwhelming vote, 157-39, reflected disapproval from both sides of the political spectrum. Allies of the gay community rejected the call to roll back marriage rights and were not swayed by the carrot of civil unions. Anti-gay conservatives, on the other hand, had no affection for civil unions, and would rather see the definition of marriage restored to its flat heterosexual language without further ado.

An amendment to that effect was certified for signature-gathering, over the objections of legal analysts, by Attorney General Thomas Reilly last week. Reilly's decision left some legislators free to vote against the civil union "compromise" proposal in the hopes that an absolute ban on same-sex marriage may come up for a public vote down the road.

The civil union measure under discussion this week was born in the tumultuous six months between the decision to legalize same-sex marriage by the state's highest court in November 2003, and the effective date of that decision the following May. Unspecified fears of gay unions, combined with a desire to shield Sen. John Kerry from the unpopular topic of same-sex marriage, led lawmakers to propose a constitutional amendment redefining marriage as a heterosexual institution, while expressly mandating civil unions for gay and lesbian couples. The convoluted measure barely passed the Legislature in 2004, and would have had to pass again this year in the exact form in order to advance to the voters in 2006.

**Matt Foreman of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said the example of happily married same-sex couples "showed the utter fallacy of our opponents' arguments and dire predictions. Not only did the crops not wither," he went on, "the Red Sox won the World Series and the Patriots took the Super Bowl."**

Even the amendment's co-sponsor, Republican state Sen. Brian Lees, was no longer able to support the language. "Gay marriage has begun, and life has not changed for the citizens of the commonwealth, with the exception of those who can now marry," said Lees. "This amendment, which was an appropriate measure or compromise a year ago, is no longer, I feel, a compromise today."

Signature-gathering for the next threatened constitutional amendment will continue into December. If successful, marriage opponents will put their flat constitutional ban before lawmakers again in 2006 and in 2007. Because this new amendment was initiated by the people, state law requires only 25 percent support from the state Legislature, voting in two consecutive sessions. If those bars are passed, the measure would go before the general electorate in 2008.

If you'd like to know more, you can find stories related to Mass. lawmakers reject gay marriage ban.

# San Francisco Chronicle

## **Transgender killings an investigative quagmire Marginalized lifestyle makes finding witnesses, prosecuting cases difficult**

- Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer Thursday, September 15, 2005

The conviction of two men this week in the killing of 17-year-old Gwen Araujo was unusual -- but not because transgender slayings are rare.

Since Araujo was beaten and strangled in 2002 during an attack at a party in Newark by men she knew, four other transgender individuals have been killed in the Bay Area.

No one has been charged in any of those four cases. The difficulty, say police and transgender advocates, is that these incidents are not easy to investigate because society tends to marginalize the victims.

The House of Representatives passed legislation Wednesday that for the first time would include gender identity in the federal definition of a hate crime, but even if it clears Congress, barriers are likely to remain.

"A lot of things put (transgender people) in contexts that are inherently more dangerous: where they may have to live, where they may have to work," said Clarence Patton, acting executive director of the National Coalition of Antiviolence Programs, which monitors violent crime in the gay community nationwide.

"It's almost like at every step of the way it's much more difficult for transgender folks to really be in a place where they can take things for granted that others can, even gays and lesbians."

Transgender women often live in high-crime areas because housing is cheaper there, and they often work as prostitutes because they can't find employers who accept their gender identity, Patton said.

Those factors and others make it harder to find witnesses when transgender people are victimized, which in turn makes prosecuting the crimes more difficult.

"Any time there is a homicide case where the victim is more vulnerable because of his or her lifestyle, or has a relationship with the perpetrator, it becomes a bigger challenge for the prosecution," said Nancy O'Malley, chief assistant district attorney for Alameda County.

In Fresno, Estanislao Martineza, who pleaded guilty last month to voluntary manslaughter in the August 2004 killing of Jose Robles, a transgender woman, was sentenced last week to four years in prison. Gay activists were angered by the relatively short sentence.

Prosecutors say they agreed to the sentence because they could not have done better at trial with the evidence they had.

"One thing that it is not is a reflection of our belief that the death of this individual is properly addressed by a four-year prison sentence," Fresno County Assistant District Attorney Robert Ellis said.

The "heat-of-the-moment" or transgender panic defense was one of many challenges that prosecutors in the case faced, Ellis said.

In San Francisco, the district attorney's office has begun training prosecutors how to rebut gay and transgender panic arguments that defense attorneys often present. Defenders have argued in many cases, including Araujo's, that the accused deserve leniency because when they found out the true identity of their victims they responded in the heat of the moment.

Many transgender homicide cases never get that far.

In San Pablo, 24-year-old Sindy Segura was shot to death at 1:48 a.m. on Oct. 1, 2003. Her body was found near the railroad tracks that border Richmond's Iron Triangle. She was last seen the evening before working a nearby street. She had been shot in the groin, the neck and one arm, said Detective Sgt. Mark Foisie of the San Pablo Police Department. The case was suspended this past spring for lack of new leads, he said.

On Nov. 6 that year, Stanley Van Dyke Traylor, 38, was shot to death in a desolate area of West Oakland, the 2700 block of Union Street. Traylor didn't have a permanent residence and stayed with friends or with tenants at motels, according to Oakland police Sgt. Brian Medeiros. Traylor, who often wore women's clothing, was found wearing denim shorts and a T-shirt. A wig was on the ground nearby.

One man was arrested in connection with the incident, but there was not enough evidence to charge him with any crime, Medeiros said.

Tony "Delicious" Green, a 45-year-old lifelong San Franciscan, was found dead in a motel room in Bayview-Hunters Point on Aug. 13, 2004. Green had been beaten, raped and gagged and died of asphyxiation, said Jennifer Rakowski, associate director of Community United Against Violence, which has worked with Green's family. Green is the only victim with family in the area, an element that transgender activists say was key in keeping the Araujo case in newspapers and on television. Araujo's mother has spoken to thousands of students about her.

San Francisco police have two suspects in Green's killing -- men who went to the motel with Green -- but not enough evidence to charge them, said Inspector Mike Mahoney.

On Feb. 28 this year, Eddie Chung Chou Lee, 42, was found stabbed to death in Westlake Park in Daly City. Lee identified both as a man and as a woman -- Michelle -- and was wearing women's clothing when killed, according to a Daly City Police Department statement. Police have no suspects in the case, said Greg Ogelsby, an investigator with the department.

The legislation the House passed Wednesday offers a ray of hope.

**"The bill will allow the FBI and Department of Justice to give money to local law enforcement agencies so they are better able to investigate and prosecute crimes," said Lisa Mottet, a transgender rights attorney with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

**Those tracking transgender homicides say they don't know for sure how many transgender individuals have been killed, though the leader of another San Francisco organization says she hears of one to three homicides per month around the world. The killings often pass unnoticed because police and then the media report the victim's birth name and biological gender, said Mottet.**

**"My sense is that we have no idea how often this happens," Mottet said.**

Gwen Smith, an Antioch resident who started the Transgender Day of Remembrance and operates the Web site Rememberingourdead.org, which lists information on transgender slayings around the world, finds scant information about suspects.

"Very few (transgender homicide) cases are ever taken to court," said Smith.

## Maine voters to have their say on divisive gay-rights legislation

### *Antidiscrimination efforts failed in past*

By Jenna Russell, Globe Staff | September 25, 2005

Long before a controversial court ruling in Massachusetts set off a national debate on gay marriage, most of New England had already agreed on a simpler point: Discrimination based on sexual orientation should be prohibited under state law, to ensure that gays and lesbians have equal access to basic needs like jobs and housing.

Most of New England, that is, except for Maine.

Almost three decades after legislators in the region's largest state first tried to outlaw discrimination against gays and lesbians, Maine is the only New England state without such language on the books. Voters here will consider the question again on Nov. 8, for the third time in seven years, and residents on both sides of the issue say it is time for the long-running battle to end.

"We're a little island here," said Portland lawyer Pat Peard, a leader of the latest fight to change Maine law. "We're behind, and we need to come into step with our sister states."

Opponents of the new law say they are angry that the results of past referendums have been ignored. In 1998 and again in 2000, Maine state legislators voted to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, but both times the measure was narrowly struck down in statewide votes.

The latest attempt to change the law was passed by state legislators and signed by Governor John Baldacci, a Democrat, in March. Conservative groups collected more than 60,000 signatures to bring the measure, now on hold, before voters in November.

"The views of the Maine people are not being heard," said Paul Madore, a Lewiston builder whose conservative Grassroots Coalition is fighting the amendment. "This is a strong, motivated demographic, and they just keep coming until they get what they want."

