



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

June 12 – June 29, 2006

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quote of the Week:

"For more than 30 years, Eric was our movement's visionary. He pushed us to be better, to never lose sight of what our movement for liberation is all about, and to love each other, fight for each other and celebrate our community."

– Matt Foreman, executive director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
San Francisco Chronicle
June 28, 2006

Eric Rofes, 1954–2006

1. **Eric Rofes, Commentator on Gay Issues, Dies at 51**
New York Times June 29, 2006
2. **Eric Rofes — scholar, educator, gay men's health activist**
San Francisco Chronicle June 28, 2006
3. **Activists mourn passing of Eric Rofes**
The Empty Closet (Gay Alliance of Genesee Valley) June 28, 2006

Pride

4. **As gay pride hits stride, transgendered find more acceptance**
Associated Press (also USA Today) June 24, 2006
5. **Make-or-break time for gay community**
San Francisco Chronicle June 24, 2006
6. **Bay Area residents ready for S.F. gay pride parade, festival**
InsideBayArea.com June 25, 2006

Federal Marriage Amendment

7. **Gays want more from Dems on marriage; Proposed same-sex bans seen as test**
San Francisco Chronicle June 13, 2006
8. **500 Rally For Marriage in the Rain**
Gay City News June 8 - 14, 2006

Faith

9. **The left finds its voice**
Minneapolis Star-Tribune June 17, 2006
10. **Pro-Abortion, Gay Rights Groups Join to Rank States on Abortion**
LifeNews.com June 1, 2006
11. **New Mexico Has Gay Pride**
New West June 12, 2006

Other highlights

12. **Asian American LGBT Survey**
Hyphen June 28, 2006
13. **Being Gay and Bicultural**
Miami Herald June 13, 2006
14. **Florida's Top 100 Events (includes Winter Party)**
BizBashFla June/July 2006
15. **SHe Said**
PrideSource June 15, 2006
16. **SF supes condemn violence in Moscow**
Bay Area Reporter June 15, 2006
17. **Crowds respond to Aviance assault**
Gay City News June 22, 2006
18. **Leather, Laughter under the Sun**
Gay City News June 22, 2006
19. **Gay couple starts tax-protest effort**
PlanetOut.com June 23, 2006
20. **The Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX) launches with the support of over 100 organizations**
Business Wire June 28, 2006

The New York Times

Eric Rofes, Commentator on Gay Issues, Dies at 51

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Published: June 29, 2006

Eric Rofes, an educator, author and organizer whose iconoclastic writings on gay concerns preceded the AIDS epidemic and who then helped define its stages, died on Monday in Provincetown, Mass. He was 51.

The cause was not determined, said Richard Burns, executive director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center in New York.

Dr. Rofes (pronounced RO-fes) founded or led gay organizations in Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco and was a principal organizer of three national meetings on gay and lesbian issues. He wrote or edited 12 books, some of which provoked sharp debate.

Dr. Rofes became a leading exponent of the view that the AIDS emergency had passed and that gay men should cast aside the crisis mentality of the 1980's. What he called his "reconceptualization of AIDS" included not only tolerance for promiscuous gay sex, but also cautious approval.

"We value the enactment of our desires and will not always give them up in a grand gesture of sacrifice to the AIDS epidemic," he wrote in his book "Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures" (1998).

He defended unprotected sex as, at least, unavoidable.

Larry Kramer, Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile and other prominent gay writers criticized such views as dangerously irresponsible, even with a decline in AIDS cases.

Dr. Rofes's outspokenness extended to comparing gay men in the time of AIDS to survivors of Nazi death camps. He wrote what may have been the first book on gay people and suicide, and he strongly criticized AIDS service organizations and anti-AIDS activists for what he saw as dogmatism and fostering a culture of terror.

When testifying to the National Commission on AIDS in San Francisco in 1991, he wore leather chaps, vest and gloves to suggest that sexual expression took many forms.

Eric Edward Rofes was born on Aug. 31, 1954, in Brooklyn. He grew up in Commack on Long Island. Dr. Rofes graduated from Harvard in 1976.



Eric Rofes last year.

In the 70's, he was one of the so-called "Boston Mafia" who founded the Gay Community News and the Boston Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance. In an article he wrote last year for *White Crane*, a quarterly intended for gay men, he told of his joy in joining the emerging gay culture.

"Gay was good," he wrote. "Gay was very good. Gay was excellent."

In that period, he taught sixth grade in public school until he was fired for being openly gay. He then taught for five years at the Fayerweather Street School in Cambridge, Mass. He and his students published three books on young adults' perspectives, including *"The Kids' Book of Divorce: By, for and About Kids"* (1981).

In 1985, he was hired as executive director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. After moving to San Francisco in 1989, he headed the Shanti Project, an AIDS service group.

Dr. Rofes received his master's from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1995 and his doctorate in 1998. He had taught at Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif., since 1999.

His research subjects included charter schools and schoolyard bullies, and he consistently used his own experience and research to document the changes in gay culture from the time before AIDS to the disease's epidemic proportions to what is happening now.

"Dr. Rofes's contribution is unique in the continuity it provides with the political movements of the late 1970's, before the derailment that occurred in the early 1980's as a result of AIDS," *The Gay Community News* wrote in 1996.

Dr. Rofes brought detailed descriptions of his own experiences, including explicitly sexual ones, to his work, as well as stark emotions.

The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review, in reviewing *"Dry Bones"* in 1999, suggested that it "is at root not about AIDS at all, but about what AIDS took away from him and his generation, what it left him with, and what he's doing with his anger about the theft."

Surviving are his partner of 16 years, Crispin Hollings of San Francisco; a brother, Peter, of Milwaukee; and a sister, Paula Casey-Rofes.

San Francisco Chronicle

Eric Rofes - scholar, educator, gay men's health activist

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, June 28, 2006

Eric Rofes, a leading scholar, author and activist in the gay community who lived in San Francisco, died unexpectedly Monday in Provincetown, Mass., where he was on a writing sabbatical. He was 51 and appears to have died from a heart attack, friends said.