**Massachusetts was the first state to pass a nondiscrimination law for gays and lesbians, in 1989, becoming just the second state to do so, after Wisconsin. Connecticut made the change in 1991, followed by Vermont in 1992, Rhode Island in 1995, and New Hampshire in 1997, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Today, 10 states prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation; five others also protect on the basis of gender identity.**

More recently, several states have gone further. Vermont legalized civil unions for same-sex couples in 2000, gay marriage became legal in Massachusetts about 1 1/2 years ago, and in Connecticut, under a law passed last spring, civil unions for gay and lesbian couples will be legal starting Saturday.

Even Maine, despite its failed attempts to enact a nondiscrimination law, established a statewide registry for domestic partners last year that grants inheritance rights to registered same-sex couples.

For gay-rights opponents in Maine, the recent changes in neighboring states are a tool in their latest campaign, which frames the nondiscrimination language as a step toward the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Supporters counter that the new law is a matter of basic fairness that will stop discrimination against gays and lesbians in housing, employment, education, accommodations, and the extension of credit. An exception is built in for religious groups that receive no public funds.

Both sides say the outcome will hinge on turnout. And both sides are worried about motivating voters who may tune out a familiar debate.

"I don't think people realize the extent of voter burnout," said Madore, who runs the Grassroots Coalition out of his tan clapboard house on a busy main street in Lewiston, a blue-collar city 40 miles north of Portland. "What we're hearing from people is, 'What's the point?'"

Voters interviewed around the state last week said the gay-rights question has lost some of its power to spur debate and action.

"When it came around the first couple of times, you heard people talking about it, but now I'm not sure there's anything left to say," said Jonathan Grant, 26, a bakery employee from Auburn, across the Androscoggin River from Lewiston, who plans to vote against the antidiscrimination measure.

Both sides said they have strong volunteer support. Madore, of the Grassroots Coalition, said 2,000 people offered to collect signatures for the petition that placed the question on the ballot. Three-quarters had not worked on previous campaigns, Madore said, indicating that there is fresh interest in the movement.

At Maine Won't Discriminate, a Portland-based political action campaign revived for the latest referendum, tables were piled high with fund-raising letters one day this month, and the number of donors and volunteers was approaching 1,000, said group leaders, who have raised several hundred thousand dollars since early August.

The group has scheduled hundreds of small neighborhood gatherings across the state this month to raise money and motivate voters, said spokesman Jesse Connolly, whose late father, Larry Connolly, was one of the first state legislators to call for the antidiscrimination measure, in 1977, a year before the younger Connolly was born.

"I think people understand that change doesn't happen overnight," he said. "It's a little frustrating that it's not done yet, but this time it's coming together."

To bolster their claim that the new law is needed, proponents have recruited a handful of victims of discrimination to tell their stories, including a gay receptionist who was fired from his job at a Bangor insurance agency in 2002 after kissing his partner goodbye in the parking lot.

The campaign has sought support from both parties. Ted O'Meara, a former chairman of the state Republican Party, is serving as a senior adviser to Maine Won't Discriminate.

Opponents of the amendment, meanwhile, have a new logo for their campaign, featuring a brightly colored, stick-figure family and the slogan: "Preserve Marriage. Protect Maine."

Madore, a builder who put his business on hold to fight the new law, now relies on donations to support his family. He said the new logo is meant to send a positive message but also make clear that the proposal contains "the underpinnings" of same-sex marriage.

"We can't include [gays in the nondiscrimination law] and deny them any privileges we give to other classes," he said.

Proponents of the new law say Madore is wrong, because Maine's Defense of Marriage Act, passed in 1997, makes gay marriage illegal in the state.

The other side "has seen that they can't win based on the facts, so they're trying to twist and turn this into something else," Connolly said.

Could be, but Debra Dillon, 43, of Freeport, does not care. She said her interest in the issue has flagged, and while she will vote out of a sense of duty, she believes the matter should have been settled years ago.

She also fears the upcoming vote may not be the last.

"I think it's a waste of energy and money, and in this amount of time there's not going to be a change in people's views," she said. "Is this going to be an ongoing thing, with no resolution?"



As Gulf disasters grow

## Survivors demand people's control

Money for housing, healthcare & union jobs—not profits and war

By LeiLani Dowell

Published Sep 22, 2005 7:04 AM

Communities and grassroots organizations in the Gulf region and their allies are fighting to beat back the attacks launched on them by the United States government in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

A rally and mass assembly will be held on Sept. 24 in Baton Rouge. Organized by Louisiana grassroots organizations and activists, the rally is themed, "Make the Vultures Pay—Don't Let them Prey!" Demands on the flier for the event include, "Tax the oil companies to repay the \$Trillion they've stolen since the war began—use the money to pay for a democratically-run government jobs program to rebuild New Orleans."

On Sept. 19, a press conference was held in New Orleans to announce the opening of a local office and collection point for the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Reconstruction Project (PHRF) at the home of New Orleans resident Mama Dee.

According to the press release for the event, "PHRF represent[s] more than 45 community based, grassroots organizations in the region determined to oversee all aspects of the relief, recovery and reconstruction of their homes, neighborhoods and lives.... PHRF stated days after Katrina that 'the people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while federal relief funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District.'"

Curtis Muhammad of Community Labor United, a member organization, said, "The government abandoned the people, the Black and poor people. Now we are seeing the most remarkable determination, generosity, creativity and collectivity on the part of those whose lives have been ravaged, and from people far and wide. It is deeply moving, necessary and hopeful in the face of the horror and neglect that can only be construed as the most blatant racism. Mama Dee is acting in the tradition of the powerful women in our community who have always stepped forward to make life possible."

### Will survivors get reconstruction jobs?

The legacy of racism and classism is reflected in the reconstruction efforts in the Gulf region. The Boston Globe reports, "The affluent areas of [New Orleans] are humming with activity as reconstruction efforts pick up tempo, but many of the black working-class and poor neighborhoods remain ... popu-mostly by dragonflies and National Guardsmen.... The haves are beginning to pick up the pieces of their former lives, while many have-nots may be forced to simply pick up and leave."

The article expresses the concern of local officials that although the French Quarter, central to New Orleans's tourism industry, may reopen soon, "it remains unclear where the ... low-wage workers necessary to operate it will come from."

In addition, the article suggests that the new construction jobs that will be created by reconstruction efforts may not go to the poorest residents, supposedly because they either "dropped out of the labor force well before the storm or lack the skills for many specialized construction jobs."

The Associated Press reported on Sept. 16 that "the nearly 20,000 residents returning to some of New Orleans' neighborhoods beginning next week will face military checkpoints ... and a dusk-to-dawn curfew."

An article in the *Virginian Pilot* discusses the continued presence of 200 Blackwater mercenaries in New Orleans, 164 of whom were hired by a division of the Department of Homeland Security to guard government facilities. A spokesperson for Blackwater interviewed by the newspaper admitted that assertions made by its employees on the ground of being “deputized” to arrest and use lethal force were unfounded—yet they were authorized to carry loaded M-16 rifles.

Meanwhile, the most oppressed in the region continue to be either criminalized or ignored. On Sept. 4, two young trans women were arrested for “criminal trespass” after taking showers in the shower facility at a Texas A&M University-run shelter. The two cousins, 20 and 16 years old, were separated from each other and from the rest of their family, and the older woman was held in isolation in the Brazos County Jail for five days. The woman was released only after the trans community and allies pressured the university to drop the charges.

The National Coalition for Transgender Equality, along with the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** and Lambda Legal, has issued a guide on making evacuation shelters safe for transgender evacuees.

On Sept. 16, a 73-year-old woman was released after spending 16 days in prison on charges of looting. Merlene Maten, a Black, diabetic grandmother and church deacon, was arrested the day after the hurricane struck for charges that she stole \$63.50 in goods from a delicatessen. Although she had never been previously arrested, the court set her bail at \$50,000 and sent her to a state penitentiary. Witnesses and family members attest that she was going to her car to get sausage to bring back to her hotel room when police arrested her.

According to the Associated Press, “Despite intervention from the nation’s largest senior lobby, volunteer lawyers from the Federal Emergency Agency and even a private attorney, the family fought a futile battle for 16 days to get her freed.

“Then, hours after her plight was featured in an Associated Press story, a local judge on Thursday ordered Maten freed on her own recognizance.”

Others who have been marginalized, once again, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are Indigenous nations in the region. The National Congress of American Indians estimates that several thousand Native people live in the Gulf area.

The Houma Nation, located in South Louisiana, suffered terrible devastation. An email sent to the Hawaii Solidarity Committee reads, “The hardest hit of the Nations were the Houma Tribe.... 3,500 members were displaced and would need everything in the long run. Most were living in the poorest places in New Orleans area.”

Rather than wait for relief efforts by governmental officials that may never come, the Native community is raising relief funds through its own organizations to help native peoples in the region.



## House passes trans-inclusive hate crimes amendment

Passed along with bill that raises civil liberties, gay rights concerns

By ELIZABETH WEILL-GREENBERG | Sep 14, 8:00 PM

The House of Representatives passed a transgender inclusive hate crimes amendment Wednesday, despite critics in the gay community who feared that including the transgender community would sabotage its future.

"It shows unequivocally that those that thought Congress couldn't pass a trans inclusive bill were just wrong," said Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. "I don't know of a single vote we lost because it was trans inclusive."

The hate crimes bill was co-sponsored by Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.). The hate crimes amendment passed Wednesday 223 to 199, according to HRC.

**"Special recognition needs to go to Barney Frank and Nancy Pelosi for their leadership," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

Most representatives voted along party lines except 30 Republicans who voted for it and five Democrats who voted against it, according to HRC.

A hate crimes bill has passed the Senate three times before and the House has held two procedural votes on hate crimes legislation, according to Christopher Labonte, HRC deputy political director. The current hate crimes bill in the Senate, co-sponsored by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), does not explicitly include transgender people.

"This is the first time an explicitly written transgender inclusive bill has been passed by the House or the Senate," said Labonte. "It's amazingly historic."

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force applauded the victory, as well, and its historic nature.**

**"Never before has the House of Representatives voted to protect transgender people in any way," said Foreman in a statement.**

**"For the first time the House voted to extend protections to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans in a meaningful way," Foreman told the Blade. "What people have been saying for years is it would be impossible to pass legislation that was explicitly transgender inclusive. Today's vote shows that is false."**

**"It's even more remarkable it occurred first in the House, which is more conservative than the Senate," he added.**

### A mixed victory

However, some gay rights activists were disturbed by the bill the hate crimes amendment was passed with — the



Lesbian Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) was one of the sponsors of the hate crimes measure that passed the House on Wednesday by a vote of 223 to 199. (File photo)

Children's Safety Act, which has raised civil liberties concerns.

Keisling said the hate crimes amendment was attached to a "very, very troubling" act.

"Parts of the bill are really bad," she said.

**Foreman said his organization was also concerned with the underlying bill. For example, he said, one provision requires all states to set up sex offender registries.**

**"In some states public lewdness is a sex offense," he told the Blade. "Public lewdness laws are disproportionately and unfairly enforced against gay men in cruising areas."**

Labonte said that HRC did not have a position on the Children's Safety Act.

Among the provisions in the Children's Safety Act, it calls for the creation of a national DNA database of anyone arrested or detained by a federal agency, according to Jack King, public affairs director for the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

The Act also eliminates federal review for prisoners who are convicted in the killing of someone under the age of 18, he said, calling it one of its worst provisions. Under the Children's Safety Act, in cases where a person is innocent, once he or she has exhausted the state courts, the only avenue left is executive clemency from the governor, he said.

"Governors are politicians," he said. "They don't want to be known for springing convicted sex offenders even if the evidence shows he didn't do it."

Many of the provisions have nothing to do with protecting children and, instead, dangerously limit civil liberties, King said.

## **How they voted**

The vote to approve federal hate crimes legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives went mostly along party lines, with Republicans opposing and Democrats supporting. The final vote was 223-199.

Here is the list of the Democrats who voted against, the Republicans who voted in favor, and those members of the House who abstained on this vote:

### **DEMOCRATS VOTING AGAINST (5)**

Berry (AR); Boren (OK); Davis (TN); Tanner (TN); Taylor (MS).

### **REPUBLICANS VOTING FOR (30)**

Bass (NH); Biggert (IL); Boehlert (NY); Bono (CA); Castle (DE); Dent (PA); Diaz-Balart, L. (FL); Diaz-Balart, M. (FL); Fitzpatrick (PA); Foley (FL); Gerlach (PA); Johnson (CT); Kelly (NY); Kirk (IL); Kolbe (AZ); LaHood (IL); Leach (IA); LoBiondo (NJ); McCotter (MI); Platts (PA); Reichert (WA); Ros-Lehtinen (FL); Saxton (NJ); Schwarz (MI); Shays (CT); Shimkus (IL); Simmons (CT); Walden (OR); Weldon (PA); Weller (IL).

### **ABSTAINING (11)**

Barton (R-TX); Beauprez (R-CO); Clyburn (D-SC); Gilchrest (R-MD); Harman (D-CA); Hoekstra (R-MI); Melancon (D-LA); Payne (D-NJ); Royce (R-CA); Walsh (R-NY); Weiner (D-NY).

## Windy City Times

### 'Just Fix My City'

by Andrew Davis

2005-09-14

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For one man, although conditions are horrific in Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, things could be even worse.

That was the message from Doug Minich, president of the New Orleans-based Cavaliers Motorcycle Club, an LGBT organization. In a follow-up to an e-mail he sent to Windy City Times, Minich spoke on Friday—and said that the situation had improved somewhat for him and his partner, Mike.

When asked what has been the most frustrating part of living through the crisis, Minich hesitated before responding. "What's most frustrating is not being able to see my home," he said. "I want to get extra clothes and to just see my place. Unfortunately, I've been told that it's going to be 60 to 90 days before I can see it."

Minich commented that other facets of uncertainty bothered him. "It's very frustrating not knowing about your family and friends," he said before adding that friends of club members are still not accounted for. He also was perplexed by the government's delay in assisting: "They can figure out who's to blame later. Just fix my city." He urged people to donate to agencies such as the Rainbow World Fund and American Red Cross, even though he is aware of the latter's anti-gay blood donor policy; he stressed that now, everyone must come together.

Fortunately for Minich, he did not end up being stranded in New Orleans. " [ Mike ] and I went to his parents' home in Lafayette; we left the day before the storm," he said. "Usually it takes about two hours to get there, but [ because of the mass evacuation ] it took about seven and a half hours."

Regarding their current living conditions, things are bit removed from what they are used to. The couple will be living in a campground in the city of Hammond for the next couple of months.

However, in the midst of the morass, Minich sees reasons for hope—if for no other reason than the support he has received from everyday people. "It's just so amazing. I've gotten so many e-mails from around the world; people are sending their thoughts, support and prayers," he said. "However, I would like for people to continue keeping us in their thoughts." He also asked that people say a special prayer for two missing friends, Lance and Carl Ford.

Minich becomes even more sanguine when discussing New Orleans's future. "I have a positive attitude and I know that we will rebuild this city," he stated. "New Orleans will be better than ever."

#### **Other Katrina-related news:**

— Although Houston's Montrose Clinic has been garnering plenty of attention, donors might want to also consider giving to Montrose Counseling Center, a separate facility that works closely with the clinic. The LGBT center provides physical and mental healthcare to all individuals, including those who are HIV-positive. People may submit checks—made payable to Montrose Counseling Center with "Katrina" listed in the memo field—to Montrose Counseling Center, 701 Richmond Avenue, Houston, Tex., 77006. The center's phone number is ( 713 ) 529-0037, ext. 352. Sally A. Huffer, a former Chicagoan, is the agency's Community Projects Specialist. She stated: "Our Gay & Lesbian Switchboard Houston has created a 'safe

homes' database for compassionate people around the country who are willing to open their homes to our GLBT neighbors from Hurricane ravaged Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. We are 200 homes and adding more every day. We've already been able to place persons into some homes, and are thrilled that the response has been overwhelming. We even have received a number of offers from the Chicago area. One may sign up or access this program through Gay & Lesbian Switchboard ( 713 ) 529-3211.

— Drs. Leigh Roberts and Roger Trinh of Howard Brown Health Center ( HBHC ) have returned home and are telling the tales of their trying times in New Orleans. According to an HBHC statement, the physicians were stranded in the city while attending a medical conference. "We were wheeling patients around in the laundry carts from the hotel," an emotional Roberts said at an all-staff meeting at the center. "An experience like this makes you realize what's really important, and makes you dig down deep inside yourself to find something that you never knew was there. It's very frightening to think no one may be coming for you."

— **The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is providing online resources for the hurricane survivors. Users can log on to [www.thetaskforce.org/katrinaaid](http://www.thetaskforce.org/katrinaaid) to learn how to donate as well as to find out how relief efforts ( such as the NAACP and Houston's Montrose Clinic ) are directing the funds.**

— Internet sites claiming to be charities related to Hurricane Katrina have been popping up faster than the FBI can look at them—and many appear to be fraudulent. According to the Associated Press, The American Red Cross, whose Web site is one of the most imitated, is working with the FBI to try to identify bogus sites.

— The Sparkplug Foundation also has a list of organizations ( e.g., AIDS Alliance, The Justice Center and the Louisiana Domestic Violence Victim's Hurricane Relief Fund ) that are aiming to help survivors. See [www.sparkplugfoundation.org/katrinarelieft.html](http://www.sparkplugfoundation.org/katrinarelieft.html).