"For more than 30 years, Eric was our movement's visionary," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, where Mr. Rofes was a former board member. "He pushed us to be better, to never lose sight of what our movement for liberation is all about, and to love each other, fight for each other and celebrate our community."

Mr. Rofes led the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Center -- the largest gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organization in the world -- from 1985 to 1988 and directed San Francisco's Shanti Project for people living with AIDS from 1989 to 1993.

Mr. Rofes, who was trained as a teacher and was fired from a job teaching sixth grade in Belmont, Mass., in 1978 because he was gay, also was an associate professor of education at Humboldt State University in Arcata (Humboldt County), where he lived part time.

University faculty and administrators called his death "a colossal loss."

"He has been one of Humboldt State's best and brightest faculty members. His passion for diversity, his intellectual curiosity and his ability to promote institutional change will be profoundly missed by the campus community," said Rick Vrem, university provost and vice president of academic affairs.

Mr. Rofes was one of the first leaders to declare the AIDS crisis over in 1994, a controversial declaration made just prior to the advent of effective medicine. And he wrote two influential books on how the gay community could recover from the trauma of the epidemic, along with a host of other books and essays.

In 1991, when the National Commission on AIDS held a hearing in San Francisco, Mr. Rofes testified wearing leather chaps, vest and gloves to make the point that there were many varieties of sexual expression. He and his deputy director resigned from Shanti in 1993 after the city found the organization had not properly accounted for how it spent \$2.7 million in state and federal funding.

Mr. Rofes, who lived in the heart of San Francisco's Castro neighborhood, had since 1998 been building a gay men's health movement that expanded beyond HIV and AIDS. He organized conferences and summits that have led new health agencies to form in cities across the country and internationally.

Chris Bartlett, a Philadelphia activist who led the recent health movement with Mr. Rofes, valued his drive to plan 20 years ahead "instead of having a crisis mentality and reacting to the crisis of the day."

Mr. Rofes bristled at the idea of responding to the AIDS epidemic by dismantling the gay sex culture that blossomed in the 1970s, said Richard Burns, a close friend and executive director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of New York City.

"Eric fought against that, and remained someone who celebrated our sexual freedom, our sexual autonomy and the strong, loving community that could be built around our sexuality," Burns said.

He started a controversy when he began speaking of the trauma HIV-negative men like himself experienced because of AIDS.

"When Eric would do an analysis of the gay community or the HIV community, he didn't do it to be popular," Burns said. "He did it to find what he saw as the truth and to look for a path for us as a community to follow in order to build a healthy, loving gay community."

He believed gays and lesbians should not put enjoyment of life on hold during their struggle for rights.

"Eric always said the point of the gay liberation movement is to reject this idea and to have pleasure and sex and social justice be a core part of these struggles," said Benjamin Shepard, a New York City activist and a friend of Rofes.

Mr. Rofes grew up on the north shore of Long Island and graduated from Harvard College in 1976. He and three friends he met at the Gay Community News in Boston, the only weekly gay publication in the country at the time, would go on to lead major gay and lesbian advocacy organizations in the country.

He earned a master's degree and a doctorate from UC Berkeley and began teaching at Humboldt State in 1999. Twelve years ago, he began chronicling the lives of gay men throughout the United States in the decade preceding the AIDS epidemic. That is the book he was writing at his death.

Mr. Rofes was preceded in death by his father and a sister. He is survived by his partner of 16 years, Crispin Hollings of San Francisco; his mother, Paula Casey-Rofes of Boynton Beach, Fla.; and his brother, Peter Rofes of Milwaukee.

A Kaddish will be held today in Provincetown, and a memorial is set for 3 p.m. July 15 at the Metropolitan Community Church, 150 Eureka St., San Francisco.

In lieu of flowers, Mr. Rofes' family requests donations be made in his name to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1325 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20005, or to the Highlander Research and Education Center, 1959 Highlander Way, New Market, Tenn., 37820.



Activists mourn passing of Eric Rofes

Wednesday, 28 June 2006

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese made the following statement on the passing of Eric Rofes, a longtime leader in the movement for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality:

"Eric Rofes was a leader in the best sense of the word and his loss will be deeply felt by the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese. "Our profound sympathy goes to Eric's partner, family and friends. The mark Eric left on this world made us all better activists and his contributions will be remembered for their enormous impact on the movement."

Rofes was a prolific author, an organizer for more than 30 years and a political pioneer on HIV/AIDS and GLBT issues.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force mourns the death of Eric Rofes, a leader, activist, visionary, former board member and dear friend to the Task Force. He died yesterday as the result of a heart attack.

"For more than 30 years, Eric was our movement's visionary. He pushed us to be better, to never lose sight of what our movement for liberation is all about, and to love each other, fight for each other and celebrate our community." — Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman



As gay pride hits stride, transgendered find more acceptance

Posted 6/24/2006 7:50 PM ET

By Lisa Leff, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A granite historical marker installed in San Francisco's seedy Tenderloin District this week would be unremarkable if it didn't honor men who dressed in women's clothes and once walked the streets selling sex.

The tired travestites who clashed with police at an all-night greasy spoon here in 1966 never would have expected the city's political elite to show up for a dedication ceremony honoring their struggle as a civil rights milestone.

Yet there, at the site of the Compton's Cafeteria riot, among a crowd of unusually tall women and noticeably short men were a pair of city supervisors, the district attorney, the police chief, and a transsexual police sergeant. The California Assembly and the mayor sent proclamations

"Trans has become part of polite society," said Susan Stryker, the local historian and transgender activist who spent nine years uncovering the Compton's Cafeteria saga and making it into a documentary called *Screaming Queens*. "You can't be openly anti-trans the way you could before."

Until Stryker teased it out, the story of the Compton's Cafeteria riot remained as hidden as its main characters' true identities and carefully concealed razor stubble. Now the event is quietly challenging New York's 1969 Stonewall Riots as the dawn of the modern gay rights era.

Thursday's event reflects the mainstream's growing awareness, if not acceptance, of people who identify as "transgender." The umbrella term, which came into common usage a decade ago, covers cross-dressers, transsexuals and others whose outward appearance doesn't match their gender at birth.