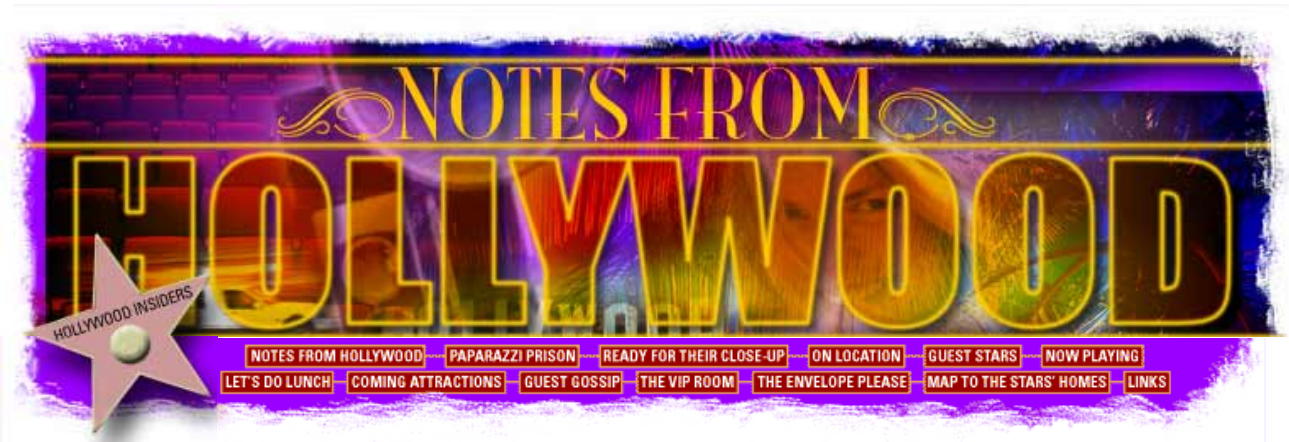
— Forty-eight hours after suspending a Paypal account setup to collect donations for colleagues impacted by Hurricane Katrina, Paypal has backed down from its decision to suspend fundraising by the web site Cruising for Sex, according to a news release connected with the site. Cruising for Sex is partly based out of New Orleans and suffered damage during Katrina. As of Sept. 8, the account was restored.

— Among the many local benefits is one being held on Sept. 17, at Pop's Sports Pub, 803 Nerge Rd., Roselle, from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. The rock band Barely Standing, a member of Outmusic and a participant in the Chicago Pride Parade, will perform. Admission is \$5.

— Under One Roof, a San Francisco-based agency that generates funding for AIDS service organizations, announced the formation of "The Above and Beyond Fund" to assist HIV/AIDS service groups in Louisiana and Mississippi. For more info, call ( 415 ) 503-2303.

— Chicago City College students protested what they called racism and negligence in the Hurricane Katrina relief effort on Sept. 7 in front of Harold Washington College. They were joined by the Campus Antiwar Network.

— Representatives from the New Orleans Mayor's Office and the Houston Gay & Lesbian Center have partnered to launch a campaign to raise disaster relief funds set aside for LGBT residents of the greater New Orleans area. Coors Brewing Company has donated \$10,000 in seed money. Concerned citizens can donate to the fund by credit card at [www.pridehouston.org](http://www.pridehouston.org) or by mailing checks to Pride Houston Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund, P.O. Box 66071, Houston, Tex., 77266.



9/13/05

## Scene 7 – ‘Queer Eye’ Producers to Be Honored At Task Force Brunch

**With the controversial issues such as gay marriage and Supreme Court nominations at the forefront of our culture today, the work of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NLGTF) has never been more important.**

During a private gathering at the trendy *Here Lounge* in West Hollywood, NLGTF Executive Director Matt Foreman that on Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup> at the Wyndham Bel Age Hotel, NLGTF will present the 2005 Los Angeles Leadership Awards, this year honoring a duo from the world of entertainment and two powerhouses from the arenas of politics and community service. The festivities kick off at 11:30 a.m.

Who is being honored? David Collins and Michael Williams are the Emmy award-winning creators and producers of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*, and the Academy Award winning producers of *The Fog of War*. Lorri L. Jean has been an activist in the GLBT community since 1979 and is best known for her leadership at the help of NLGTF and the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center where she currently serves as Chief Executive Officer. The final honoree is Phill Wilson, founder and Executive Director of the Black AIDS Institute. Raising his powerful voice about the spread of HIV/AIDS in the African-American Community, Wilson is also the founder of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum and co-founder of the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention.

For information about the September Leadership Awards brunch, visit the [web site](#) or simply call NLGTF at (323) 954-9597. The brunch will include a silent auction to include two prize paintings by renowned artist [Tom Ellis](#), among many other sought-after items.

## Vatican to review seminary operations

### Church monitors will look for evidence of homosexuality.

By [SHIRLEY RAGSDALE](#)

REGISTER RELIGION EDITOR

Vatican-appointed investigators begin this week reviewing 229 U.S. Catholic seminaries for evidence of a homosexual culture and faculty dissent from church teaching.

Advocates for gay priests and seminarians say the audit is a witch hunt. Church and seminary officials say the examination will reassure Catholics that potential child abusers are not being trained for the priesthood.

The "Apostolic Visitation" comes as Catholics await publication of a new Vatican policy barring gay men from ordination and after the Rev. Edwin O'Brien, the archbishop supervising the seminary review, has said that "anyone who has engaged in homosexual activity or has strong homosexual inclinations" should not consider the priesthood.

**"The church hierarchy is attempting to scapegoat gay people for its own failure to address the sexual abuse of children and young people that it alone created and covered up," said Matt Foreman, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force spokesman who grew up Catholic and has relatives in the priesthood. "The evil in this is that they are trying to equate being gay with sex abuse, which is appalling."**

Benedictine Father Benedict Neenan, president-rector of Conception Seminary College in Conception, Mo., said: "The purpose is not a witch hunt, although there may be some witches who need to be hunted, I don't know. The visitors will be checking if we are proactive in helping the guys develop a balanced, healthy sexuality that will enable them to live a faithful, celibate commitment and helping seminarians understand the dynamics of modern culture that are sometimes at odds with our faith."

U.S. seminaries are under Vatican review as a direct result of the clergy sexual abuse scandal that swept the church in 2002. Pope John Paul II and U.S. church officials agreed to examine the way candidates for the priesthood were screened and prepared. The visitation has the endorsement of Pope Benedict XVI.

### Abuse victims

Gay priests and seminarians have come under scrutiny because a study commissioned by the church found that most of the victims of abuse by priests were adolescent boys, according to the Rev. Joseph Fessio, a priest and critic of the way priests are selected and educated in the United States.

"It would be naive to believe that kind of attraction stops after age 18," Fessio said. "It takes no brilliance of vision to see that the sex abuse crisis involves the great difficulty of those with same sex attraction living in close quarters with males."

Catholics interviewed after 11 a.m. Mass at Pope Pius X Catholic Church in Urbandale on Sunday said they approve of the policy change.

"I believe the Catholic Church teachings about homosexuality and the priesthood need to be made clear. I believe that after Vatican II homosexuals exploited loopholes (in church policy), and the fruits of that lax attitude are reflected in the abuses that have come to light," said John O'Connor of Des Moines.

Tanny Armstrong of Urbandale said: "I think it is a good thing if the church excludes homosexuals as candidates for the priesthood. I love homosexuals but I don't love what they stand for. I don't think they should be accepted as candidates for seminary."

Hanna Jones of Des Moines, a lifelong member of Pius X, is conflicted about barring gays from the priesthood.

"I guess it depends if you believe homosexuals choose the lifestyle or are born gay or not. It's kind of like being an alcoholic — is it a sickness or a choice? I'm thankful to God that I don't have to decide."

The Rev. Thomas Reese, a Jesuit priest and former editor of America magazine, recognizes a conflict between those who believe psychologically stable and celibate homosexual candidates could be good priests and those who say gay men should not be ordained.

"There's not much argument about banning homosexuals or heterosexuals who are sleeping around from the priesthood," Reese said. "Catholic teaching tells us with God's grace, all things are possible. But if they say celibate homosexuals may not be priests, then the church is saying God's grace is not sufficient for them, and that's a problem theologically."

### **Candidate screening**

Candidates being screened for the priesthood go through a "very thorough process," before they ever reach seminary, according to Stephen Tatz, vocation specialist for the Diocese of Des Moines. Candidates are questioned, psychologically tested and subjected to interviews with the seminary board and the bishop.

"It's not easy," Tatz said. "It is a matter of looking intently at a person, checking for issues, but also looking for the gifts that they may bring to the priesthood."

Neenan said he's confident that when Conception Abbey's policies are examined, it will be seen favorably by the monitors.

"We want to reassure people our seminary is in good shape, but we don't want them to just take our word for it," Neenan said. "The Apostolic Visitation is designed to be tough. We grapple with the issues and difficulties. A lot of corrections have been made, and we need to demonstrate that. I believe the process will show that we are striving to have good programs so we will have good priests in the future."

The Rev. Joseph Pins, a Dowling Catholic High School graduate, will complete his studies at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis in 2006. He said he welcomes the visitation.

"One of the jobs I had before joining the seminary was an internal auditor," Pins said. "I like to think of the visitation as an internal audit. It is always good for others to review your policies and procedures and test to see if they provide proper results."

The sexual orientation of priests isn't as much a concern as the moral and ethical policies they comply with, according to the Rev. Michael Maher Jr., a chaplain at Loyola University in Chicago, who has studied homosexuality in U.S. seminaries and difficulties experienced by gay and lesbian students attending Catholic high schools.

"It is clear the American public has been forced to think more about the sex lives of priests than they would prefer in recent years, especially when it involves sex with males," Maher said. "The underlying issue here is that you don't have sex with people to whom you are ministering, regardless of their sex or age."

The Rev. Donald Cozzens, best-selling author of "The Changing Face of the Priesthood: A Reflection on the Priest's Crisis of the Soul," also believes the focus of the visitation is broader.

"While the intention of the Vatican is noble, to make sure our seminaries are not contributing to the clergy abuse scandals, the means is doomed to failure," Cozzens said. "It is already being perceived as a witch hunt by some. Moreover, it is unfair, if not unjust, to committed, faithful, celibate gay priests and seminarians. And it will most likely drive gay seminarians and clergy even deeper into their closets."



## **Cruising for gay retirees Travel firm to build retirement resorts**

**By Mark Calvey**

San Francisco Business Times

Updated: 8:00 p.m. ET Sept. 25, 2005

Olivia Cos., long known for its lesbian cruises, has set its sights on entering the business of operating resort retirement communities for the gay and lesbian community.

The San Francisco-based travel company has looked at three parcels in Palm Springs for its first retirement community and is now looking for a real estate developer to build it.

"Now we're a travel company, but what I really think we are is a lifestyle company," said Amy Errett, CEO of Olivia. "We see ourselves as becoming the gay AARP."

The company anticipates strong demand for its Palm Springs resort retirement community.

"Without going out and marketing, we have close to 600 people who said, 'Sign me up, wherever you do it, whatever you do, we're coming,'" Errett told those attending an Association for Corporate Growth luncheon in San Francisco on Sept. 15.

"The hospitality nature of our business translates very well into a resort retirement community," she added.

**The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force put the number of gay seniors at 1 million when it launched its "aging initiative" six years ago to address retirement, health care and other issues facing older gay Americans.**

**"That number will explode when large numbers of out-of-the-closet baby boomers reach retirement," an NGLTF executive said at the time.**

The affluent segment of the gay and lesbian community is a market niche that's generating a lot of buzz among those planning retirement communities.

"What happens with aging, is that your safety, community and ability to fully be who you are is at risk," Errett said, echoing concerns voiced by the gay community.

She also believes retiring boomers will seek retirement communities promoting active living rather than those focused on assisted living.

Olivia, which currently generates about \$20 million in annual revenue primarily by chartering cruises for affluent gay women, is also eyeing the cruise and travel business targeting gay men.

The company has approached about a half dozen companies about an acquisition, but so far no sale.

"We have looked at making a handful of acquisitions," Errett said. "The only way we'd move into the gay men's travel market is if we had another brand or acquired another brand."



## **Marriage of Two Minds**

**Gay nups may have become inevitable, but for now it's a world of pain**

**by Kristen Lombardi**

September 20th, 2005 11:36 AM

If you're gay and looking to marry, the news might seem all white lace and promises.

Last week, Massachusetts lawmakers bucked an attempt to halt gay marriages. On September 14 they trounced, by a vote of 157 to 39, a proposed constitutional amendment that would have eliminated the same-sex nuptials made legal two years ago, and replaced them with civil unions. The final count marked a dramatic shift; 105 of these lawmakers had supported the same amendment last year.

Just eight days earlier, California had been the state breaking ground, when its legislature became the first such body in this country to authorize civil-marriage rights for same-sex couples. The victory was hard-fought: It took activists 20 months of wheedling and browbeating just to keep the bill alive. They won final approval by a narrow margin, 41 to 35. Yet momentum, once again, had been on their side, causing activists to hail a new chapter in the push for marriage equality for gays and lesbians nationwide.

As Evan Wolfson, the executive director of Freedom to Marry, in New York, puts it, "This vote means we've entered a new era. It doesn't mean we'll win overnight, but it means we've turned the tide."

Maybe so. Things have gotten better for gay people in some places across the country since 2004, when the marriage equality movement kicked into overdrive. This year, the Connecticut legislature enacted a civil-unions law to recognize gay couples, without a court order. The law goes into effect next month. And last year, New Jersey granted couples such limited domestic-partnership benefits as hospital visitation rights. Meanwhile, lawsuits challenging the denial of marriage licenses to same-sex partners are making their way through the courts in both states, setting the stage for full equality.

For the rest of the country, though, the reality is much grimmer. Activists have had to remain on the defensive, fending off one constitutional amendment after another—and measures that not only ban gay marriage, but also prohibit any legal recognition whatsoever. As many as 18 states have defined marriage in their constitutions as exclusively heterosexual, and the numbers continue to grow (see sidebar). In Texas, voters will cast their ballots on just such a ban come November. By 2006, Alabama, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin will have followed suit.

Some places keep piling on the pain, pushing more anti-gay ballot measures in the 13 states that approved constitutional bans on gay marriage last year. This time, the initiatives take aim at gay families, prohibiting same-sex couples from adopting. Already, activists have had to gear up for this second wave in Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri, and Georgia. The list could easily grow.

Gay people can't even feel safe in progressive bastions. In California, less than 24 hours after the historic vote there, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vowed to veto the bill. At the same time, opponents have begun gathering up to 600,000 signatures to amend the state's constitution to ban gay marriage by ballot referendum. They will also try to roll back the state's domestic-partnership benefits, which gay couples fought hard to win.

Over on the other coast, in Massachusetts, opponents are gathering signatures too, trying to put another question banning gay marriage on the ballot. If they succeed, it won't appear before voters until November 2008. By then, gay couples will have been getting hitched there for four years. Nevertheless, those who oppose their legal unions are busy organizing volunteers and raising money.

**What's worse is that traditional allies of gay people—from candidates for office to ministers and advocacy groups—have turned their backs. Gay people, a tiny minority, are left to fight this unending fight almost alone. "Can you imagine the reaction from people of 'goodwill' if this kind of attack was going on against any other minority?" says Matt Foreman of the National Gay and Lesbian Political Task Force. "People would have been up in arms, standing to defend the minority group. But because it happens to be gay people and marriage, it's a deafening silence."**

To hear veteran activists tell it, the push for marriage equality, with its fits and starts, is going about as well as could be expected. It's all about taking two steps forward, one step back, as has happened in every civil rights struggle. Wolfson, of *Freedom to Marry*, describes the movement's evolution in his book *Why Marriage Matters* as a classic pattern, "a period of patchwork" in which some states move forward while others resist—or regress.

"There has never been a civil rights battle where all 50 states held hands and skipped happily towards equality," Wolfson says. Instead, we see 50 responses. Some states, like Massachusetts, will rush to legalizing gay marriage. Others, like Connecticut, will take incremental steps toward the final goal. Still others will pile on the anti-gay sentiment—Nebraska, for instance, not only passed a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage but wiped all forms of civil recognition for gay couples off the table.

Activists see a certain logic to the current lay of the land. Those places way ahead of the curve on the marriage issue—Massachusetts—have long led the country in the arena of gay rights generally. These states passed non-discrimination laws decades ago, or set up gay-straight alliances in high schools, or expanded hate-crimes statutes to include sexual orientation.

States that have basic protections for gay people are now wrestling with the marriage issue, activists say. Take New York. On the one hand, it seems to be moving toward equality. It's one of just six states without a law on the books defining marriage as between a man and a woman, it has a pending marriage lawsuit, and some officials have even performed gay nuptials, albeit illegally. On the other, the New York legislature has enacted rights for gay families only in tiny increments.

Resistance has been strongest where gay people have no protections at all—no anti-discrimination laws, no family registries, no advocacy groups. Activists were still trying to achieve these steps in all 50 states when the marriage issue went national, in 2004, with the first wave of amendments. They've had to shift their focus to staving off the bans. But, as Toni Broaddus of the Equality Federation explains, "It's difficult to fight an anti-gay-marriage measure in a state where gays who speak out can lose their jobs."