While not every city is ready to celebrate the contributions of its cross-dressing citizens, San Francisco — which in 2001 extended its health insurance to cover sex reassignment surgeries for municipal employees — is no longer alone in left field. Across the nation, transgender residents are quickly winning rights and recognition they began to demand only recently.

In the last two years alone, New Mexico, Illinois and California have updated their anti-discrimination laws to protect transgender home buyers and renters; colleges in Vermont and Iowa have dedicated "gender neutral" dorm rooms; and corporations have adopted policies for helping employees stay on the job during sex changes.

"When we are getting phone calls from people who have lost their jobs, and e-mails from people who are facing violence, it's sometimes easy to think everything is still really bad," said Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality in Washington, D.C.

"But to see that people were able to stand up for themselves 40 years ago is a very wonderful reminder to us of how far we've come."

The change is especially obvious this month as cities in the United States and Europe observe gay pride events.

Although so-called "drag queens" have been a visible part of pride marches since the 1970s, gay and lesbian groups were long afraid to embrace transgender causes for fear of being tainted by the more extreme prejudice they provoked, said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"There was a time when nobody wanted to even mention transgender issues or have transgender people accompany you on lobbying visits to members of your state assembly because that was pushing the envelope too far," Foreman said. "There was a myth in our community, and frankly I was part of that myth, that including transgender people would set our cause back."

But gender identity still raises thorny questions for gay activists. For example, should women who were born as men be admitted to lesbian music festivals? But the annual pride party has become much more transgender inclusive, Keisling said.

This month, transgender people were chosen as grand marshals for pride parades in Albuquerque and Seattle, while Boston and Houston joined New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco in making trans-specific entertainment part of the official pride festivities.

"The history of transgender civil rights and Pride was that it was OK as long as it was gay men in dresses and it was about spectacle," said Chris Daley, director of the National Transgender Law Center in San Francisco. "The shift we are seeing is that the broader LGBT community has been able to embrace not only the more comfortable parts of the community, but everybody."

Observing the range of lawyers, entertainers and openly transgender professionals who were on hand as the sidewalk plaque marking the Compton's Cafeteria riot was installed, Stryker was struck by how much had changed in the last 40 years.

"Back then, you couldn't be out as trans without huge costs," she said. "To see all these people honoring a bunch of drag queens who rioted against the cops is amazing."

San Francisco Chronicle

Make-or-break time for gay community

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Saturday, June 24, 2006

This weekend's pride celebration in San Francisco caps a monumental year in the history of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community, with unprecedented advances on same-sex marriage and a constant presence in popular culture, thanks largely to two gay cowboys on the big screen.

Those issues fueled the debate on gay rights in churches, schools, courtrooms, locker rooms, boardrooms and nearly every other segment of society, and leaders in the gay and lesbian community believe they are at the pivotal point in their movement.

"I think we are facing more challenges in the coming year and decade than we've faced up to this point. It's a classic 'best of times, worst of times,' " said Kate Kendall, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. That organization will be arguing the same-sex marriage case before a California Court of Appeal next month, but Kendall believes the time of single victories has passed.

"In the next 10 years, it won't be one or two events, rulings or issues. It will be really what I think is the final contest over whether lesbian and gay and transgender people are going to be full participants in civic life," Kendall said. Her group ignited a firestorm in college basketball when a former Penn State player, represented by the center, accused her high-profile coach of discrimination and filed a federal lawsuit.

In the 12 months since people from around the world gathered in San Francisco to celebrate gay pride and reflect on the movement, the California Assembly passed a bill legalizing same-sex marriage. That was a first for a legislative body in this country -- although Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the measure.

"The bill became a focal point which enabled us, I think, to finally frame our struggle as the civil rights issue that it is," said Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, who wrote the bill. He plans to reintroduce it in December.

A few weeks ago, the U.S. Senate fell far short of passing an amendment to the federal Constitution to ban same-sex marriage. Canada and Spain, meanwhile, legalized same-sex marriage during the past year, and England created civil partnerships.

High courts in the states of Washington, New York and New Jersey heard arguments on same-sex marriage and should make rulings in the coming months. Conservative organizations in Florida and Arizona, in addition to California, were

unable to gather enough signatures to get a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage on the ballot, although six other states will vote on similar bans in November.

Beyond marriage, state courts have made rulings favorable to gay and lesbian rights on issues involving families headed by same-sex couples, especially in California. This month, the state appeals court established guidelines for giving rights to nonbiological parents, who sometimes become estranged from their children when a couple splits.

For months, the film "Brokeback Mountain" captivated the nation and later won three Academy Awards. Other gay-themed films, such as "Transamerica," also received attention. Gay and lesbian issues have constantly been in the newspaper and on television.

The visibility over the past year was unprecedented, said Neil Giuliano, who leads the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination, an organization that monitors media representations of gay and lesbian people and issues.

"The culmination of all this is that it's leading people to question their own beliefs and are willing to have a dialogue about these issues," Giuliano said.

That dialogue has had a major presence in churches. The United Church of Christ voted in July to support marriage for same-sex couples. In the past few days, Episcopalians and Presbyterians debated the role of gays and lesbians in the clergy.

In November, the Roman Catholic Church issued an instruction barring men from the priesthood who are actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies or "support the so-called gay culture."

Major gay rights organizations have focused their advocacy on churches. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is working within eight denominations to increase the number of churches that accept gays and lesbians, often called "welcoming and affirming" churches.

In those churches, membership has increased 20 percent in the past year, according to the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, who leads the program for the task force.

"It really feels like there has been a pretty significant beginning of a sea change," Voelkel said.

All of the leaders acknowledge they face much opposition to their efforts and that any mistakes they make could have profound implications.

"We're walking the edge of the knife," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the group. "We could go one way and have more advances than we ever thought possible -- and if we fall off the other way, we could be set back generations."



Bay Area residents ready for S.F. gay pride parade, festival

By Michelle Maitre and William Brand, STAFF WRITERS

June 25, 2006

SAN FRANCISCO — Thousands gathered in San Francisco's Civic Center on Saturday to mark the start of the city's annual gay pride parade and festival, with many of those saying it is as much about pride as it is about voice, family and, of course, fun.