That sums up the case in Kentucky, where last fall, voters passed an anti-gay-marriage amendment by a landslide 75 to 25 percent. Andrea Hildebran, who heads the Kentucky Fairness Alliance, a gay rights group, describes a valiant campaign waged by tens of thousands of activists and allies there. They crisscrossed the state, knocking on doors, trying to sway the hearts and minds. And Hildebran says they achieved "a measurable difference" in how voters cast their ballots.

When they lost, however, it didn't come as a big surprise. Since 1998, Kentucky has had a law on the books defining marriage as exclusively heterosexual. And lawmakers have pushed numerous anti-gay measures for more than a decade. They've tried to recriminalize sodomy and prohibit local gay rights ordinances. They've even tried to justify murdering a homosexual with the "gay panic defense." Word has it the right will be filing yet another amendment. This time, activists expect it to ban gay adoption.

"There is nothing mysterious about Kentucky," says Hildebran. "It's just that we're further behind."

Even states known for their liberal ways have experienced setbacks. In March 2004, for instance, Oregon was brimming with hope. One county began issuing marriage licenses, and more than 3,000 same-sex couples tied the knot. Says Roey Thorpe, of Basic Rights Oregon, who married her partner, "I cried almost continuously for a couple of weeks because I understood what it felt like to be equal." One year later, she and thousands more had their unions nullified by the state's Supreme Court.

Yet that wasn't the last of the crushing defeats. Last fall, voters passed a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, 57 to 43 percent. Activists returned to battle, pushing for a civil-unions bill instead. In July, it passed in the senate 19 to 10 and, Thorpe says, could have passed in the House too. But their efforts were thwarted last month, when the House speaker refused to bring it to the floor for a vote. "It was a terrible blow," Thorpe confides. "It left people wondering, 'Is there anything we can do?'"

Changing people's minds is not an impossible task—it just takes time. Case in point: California activists suffered a major blow when voters passed a referendum restricting marriage to heterosexuals in 2000. But they soon turned the negative around. The next year, they began pushing for limited domestic-partnership benefits, securing them in 2002. Then the legislature expanded those rights to mirror civil unions. And then came today's marriage bill. All of that happened within five years.

But activists don't have five years when trying to beat back a ballot referendum. Instead, they have three to six months. Glen Maxey, of No Nonsense in November, in Texas, is just beginning to grapple with the constraints of such a short time frame. As the group's name shows, they're not necessarily playing up the fight for full equality.

"This is a soccer mom campaign," he explains. Maxey hopes to tap into voters' general frustration with the legislature, which is sponsoring the measure.

"This campaign may be a long shot," he says, "but I know that we are uniquely situated to defeat this amendment, better than any state so far."

**That, of course, is just what the movement needs, says the Task Force's Foreman. He considers the push to be at a "very critical moment" these days. By next year, anti-equality amendments, as opposed to laws, could reach half of all states in the nation. Once a state turns over, it becomes very hard for activists to move forward. Only four suits have been filed challenging an amendment—in Oregon, Ohio, Georgia, and Nebraska. In May, a trial judge struck down the Nebraska amendment, saying it denies gay couples fundamental rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. Still, the state has since appealed to the federal appellate courts.**

**"This is a long-term grinding battle, but we have to create some wins," Foreman says. "It's us against them."**

No one agrees more than Geoff Kors, who heads Equality California. He sees the potential 2006 vote as pivotal not just for California, but for the movement overall. "We know we have to stand the line by beating opponents in the ballot effort," he says. "If we do, we can turn back the tide for the nation. But if we don't, we'll be hard-pressed to stop these ballot measures anywhere."



## Setting the Course The National Black Justice Coalition's summit fights for the future

by Will O'Bryan 

Published on [09/29/2005](#)

The Wednesday opening reception aside, when attendees of the National Black Justice Coalition's first Black LGBT Leaders Summit sat down to business early Thursday morning, Sept. 22, ghosts set the tone. The first presentation of the morning was a slideshow of fallen leaders of the black GLBT community, starting with Wanda Alston. Alston, the first person to head Mayor Anthony Williams's Office of LGBT Affairs, was murdered in March. Following Alston, the morning attendees, about 50 in all, saw the faces of dozens more community heroes, from Angelina Weld Grimké, a writer and D.C. resident who died in 1958, to AIDS activist Reggie Williams, who founded the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention before his death in 1999.

It was a bittersweet start to a bittersweet summit. Here, a community was coming together with hope for the future, yet with so many crosses to bear. On Friday morning, for example, at a panel titled "Naming Our Priorities," Phill Wilson reminded everyone: "Dead people don't get married. Dead people don't adopt. Dead people don't need protection in the workplace." It's not that attendees needed Wilson, CEO of the Black AIDS Institute, dressed in a "Got AIDS?" T-shirt to remind them that HIV is taking a seemingly near-apocalyptic toll on the African-American community. Rather, so many conversations throughout the summit kept returning to the topic.

There were ever-present statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing the African-American population constituting nearly half the country's HIV infections. And then there were the recently announced results of a five-city study of 1,767 MSM (men who have sex with men), in which 46 percent of African-American participants were HIV-positive -- compared to 21 percent of white or 17 percent of Hispanic respondents. These were part of every summit dialogue, no matter the title of any given panel.

But while HIV hung over the summit, the virus did not own this event. There was still other work to be done. There was analysis of the same-sex marriage debate in the African-American community -- particularly in the black church, and as a wedge issue strategically employed during elections.

"There is no way I could've imagined the ferocity of the Republican Party on the marriage issue in [Ohio]," said Gregory Moore, a Cleveland native and executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's National Voter Fund.

"Ken Blackwell was leading the charge [against marriage]," Moore added during Thursday morning's panel of leaders from across the spectrum of the African-American community. Blackwell, who is black, is running for Ohio governor in 2006. "It was just one of the many egregious things he did in the election that we will never forgive him for."

That intersection of politics, the African-American community and GLBT equality had obvious resonance with summit attendees. It's what they came for. Many of them questioned panelists about what was being done to counter the political right, which was often described as this movement's more evolved counterpart.

"It's the 'Archie Bunker' world, and they're working diligently to get it," observed Cedric Harmon of D.C., insisting that the right is moving full-steam ahead to return America to a time when "girls were girls, and men were men," borrowing from Bunker. "And they're using our own pastors and people to get there."

Attendee Meredith Moise of Equality Maryland, who heads that organization's outreach into religious and people-of-color communities, spoke similarly: "The right is maybe 15 years ahead of us in organizing in the black community."

Leaders from a range of GLBT organizations sat on a panel, "Building Alliances," seeming to sow seeds for partnerships in the future.

**"For more than 20 years, we've said racial justice is a gay issue," offered Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "We have to be there for other people's fights."**

Aside from the Task Force, other GLBT organizations joining NBJC for this panel were Lambda Legal; Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; the National Center for Transgender Equality; the National Center for Lesbian Rights; the Victory Fund; and the Human Rights Campaign.

By the end of the summit, held from Sept. 21-23 at the Washington Court Hotel on Capitol Hill, attendees identified three loosely defined goals for the future: finding ways to encourage more gay African Americans to be public about their sexuality, crafting ways to deal with homophobia in the black church, and combating the alarming increase in HIV among African Americans. NBJC leaders say they will present a report in coming weeks to elaborate upon the hours of discussion at this initial leadership summit, and further define agreed upon issue areas.

*For more information about the National Black Justice Coalition visit [www.nbjcoalition.org](http://www.nbjcoalition.org).*



## **GLBT rights groups criticize Roberts confirmation**

by Peter Cassels EDGE National News Editor  
Thursday Sep 29, 2005

Three of the nation's leading GLBT rights advocates have expressed their displeasure with the U.S. Senate's Sept. 29 vote of 78-22 to confirm John Roberts as chief justice of the United States.

The Lambda Legal Defense Fund called the confirmation "disappointing." **The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's comment was stronger: "beyond disappointing—outrageous."** The Human Rights Campaign said it makes the next nomination to the court critical in preserving its current balance.

"We firmly believe that a clear commitment to fairness and equality for all Americans is one important qualification for a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court, and we are disappointed that John Roberts was confirmed as chief justice without being required to demonstrate that he has that commitment," Lambda Legal Executive Director Kevin Cathcart said in a statement shortly after the Sept. 29 confirmation. "Judge Roberts was given every opportunity to do so at his confirmation hearings. Nonetheless, looking to the future, we sincerely hope that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and people with HIV will have a fair hearing before the court that he now leads."

"What was remarkable about the Roberts hearing was how prominently LGBT civil rights questions figured into the proceedings overall--it was unprecedented," Cathcart continued. "And it sets a great standard looking forward to the next nominee."

In late August, in anticipation of John Roberts's confirmation hearings, Lambda Legal delivered 30 questions to the Senate Judiciary Committee designed to determine whether Roberts had a commitment to fairness and equality for all Americans, including GLBTs and people with HIV. The substance of many of the questions were posed to Roberts during the hearings, Lambda said.

**"The U.S. Senate today voted...without reviewing materials that constitute the most critical and telling part of his record and without getting meaningful answers about his views on critical legal and constitutional principles. This is beyond disappointing--it is outrageous,"** Eleanor Acheson, the NGLTF's director of public policy and government affairs, said in a statement.

**The Bush administration refused to produce what the NGLTF called "critical documents" from Judge Roberts' tenure in the solicitor general's office, materials that have been produced in earlier judicial confirmation proceedings under both Democratic and Republican administrations.**

**"Seemingly oblivious to this precedent or the interests of the American people, the Senate failed to stand up to the administration and effectively relinquished its constitutional 'advise and consent' responsibilities,"** Acheson stated. **"The Senate compounded this default by not holding Roberts' nomination until he fully answered all the questions asked."**

**Acheson went on to say that many senators apparently voted to confirm Roberts because they perceived that it would not affect the current balance on the court--namely, replacing one hard-line conservative, William Rehnquist, with another, John Roberts. "This kind of acting and thinking undermines confidence in the Senate's trusteeship of our interests,"** she said.

"With a Chief Justice who's been given a stamp of approval by the extreme right-wing, it's critical that the next Justice preserve a fair and balanced Court," HRC President Joe Solmonese said in a statement. "Justice O'Connor was a voice of moderation and cast several votes to protect the GLBT community in recent years. Justice O'Connor's replacement should continue the model of fairness she and others have set. We join Republicans and Democrats alike in continuing to call on President Bush to nominate a justice who will keep the court balanced."



## **GLBT groups react to Miers nomination**

by Peter Cassels

EDGE National News Editor

Tuesday Oct 4, 2005

Gay rights groups are urging the U.S. Senate to thoroughly scrutinize Harriet Miers, White House counsel and President George W. Bush's nominee to replace Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor on the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Lambda Legal Defense Fund and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force weighed in following Bush's announcement of Miers' nomination, as did gay groups representing Republicans and Democrats.

Lambda Legal said Oct. 4 it is troubled by Miers' written answers, while a candidate for Dallas City Council, to a number of questions about GLBT rights. Miers said she favored equal civil rights for gays, but twice opposed repeal of the Texas sodomy statute, which was later overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Recalling that Lambda Legal defended the two gay men whose case resulted in the Supreme Court ruling, Executive Director Kevin Cathcart said, "We therefore find it very troubling that Ms. Miers would twice assert that the law should stand rather than be repealed."

Her answers to the gay rights survey 16 years ago make it even more important that the nomination be subjected to rigorous scrutiny during the confirmation process, Cathcart added. "We do not believe that her statements in 1989 alone decide whether she is qualified to a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court. At the same time, we firmly believe that a nominee is qualified only if she demonstrates the necessary legal intellect, experience and judicial temperament as well as a clear commitment to fairness and equality for all Americans. Ms. Miers' support for a criminal law that openly discriminated against gay people calls into serious question whether she possesses this commitment."

**The NGLTF criticized the White House for not producing documents that would have shed light on Chief Justice John Roberts' ideology and legal thinking during his confirmation process, and Roberts' refusal to speak candidly during questioning from senators.**

**"This time, the White House and nominee must be more forthcoming," Eleanor Acheson, NGLTF director of public policy and government affairs, said. "The stakes are simply too high."**

The Log Cabin Republicans and the National Stonewall Democrats both issued statements reacting to the nomination.

The gay Republicans were non-committal. "Log Cabin looks forward to a thorough and thoughtful review of Harriet Miers' nomination," said Patrick Guerriero, the organization's president. "Given the lack of a public record on Ms. Miers, the confirmation hearings will be a critically important part of the confirmation process. Log Cabin will carefully study Ms. Miers testimony during this confirmation process, particularly as it relates to questions of basic fairness for gay and lesbian Americans."

The gay Democrats charged that a nucleus of social and anti-gay activists was involved in the selection process. A key advisor, the organization said, was Jay Sekulow, an anti-gay activist who headed Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice. The group added that it has been reported that the Bush White House also sought the input of anti-gay organizations like the Family Research Council.

"The Bush administration has already failed American families by constructing a judicial selection process that relies on the corrupt cronyism of anti-gay activists which clouds the intent of this nomination," Eric Stern, National Stonewall Democrats executive director, said in a statement. "As White House Counsel, Harriet Miers served as the

key legal advisor on controversial legislative matters. Therefore, the White House should disclose the advice she provided the administration on key legislation such as the anti-marriage constitutional amendment and the Marriage Protection Act.”

*Peter Cassels is a former Bay Windows associate editor and recipient of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association's Excellence in Journalism award.*

# Gay City News

FROM NYC TO THE WORLD

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## Who the Heck is Harriet Miers?

Gay Advocates Sift Through A Thin, Contradictory Record

By PAUL SCHINDLER

In the spring of 1989, Harriet Miers, who is now the White House counsel and this week was nominated to the Supreme Court by President George W. Bush, was running for an at-large seat on the Dallas City Council.

Seventeen years before, the 1970 graduate of the law school at Southern Methodist University had broken an important gender barrier in Dallas' legal community by becoming the first woman attorney hired by the prestigious firm Locke Purnell Boren Laney & Neely. In 1985, Miers was the first woman to assume leadership of the Dallas Bar Association.

In seeking a seat on the City Council, Miers clearly had strong backing from Dallas' conservative business and legal establishment. Thus, it came as something of a surprise when she decided to respond to a questionnaire from the Lesbian/ Gay Political Coalition of Dallas and to appear before the group's screening panel.

According to Louise Young, a founder of the Coalition who today works in the computer industry and remains active in gay and lesbian politics, candidates for public office in Dallas first began responding to inquiries from the LGBT community in the late 1970s. Yet, more than a decade later, the number of politicians in Dallas who sought endorsements from the gay community could still "be counted on your hands," in the recollection of Brian Welker, the treasurer of the Log Cabin Republicans of Texas, who first moved to Dallas in 1992.

Miers was not among those trailblazers. In her response, she checked the line that read, "I am not seeking the endorsement of LGPC."

Still, she did respond to the questionnaire, with at least some openness on gay and AIDS issues, and did make time during her campaign to sit down with the group as well.

Miers' answer to the group's first question is arguably the most positive indication that the LGBT community has of where the nominee's head and heart are on the question of gay rights. Asked, "Do you believe that gay men and lesbians should have the same civil rights as non-gay men and women?" she responded, "Yes." What has never been spelled out, in the 16 years since that survey, is precisely what Miers meant by that answer. Were additional civil rights measures needed to protect those rights or did she believe that the gay and lesbian community was already protected?

No one this week has been able to come forward with any concrete evidence to answer that question. Yet, her survey response and Miers' willingness to participate in the LGPC process at all led Tony Perkins—the leader of the Family Research Council and one of the conservatives who has come forward in the past few days to question the nominee's fidelity to their cause—to charge that she "was helping to legitimize the drive of homosexual organizations for power and influence over our public policies."

Miers signaled an entirely different mode of thinking when asked whether as a private citizen or as a prospective member of the Dallas City Council she would support repeal of the Texas sodomy statute that was specifically tailored to outlaw same-sex conduct. Her answer to both questions was no. It would be another 14 years—only after the arrest of two gay Houston men for private consensual behavior in the apartment of one of them made the issue a cause célèbre—before the United States Supreme Court overturned that pernicious law.

Asked whether she supported city legislation to bar AIDS or sexual orientation discrimination, Miers indicated she was “willing to discuss the need and make an appropriate decision,” but only after being advised of “all the facts.” She also wrote she needed more information on the need to increase the \$550,000 Dallas then spent annually on AIDS services, though she made a point to add that she considered “the AIDS illness as a serious total community problem,” with the word “total” underlined.

The day this week that Miers was nominated to the high court, Young made public a copy of the 1989 survey along with handwritten notes made by another member of the group’s screening committee from the interview held with the nominee. At one point, Miers is quoted saying, “My personal conviction is not consistent with a homosexual lifestyle.” Young said she remembers that moment in the interview, but added that such a comment was “not unusual” for Dallas office seekers at that time.

Still, the question persists why a candidate not seeking the gay group’s endorsement and willing only to make comments that at best signaled open-mindedness rather than any real enthusiasm for gay rights bothered to go through the screening process.