"There's so much more to life than being gay," said Chris Teves of Pleasanton, who debuted her new line of T-shirts with slogans such as "Do Ask, Do Tell," at her Tease Inc. T-Shirt company booth in the heart of the festival.

The annual event "is about bringing people together," Teves said.

Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world are expected to participate in San Francisco's Pride activities.

The main event is today when the televised annual parade down Market Street begins at 10:30 a.m. Actress Jennifer Beals of "The L Word," Showtime's popular soap opera about a group of lesbians living in Los Angeles, is parade grand marshal.

Meanwhile, in a garage near Jack London Square in Oakland on Saturday, members of SistahsSteppin' Out were preparing a banner to place on a flatbed truck to drive in the big parade today.

"We've invited everyone in the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual) community to join us and ride," said Sistahs founder Peggy Moore. Many people don't know it but, based on the number of household couples, the largest lesbian population in the United States is in Oakland, she said.

"When you think of Oakland, you think of diversity. We're part of that diversity and uniqueness and we love Oakland," she said. Sistahs has been working with the city of Oakland on a number of events planned in the near future.

Jonathon Winters of Oakland, who is active in the University of California gay community, said he will be working at the national gay and lesbian task force booth.

"There's nothing like the San Francisco Pride celebration," Winters said. "It's the largest public event in the Bay Area, bar none. It's a lot of fun and the weather looks great this year.

"It's a big weekend — people coming for the first time, activists in the community who have been organizing for years," he said. "It's like a huge family reunion. There are people who are into politics and people who just like dancing in the street."

In Hayward, Patricia Kevena Fili, executive director of Lighthouse Community Center, which serves the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community of Southern Alameda County, said there will be a south county contingent in the parade.

The community is becoming visible in south county, she said. "We're planning Hayward Pride for Aug. 19-20."

On Saturday in San Francisco, Teves T-shirt booth was mixed in with dozens more offering everything from barbecue lunches and henna tattoos to information and resources on HIV/AIDS education and awareness and community events. A booth from a sperm bank was set up next to one with a banner declaring, "Yes, you can adopt!"

Rena Gold of Eugene, Ore., was a first-timer of the festival. "This is pretty impressive," she said. "Coming from a smaller city, it's great to come to a place where they require all these cops doing traffic control."

Shannon Braley, 21, of Danville, also was planning to attend today's march, which would be her fourth. A broadcast journalism student, she is straight but supports her friends and sending a message about the importance of bracing diversity.

"I have a great time," said Braley, who staffed a booth raising money for the California Prevention and Education Project, which provides education and advocacy for people affected by HIV/AIDS. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the first AIDS diagnosis.

Braley said events like the Pride Parade help show unity.

Similar pride events are held all over the country and welcome gays and lesbians, as well as transgendered and bisexual people. Mainstream society is becoming slowly more aware of transgendered people — an umbrella term that covers cross-dressers, transsexuals and others whose outward appearance doesn't match their gender at birth.

Thursday, San Francisco dedicated a historic marker in the Tenderloin District to commemorate a 1966 riot at Compton's Cafeteria between transvestites and police. Some of the city's political elite, including two city supervisors, the district attorney and police chief were in attendance at the dedication ceremony.

"Trans has become part of polite society," said Susan Stryker, the local historian and transgender activist who spent nine years uncovering the Compton's Cafeteria saga and making it into a documentary called "Screaming Queens." "You can't be openly anti-trans the way you could before."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

San Francisco Chronicle

Gays want more from Dems on marriage

Proposed same-sex bans seen as test

By Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

June 13, 2006

Gay and lesbian political leaders applauded Democrats in the U.S. Senate last week for defeating the proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, but they say the real test of the party's commitment to the gay community will come this fall.

The national party is simultaneously courting conservative evangelical Christian voters and planning how to defeat proposals on the November ballot in six states for constitutional bans on same-sex marriage. That has created tension between the Democratic Party and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities.

Gay Democrats supporting the outreach to conservatives insist the party does not have to turn its back on gays and lesbians to appeal to evangelical Christians.

But, during last week's debate, most Democratic senators argued only that Congress should be confronting more important issues like the economy and the Iraq war; they did not specifically address same-sex marriage. When asked later for Sen. Dianne Feinstein's position on same-sex marriage, a spokesman said Feinstein's speech was her only statement on the topic.

In the speech, Feinstein argued that the states "reign supreme" in family law and are dealing with same-sex marriage "as they see fit."

Sen. Barbara Boxer, like Feinstein a Bay Area Democrat, spent more time talking about gay families. But her speech focused on the other issues she believed the Senate should discuss.

A spokeswoman said Boxer supports full rights and benefits equal to marriage for same-sex couples, but not marriage. The spokeswoman did not respond to a question about what distinction the senator draws between marriage and the kinds of unions she supports.

"We are disappointed that more senators could not take an affirmative stand for gay and lesbian Americans," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

The national task force returned a \$5,000 donation from the Democratic National Committee after party leader Howard Dean, appearing on the ultraconservative "700 Club" television show, said the party believes marriage

should be only between a man and a woman -- even though the party's platform states that gay and lesbian families should have equal "benefits, responsibilities and protections" and that marriage should be a state issue.

Dean quickly apologized for his misstatement, but not before he was blasted by gay rights organizations who called his record on gay issues as party leader "sorely and sadly lacking." The apology mollified the organizations, but the relationship has not mended.

"We're not going to be back on track until we know what track we're on," Foreman said. "We don't know that yet. ... We need action more than words."

When the House version of a ban on same-sex marriage comes up for a vote, probably this summer, most of the Bay Area delegation will vote against it.

Every member of Congress representing the Bay Area voted against the amendment in 2004 except Richard Pombo, R-Tracy.

All 11 Democrats in the delegation told The Chronicle last week they would vote the same way this year. And 10 said they supported either equal rights or marriage for same-sex couples. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, who represents San Francisco, said she supported full marriage rights.

Gay rights leaders said a crucial test of Democratic Party support -- in addition to the marriage vote -- is how the party responds to a formal request from the National Stonewall Democrats to help fight the state amendments and encourage gays and lesbians to vote. The party has yet to budget any money for the efforts.