“I believe she probably came at the request of her campaign manager,” Young explained in a telephone interview, noting that the political consultant who handled Miers’ campaign, identified in the press as Democrat Lorlee Bartos, had brought a number of her other clients in front of LGPC. “[Bartos] probably thought it was an opportunity for her. She may not have even known that Miers checked that she wasn’t seeking our endorsement.”

Young said she could not remember any stands Miers took publicly on gay or AIDS issues during the two years she served on the Council. Miers did not seek re-election in 1991, when the City Council changed from at-large representation to a local district format.

Nathan L. Hecht, a law firm colleague of Miers’ who has been mentioned as a sometimes romantic interest of the nominee and who is now one of the most conservative members of the Texas Supreme Court, has recalled, in published reports, that his longtime friend by 1979 had discovered a void in her life that led to her to turn to evangelical Christianity. According to Hecht, the two colleagues spent late evenings in the office discussing spiritual matters—and praying together—and Miers, raised a Catholic, in time joined a evangelical congregation of which he was already a member.

Bartos told The New York Times that when she managed Miers’ 1989 campaign the candidate confided that she had once been supporter of a woman’s right to choose but had changed her views under the influence of her adopted church, where she served on the missions committee, which takes an explicitly anti-abortion stand. Hecht recalled attending several dinners with Miers organized by anti-abortion groups in the early 1990s.

As with gay rights, however, Miers’ current thinking on choice or the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling on abortion is unknown.

Personal accounts by gay Texans indicate that Miers had good relations with gay and lesbian people she encountered in her professional life. Though Young was unable to recall Miers appointing a gay attorney, since deceased, to a public commission during her time on the City Council, as a published report has indicated, other gay men told Gay City News of their positive experiences with her.

Hector Garcia is an actor in Dallas who is a trustee of the pro-gay Texas Human Rights Foundation.

In an e-mail message, he wrote, “I know Harriet casually... My spouse of 16 years, Craig Holcomb, served on the City Council from 1983 to 1989, leaving [the] Council as Harriet was coming on. We got to know her at that time and found her intelligent, witty, and thorough. She researched issues well in order to take a position. On occasion, she changed her position when her research pointed her in a different way...and I admire that ability.”

Garcia added, “She seemed comfortable around Craig and me, always treating us warmly, with respect and humor.”

Welker, the Log Cabin official, who lives in Dallas, said three attorneys who are part of that group have told him of professional contacts with Miers in which “she was comfortable working with them, knowing that they were gay.” One

of the attorneys, Welker said, who did not want to be identified by name, “worked with Miers very closely.”

“They were unanimous in that they think she is a good person,” said Welker, who has not himself met Miers. “She has lots of integrity and is very fair-minded.”

Looking back at Miers’ meeting with the Dallas gay rights group, Welker said, “My personal perspective is that back in ‘89, she was on the cutting edge... that was pretty far forward. And the fact that she spent the time to sit down was remarkable for an establishment person.”

Subsequent to her Council days, however, Miers had no public posture on gay issues. Chris Smith, who works for the Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby of Texas in Austin, which works “pretty much exclusively on legislative matters,” said, “We have not had any past dealings with Harriet Miers.”

**National gay advocacy groups have been cautious in their response to the Miers nomination. Both Lambda Legal and the Human Rights Campaign noted, with some optimism, that Miers wrote in 1989 that gay people should have the same civil rights as others, but also worried about her opposition to repealing the Texas sodomy law. The two groups emphasized the need for greater scrutiny of her record and her positions on key issues. That theme was the exclusive focus of a written statement from Eleanor D. Acheson, the public policy director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:**

**“This time, the White House and nominee must be more forthcoming,” Acheson’s statement said in part. “This time, stonewalling by the White House and the nominee cannot be an option.”**

Andrew Sullivan, the writer and commentator who maintains a blog and is often considered a leading gay conservative, offered a more thoroughgoing critique of Miers on a key issue regarding the war on terror. After dismissing the nominee as a “flunky” and “crony” in the immediate aftermath of Bush’s announcement Monday morning, Sullivan, in a later posting, noted that Miers has been a White House insider for five years, on board at every step of the development of policy toward prisoners held by the U.S.

“The Miers appointment is completely compatible with the need to maintain the president’s approval of detainee abuse—against potential legislative checks and judicial oversight,” he wrote, adding, “The war for America’s soul continues.”



***National Gay, Lesbian Task Force to Honor Leno***

***OIA Newswire***

LOS ANGELES - The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will present its National Leadership Award to California Assemblyman Mark Leno at the 9th Annual Miami Recognition Dinner at the Loews Miami Beach Hotel, November 5.

The award will honor Leno for his role in the struggle for marriage equality for gays.

Leno made history in November 2002 when he was elected as one of the first openly-gay men to the California State Assembly. During his first term, he was successful in getting 28 bills passed by the legislature and signed into law, including laws that protect Californians from gender-based discrimination in housing and employment.

This year he became the driving force behind the California legislature's passage of a marriage equality bill, making it the first U.S. legislative body to support equal rights for lesbian and gay couples who want to enter into the civil institution of marriage. The bill, which would have ensured equal treatment under the law by allowing same-sex couples to marry, was later vetoed by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Despite the veto, Leno remains undeterred.

"While we are extremely disappointed, we have not lost faith, and our struggle continues," he said. "We will continue to fight until our relationships are treated equally and we gain access to the rights and responsibilities of marriage, so that we may create loving, committed, stable homes for ourselves and our children."

Last year, Leno received the Award of Courage from American Foundation for AIDS Research, and he was honored by the Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Association of Los Angeles at their 25th Anniversary Gala for his commitment to marriage equality.

Leno will join a star-studded list of individuals who have been honored at the Recognition Dinner, including U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton, U.S. Rep. Richard A. Gephardt, actor Sir Ian McKellen and playwright Terrence McNally. [10/6/05]

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## National gay rights religious group hopeful about acceptance

September 28, 2005

CLEVELAND --A national group of religious leaders pushing for gay rights says it's pleased that some faiths have become more accepting of gays but is concerned that the Vatican is expected to ban gay seminarians.

### **The National Religious Leadership Roundtable, a project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, ended a two-day strategy meeting in Cleveland on Tuesday with mixed emotions.**

The group condemned last week's news reports that an upcoming Vatican proposal would ban gay men from Roman Catholic seminaries even if they are celibate. But the group praised a decision of the Episcopal Church to stand behind its election of a gay bishop and the Cleveland-based United Church of Christ's vote to endorse same-sex marriages.

"Collectively, we have to feel good about progress that is being made," said Debra Weill, executive director of DignityUSA, an independent Catholic gay-rights group. "Some of the churches have taken amazing steps."

The group supported the Episcopal Church standing by its decision even as it faces criticism from its own members for approving the election of an openly gay bishop in New Hampshire.

There was similar accolades for the United Church of Christ, which earlier this year became the largest Christian denomination to back same-sex marriages.

Many gays and lesbians are hopeful and returning to religions, the activists said.

"It's almost like a great awakening, I would say," said the Rev. Jay Johnson of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at the Pacific School of Religion.

Imam Daayiee Abdullah, a gay imam from Washington, said a group for gay and lesbian Muslims called Al-Fahita has grown to eight chapters in the United States. He said the group has helped get a conversation going between gay and straight Islamic scholars.

But the Rev. James Tasker of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Bay Village said there will always be religious people who will disagree with homosexuality because of their strict interpretation of the Scripture. His is one of several local churches considering separating from the denomination because of the ordination of the gay bishop.

"As far as the Episcopal Church goes, as far as the Anglican Communion goes, there will be a split," Tasker said. "I would predict eventually there will be a split in every denomination."

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<http://www.thetaskforce.org/ourprojects/nrlr/index.cfm>

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September 29, 2005

## Pro-gay religious conference ends on both concerned, optimistic notes

**Members of a national group of religious leaders pushing for gay rights say they're pleased that some faiths have become more accepting of gays but are concerned that the Vatican is expected to bar gays from seminaries. The National Religious Leadership Roundtable, a project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, ended a two-day strategy meeting in Cleveland on Tuesday with mixed emotions.**

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## **National gay rights religious group hopeful about acceptance**

CLEVELAND A national group of religious leaders pushing for gay rights says it's pleased that some faiths have become more accepting of gays.

**But the National Religious Leadership Roundtable is concerned that the Vatican is expected to ban gay men from Roman Catholic seminaries, even if they are celibate.**

**The group is a project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. It ended a two-day strategy meeting in Cleveland yesterday.**

The group praised a decision by the Episcopal Church to stand behind the election of a gay bishop by the New Hampshire diocese. It also praised the Cleveland-based United Church of Christ's vote to endorse same-sex marriages.

The Reverend V- Gene Robinson became Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire last year. His selection has caused a major rift in the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican communion.

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