"They know they have to quickly move on something, and we are optimistic that it will be in the next few weeks," said John Marble, spokesman for the National Stonewall Democrats.

Constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage will be on the ballot in Idaho, Virginia, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Tennessee and South Carolina. Gay rights leaders believe they have the best chance of defeating the Wisconsin amendment.

"I can't tell you where (money) will play into this whole process. We're not there yet," said Brian Bond, executive director of the Gay & Lesbian Leadership Council for the Democratic Party.

Bond's hiring in May is another subject of contention between Democratic leaders and gay and lesbian constituents. Bond's predecessor was fired days after his partner -- Paul Yandura, a prominent Democrat -- criticized the party's lack of planning on the same-sex marriage ballot measures. Yandura told The Chronicle his firing was retaliatory. A party spokesman said the two events were unrelated.

About the effort to court evangelical voters, Bond said the party can change people's minds and gain their votes without compromising its support of gay rights.

"We should never compromise on our values, but we should never limit ourselves on who we talk to about them," Bond said.

The effort has the support of some gay and lesbian groups that have begun their own aggressive campaigns to woo religious Americans.

But leaders of conservative organizations believe the effort will fail because the interests of religious conservatives and the gay and lesbian community are "opposing forces," said Benjamin Lopez, a legislative analyst and Sacramento lobbyist for the Traditional Values Coalition.

"I don't think the Democratic Party is going to sacrifice a significant portion of its base simply to appease a few evangelicals they might win over in November and then have to deal with the long-term effect of having to win over the gay community for years to come," Lopez said.



Metro Edition

June 17, 2006 Saturday

SECTION: SOURCE; FAITH & VALUES; Pg. 14E

The left finds its voice

As the religious left rises up, joining Protestants, Catholics and Jews, it is treading carefully so as not to violate the value that long kept it silent - belief in the separation of church and state.

Pamela Miller, Staff Writer

They call themselves "spiritual progressives," and they're getting louder and prouder.

Reacting to the successes of the Christian right and reviving the faith-fueled activism that drove 1960s crusades on civil rights and the Vietnam War, more liberals are embracing the language of faith.

For decades, left-leaning activists "were so afraid of imposing their beliefs on others that we hadn't claimed a stance," said Carolyn Pressler, a professor at United Theological Seminary in New Brighton. "Suddenly it was the Christian right versus the secular left. We had abdicated."

No more. Nationwide, new books and websites are raising the flag of the religious left. In Minnesota, the trend has been evident in such arenas as the legislative debate over a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Evangelicals and Catholics who back a ban faced church activists who argued that godliness was on their side. The chorus of liberal religious voices also has been heard on poverty, immigration and taxes.

"There's no question, religious progressives are stirring," said Brian Rusche, director of the Joint Legislative Religious Coalition. "In 1988, our big lobbying 'day on the hill' drew about 200 people. Now it's a thousand."

The 2004 election was the "tipping point," said the Rev. Chris Morton of the Minnesota Council of Churches. "People said, 'We've got to find a way to articulate our faith. Silence is not the answer,'" he said.

Morton sees the religious left crystallizing into two camps - "unabashed liberals" and those from a more middle ground.

"The greatest gift evangelicals gave to mainline Protestants was the reminder that all of what we do should be grounded in faith and scripture," he said.

Voices being heard

House Speaker Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, said he's noticed a few more "liberal groups associated with the church coming forward." He treats them like any constituents, he said: "You listen, you try to balance things, and not undersell your own principles."

Sviggum said he's always acutely aware of the wide range of views within denominations like his own, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and even within congregations like his own, Vang Lutheran Church near Kenyon. "Issues around family values, especially, can be dividing," he said.

Still, a well-organized collective such as the Isaiah Group, which lobbies on behalf of social-justice causes, he said, lends power to its members' individual voices simply by being organized and articulate.

Mixing church and state?

The surge in faith-based activism on the left hasn't escaped the notice of the right.

"It's good in terms of the debate because a lot of these issues have a significant moral and philosophical dimension," said Tom Prichard, president of the Minnesota Family Council. "Church and state are separate, but religion and politics never have been. Politics is how a culture functions. At the heart of culture is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion."

Chuck Darrell, the council's communications director, said, "I welcome liberal theologians to the debate. We can learn from one another, and it legitimizes the inclusion of faith in secular debate."

What about separation of church and state?

"People of faith have to help govern," Rusche said. "The religious right tends to quote the Bible, while the left is moved by the longer narratives in which God calls people to do works of justice."

"People should use their beliefs to assess policy, but once you enter the civic realm, you have to honor religious pluralism," he said.

Rabbi Michael Lerner, author of "The Left Hand of God" and founder of the nationwide Network of Spiritual Progressives, said the religious right rose when it "addressed the spiritual void people felt when the dominant values were selfishness and materialism."

Liberals trying to keep talk of values out of the public sphere "only succeeded in keeping talk of their values out," he said. "The Constitution doesn't ban values in the public sphere. It only says the state should not impose a particular vision of God on us."

Pushing `American principles'

Jan Linn, a Lakeville pastor and author whose most recent book on faith and politics is "What's Right With the Religious Left," said, "I cannot view issues outside of my Christian perspective; it's just part of my DNA. A fundamentalist Christian may feel the same, but if he says his view is the godly view and mine is not, he's taking it too far."

As do many on the religious left, Linn cites the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as a model for Christian progressives who also value separation of church and state because "he called for the nation to live up to the Constitution, not the Bible."

"What we need is a coalition of religious traditions that protects the religious neutrality of our government and speaks to shared values based on American justice, not Christian principles," he said.

Phyllis Stenerson, 66, of Minneapolis, is among the Minnesotans who have formed a Minnesota chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. "For me, this is a natural extension," said Stenerson, a Unitarian Universalist. Income disparities between rich and poor and the war in Iraq strike her as "the result of activism and the taking of power by religious reactionaries," she said.

Stenerson has met monthly since October with like-minded people of faith. The group, now about 60 people, grows monthly, she said.

The network's goal, she said, is to lobby lawmakers and appeal to voters "to shift this country back to the middle instead of it just being a narrow, angry dialogue between far right and far left," she said.

Faith and gay rights

The rise of the religious left has strengthened the gay rights movement. In an illustration of how people of faith and secular activists are joining forces, a recent merger took place with the Institute for Welcoming Resources, an umbrella organization for Protestant "welcoming churches," and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"In the past, social justice movements might not have been successful without faith-based community organizing," said Rebecca Voelkel, a United Church of Christ pastor and the institute's executive officer. "The civil rights movement came out of African-American churches and had support from the Jewish community."

Those who believe in full equality for gay people "need to reclaim very strongly the voice of faith," she said.

Unlike the religious right, which is driven largely by evangelicals, the left is broadly ecumenical, drawing in Protestants, Catholics and Jews.

Terry Gips of Minneapolis, president of the Alliance for Sustainability, an environmental organization that works out of the Hillel Center at the University of Minnesota, said his Judaism and his activism are "completely integrated."

Gips is inspired by the Torah, which he calls "a radical document in terms of social justice and the environment," and the Jewish value of tikkun olam - "repair of the world."

"When I first moved to Minnesota, I was involved in the protests against Honeywell, and there were always people of faith involved, like nuns and [longtime activist] Marv Davidov, but they didn't necessarily embrace the spiritual aspect," he said. "Now I see people on the left going deep into their spiritual roots to find inspiration and guidance."

Solid middle ground

In the end, lawmakers may be most likely to heed the voices of those activists of faith whose stances are not suspected of echoing a particular political party's platform.

One example mentioned by both the right and left is Al Quie, Minnesota's Republican governor from 1979 to 1983. Quie's causes include some popular with the religious right - prison ministry, for instance - and others embraced by the left - opposing tax cuts and keeping troubled families together.

"There is a role for people of faith in the political arena," said Quie, 82, of Edina, a member of Minnetonka Lutheran. "As people of faith, we're not of the world, but we are in the world, so we'd better do something about making it better."

Quie is perfectly comfortable with disagreements among people of faith about social and political matters. "It brings to mind the rabbis arguing with each other, which led to the scriptures coming together," he said.

Inspiration, not ammunition

While some on the religious left are eager to go head to head with the right, others sound a note of caution.

"Using Bible verses as bullets to fire at the other side just results in a bunch of shot-up people," Pressler said. "The Bible is not an agenda, but rather a story that shapes the vision of its people. What we must move toward doing is asking, 'What is holy to us?'"

Sviggum said lawmakers are unlikely to listen long to anyone who claims God is on their side. "Instead, we should be working to be on God's side," he said.

CHRONICLING THE MOVEMENT

Books and websites linked to the religious left include:

"God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It" (Harper San Francisco, 2005) by the Rev. Jim Wallis, the Washington, D.C.-based leader of the Sojourners movement. Wallis is said to have coined the movement's battle cry: "The monologue of the religious right has ended, and a new dialogue has begun."

"Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis" (Simon & Schuster, 2005) by Jimmy Carter, former U.S. president.

"The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country From the Religious Right" (Harper San Francisco, 2006) by Michael Lerner, a California rabbi who edits Tikkun magazine.

"Why the Christian Right Is Wrong: A Minister's Manifesto For Taking Back Your Faith, Your Flag, Your Future" (Jossey-Bass, 2006) by Robin Meyers, an Oklahoma professor and United Church of Christ minister.

"The Faiths of the Founding Fathers" (Oxford University Press, 2006) by David L. Holmes, a religion professor at Virginia's College of William and Mary who argues that the founding fathers were not Christian in the conventional sense.

"What's Wrong With the Christian Right" (Brown Walker Press, 2004) and, coming out this month, "What's Right With the Religious Left" by Jan G. Linn, an author, activist and co-pastor of Spirit of Joy Christian Church in Lakeville (www.janglinn.com, www.spiritofjoymn.com).

www.sojo.net, website of the Sojourners movement, led by Wallis.

www.beliefnet.com, a nonaffiliated site that focuses on questions of faith and spirituality.

www.christianalliance.org, site of a progressive Christian movement founded in Jacksonville, Fla.

www.benetvision.org, site of Sister Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun active in the Catholic peace and justice movement.

www.tikkun.org, the website of Tikkun magazine, edited by Lerner.

www.theriversidechurchny.org, site of New York City's Riverside Church, led by the Rev. James Forbes Jr., successor to the Rev. William Sloan Coffin Jr.

The logo for LifeNews.com, featuring the text "LIFENEWS.COM" in a bold, sans-serif font. "LIFENEWS" is in white and ".COM" is in yellow, all set against a dark teal rectangular background.

Pro-Abortion, Gay Rights Groups Join to Rank States on Abortion

by Steven Ertelt

LifeNews.com Editor

June 1, 2006

Washington, DC (LifeNews.com) -- Two pro-abortion groups have joined forces with a gay rights organization to rank states on a combined scale covering both abortion and homosexual issues. Though the political issues are unrelated, the organizations released the rankings with the hope of sparking more alliances between pro-abortion and pro-homosexual groups.

In releasing the rankings, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force joined two pro-abortion groups, Ipas and the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective.

They ranked the states based on 25 laws including restrictions on abortion such as conscience clauses, promoting the morning after pill, parental involvement laws, abortion facility regulations, and encouraging abstinence.

Most of the laws the groups focused on had to do with abortion and only hate crimes laws, measures promoting heterosexual marriage, prohibition of gay stepparents, and same-sex partnerships covered the gay rights portion of the survey.

According to the rankings, New Mexico and New York share the top spot as the most pro-abortion and gay friendly states. Ohio and South Dakota are tied for last.

States faring poorly in the pro-abortion survey include Oklahoma, Indiana, Utah, Idaho, Mississippi, and North Dakota.

Those states found to be most supportive of abortion and gay rights include California, Washington, New Jersey and most of the New England states.

The rankings don't necessarily upset pro-life lawmakers who want to increase state limits on abortion until *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.

In South Dakota, pro-life Republican state Sen. Lee Schoenbeck told the Associated Press the state's low ranking was a "badge of honor."

"I'd have been disappointed if we'd finished any higher than last," he said.

Leila Hessini, a policy adviser with Ipas, told AP, "In this country, freedom depends on where we live." She claimed South Dakota's recently passed state abortion ban, "has more in common with Afghanistan than Oregon."

However, not all pro-gay groups are pro-abortion.

With the mission statement, "Human rights start when human life begins," the Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians has been advocating the pro-life perspective since 1990.

The group participates in both pro-life and pro-gay marches and rallies in their efforts to convince pro-life people that gays and lesbians can oppose abortion and to persuade the homosexual community to gays should be pro-life.

"PLAGAL has received media attention in both straight and lesbian and gay media at both national and a number of local level," the group says on its web site. "And we hope that we are doing some good."

Related web sites:

PLAGAL - <http://www.plagal.org>



New Mexico Has Gay Pride

By Alan Kleinfeld
June 12, 2006

New Mexico has made the top of another "best of" list. With the recent Forbes #1 ranking for business, it's nice to see more positive survey results. **This time we tie with New York state for tolerance, and in particular for the rights of gays and lesbians to marry. The survey was conducted in part by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

I wasn't all that surprised that our live and let live attitude has been recognized. If it's one thing New Mexico has tons of it is acceptance. In 2004, the Urban Institute Press, out of Washington, DC, ranked Albuquerque in the top 10 cities with high concentrations of same-sex households. Yes, that's right. Little ol' Albuquerque ranked 8th among cities like San Fran, Seattle, New York, Austin, Los Angeles and Atlanta.



Pride Fest, 6/11/06 Courtesy, Democracy for New Mexico

So it was no surprise to me that New Mexico got a top ranking for accepting the idea of marriages of same-sex domestic partners. Our state constitution defines marriage as an act between two people. Let's hope for the civil rights of everyone that it stays that way.

The whole gay marriage debate boggles my mind. To deny a group (any group) that right is nothing short of plain and simple discrimination. Why would anyone want to support hate? I've never figured it out. Growing up a New Mexican must have left an impression on me that you are what you are, whether that's gay, Hispanic, Indian, African American or Anglo or some combination thereof. No big deal.

In current times, what other group is not allowed to marry? White can marry black. Jews can marry gentiles. In some states (can you say Mississippi?) a man can marry his cousin. Or even all of his cousins. Ironically, it's in these states that the idea of gay marriage ranks at the bottom of the survey.

As for the religious reasons against gay marriage, I just can't give it any consideration. Until the bible beaters take everything in the bible as literally as the gay issues, then it's not worth wasting time on. That means no more pork, no more hair cuts, no more leather shoes, no more mixed race marriage, no mixed clothing and let's not forget no more lies,

murder and infidelity. Besides, nowhere in the bible does Jesus himself say homosexuality is a bad thing.

But our commander in chief (who I don't believe is as religious as he claims, but feels he has to pander to his base voters) says marriage should be between one man and one woman. Someone better tell Siegfried and Roy!

I think some people envy gays and lesbians. Most gay couples I know have stronger relationships and are more faithful than many straight couples I know. One straight female friend has been married six times. And she's not even 50 years old. She could easily fit in another half dozen and society wouldn't begrudge her. At least not too much.

Of my gay friends, they have been in longer monogamous relationships. I bet you didn't know that Raymond Burr, of Ironsides and Perry Mason fame, was gay and lived with his domestic partner for 35 years, until Burr's death in 1993. For him, it was just part of everyday life.

From an economic standpoint, Republicans (who I occasionally think of as the money grubbing party) should be pushing for gay marriage. When the boys can marry, you know they'll be shakin' some serious groove, going all out for food, décor, attire, honeymoons, and limos, not to mention all the bling. There will be more trips planned, more hotel rooms booked, more taxis used and cars rented. Can you imagine all the hers and hers Subaru wagons?

But economics aside, isn't it just fair to let whomever marry whomever? When we generally make the top of so many bad lists (drop out rate, teen pregnancy, poverty), it's not just nice to hear of our state's acceptance and tolerance. It's fabulous.

The Miami Herald

Being Gay and Bicultural

June 13, 2006 Tuesday

Being Gay and Bicultural: Panel discussion includes Sergio Baradat, the artist who created the new mambo U.S. postage stamp; Mubarak Dahir, editor of the Fort Lauderdale-based Express Gay News and **Russell Roybal, director of movement building for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force;** 7 to 9 p.m., Arts at St. John's, 4760 Pinetree Dr., Miami Beach. Free. Call 305-815-2484.

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Volume 3, Issue 3

\$5.95

Volume 3, Issue 3

June/July 2006

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EVENTS MEETINGS MARKETING STYLE STRATEGY IDEAS

DeBartolo All Star Charity Gala
at A La Carte Event Pavilion

FLORIDA'S TOP 100 EVENTS

Inside Florida's Top
Annual Events

WINTER PARTY This weeklong party, held from March 1 through 6, is a series of activities that take place at South Beach hot spots. One event, a pool party, drew 4,500 people alone. The \$1 million in proceeds are distributed to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in Miami-Dade and the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (which produces it). More than 10,000 participants from all over the world attend each year. Kersten Communications handles the public relations.



SHe Said June 15, 2006

Originally printed 6/15/2006 (Issue 1424 - Between The Lines News)

"Here's something I can't figure out. 51 percent of Americans are against gay marriage. But 71 percent of Americans don't approve of President Bush. So gay marriage is actually more popular than he is."

- *Jay Leno, June 5, 2006*

"I'm all man, so I ain't got nothing to do with that. I go by what the Bible says - man and woman."

- *Montgomery, Alabama voter Joseph Rembert Jr. on why he voted for the state's anti-gay marriage amendment, as quoted in The Decatur Daily, June 7, 2006.*

"[The June 7] vote in Alabama comes as no surprise. It wasn't until 2000 that Alabama repealed its constitutional ban on interracial marriage, 33 years after Loving v. Virginia made such discrimination unconstitutional coast-to-coast. Similarly, 50.1 percent of voters opposed a 2004 measure to remove a constitutional provision mandating segregated public schools for 'white and colored children.'"

- *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman in a June 8, 2006 statement.*

"No matter how you feel about the issue, and many of us feel deeply, a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage is utter and complete nonsense. It's an insult to the intelligence of every voter, Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative."

- *Lou Dobbs, CNN.com, June 7, 2006.*

"If it's up to me, we'll have a vote on this issue every year. I think it's important to the American people."

- *U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colorado), author of the Marriage Protection Amendment, as quoted by The New York Times, June 7, 2006.*

"The stars are in alignment for a new national orgy of rancor because Americans are angry. The government has failed to alleviate gas prices, the economic anxieties of globalization or turmoil in Iraq. Two-thirds of Americans believe their country is on the wrong track. The historical response to that plight is a witch hunt for scapegoats on whom we can project our rage and impotence. Gay people, though traditionally handy for that role, aren't the surefire scapegoats they once were; support for a constitutional marriage amendment, ABC News found, fell to 42 percent just before the Senate vote. Hence the rise of a juicier target: Hispanics. They are the new gays, the foremost political pi-ata in the election year of 2006."

- *Frank Rich, The New York Times, June 11, 2006.*

"A Senate committee on Thursday approved a constitutional amendment banning same sex marriage, apparently forgetting that our forefathers wore wigs and satin Capri pants."

- *Tina Fey on Saturday Night Live's Weekend Update, June 3, 2006.*

BAY AREA REPORTER ON THE WEB

SF supes condemn violence in Moscow

by Rob Akers

06/15/2006

San Francisco supervisors Tuesday, June 13 unanimously approved a resolution condemning the Russian government's sanctioned violence that occurred at Moscow's first gay Pride celebration last month.

Supervisor Tom Ammiano, who introduced the resolution at last week's board meeting, said he thought it was important to take a position. "When something like this happens to anyone, it happens to us all," he said.

"This thing brought back memories for me of the old days when this kind of stuff was happening here in the states. Actually, it could happen here at any time. We must always remain vigilant," he added.

As many as 100 lesbian and gay participants in Russia's first-ever gay Pride march were either arrested or injured at the May 27 event that had been officially banned by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has called upon the Bush administration to demand an apology and compensation from the Russian government. Human Rights Watch has asked for a full investigation into the incident.

Ammiano's resolution states that it is the "duty of all governments, democratically elected or otherwise, to ensure that human and civil rights, such as the freedom of assembly and expression for all citizens is protected."

"When a government employs discriminatory or homophobic rhetoric, it is taken as implicit permission by hate groups to perpetrate violence and ... this fact was evidenced by Moscow Mayor Luzhkov's portrayal of homosexuals as 'sexual deviants,'" the resolution states.

"The Russian government's contempt for the local and international LGBT community, and the rule of law, was made clear when the Moscow police stood by as a gay member of the German Parliament was assaulted along with less prominent members of the Russian LGBT community," the resolution states. "The Russian authorities chose to add insult to injury by arresting the LGBT demonstrators for assembling unlawfully after permitting neo-fascist groups to beat and kick them for an extended length of time."

The resolution concludes that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors "condemns the government-sanctioned violence and chaos which took place during Moscow's first gay Pride march, and urges the Kremlin and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov to work toward fostering a culture of tolerance in relation to the LGBT community in Russian society."

Reports from the event have been widespread.

British gay rights activist Peter Tatchell filed a first-hand account from Moscow describing what happened. "We were immediately set upon by about 100 fascist thugs and religious fanatics who began pushing, punching, and kicking us. They snatched flowers out of our hands and abused us with chants of 'No sodomy in Moscow' and 'Put the pederasts on the iron' and 'Russia is not Sodom.' We were pushed and carried like corks on a sea of fascist pushing and shoving ... Groups of roaming neo-Nazis stormed around the square looking for gays and lesbians to attack."

Antigay protesters, including skinheads, nationalists, and Orthodox followers continued to attack the participants, beating and kicking many, while throwing projectiles and chanting, "Russia free of faggots! Death to sodomites!" Skinheads punched Volker Beck, a gay member of the German parliament, and struck him with a rock, injuring his eye.

Luzhkov had formally banned the Pride parade on May 18. He stated: "If any one has any deviations from normal principles in organizing one's sexual life, those deviations should not be exhibited for all to see."

He also banned any meetings concerning the event, citing "moral" reasons.

According to reports, Luzhkov said, "I believe that such a parade is inadmissible in our country above all for moral considerations. People should not make public their deviations." He deployed 1,000 officers to enforce his order, one-quarter of the city's entire police force.

Gay rights groups in the U.S. have called for action in the aftermath of the violence.

Matt Foreman, NGLTF executive director, said, "The state-sanctioned violence that was inflicted on peaceful gay and lesbian activists in Moscow is sickening and appalling. We call upon the Bush administration to immediately condemn the attacks and to insist from the Russian government not only an apology and compensation to the victims, but a thorough investigation and a commitment to uphold the rights of gay and lesbian Russians to meet and march in peace."

Human Rights Watch documented the violence in a briefing paper released May 30, and called on Russian officials to fulfill their obligation to protect human rights by refraining from homophobic rhetoric and ensuring that freedoms of expression and assembly are upheld.

"Victims of prejudice and violence deserve full justice," said Scott Long, director of HRW's LGBT rights program, who traveled to Moscow and witnessed the events.

"The authorities in Moscow have endorsed discrimination and fostered an environment that allowed hatred to rise. Now they must investigate these attacks, and ensure that civil liberties and personal security are not hostage to homophobia," Long said.

06/15/2006



Crowds Respond to Aviance Assault

Volume 5, Number 25 | June 22 - 28, 2006

700 turn out for Saturday march from East Village to Sheridan Square

BY ANDY HUMM

In one of the largest outpourings of grassroots outrage in recent memory, hundreds of LGBT activists and their supporters marched through Greenwich Village at midday on Saturday, June 17 to reclaim the streets after the gay-bashing of drag queen star Kevin Aviance the week before.

"Whose streets?" out state Senator Tom Duane shouted as the demonstrators gathered at the corner of 14th Street and First Avenue, a block from the scene of the crime. "Our streets! The LGBT community will never be afraid!"

Just as the rally in Sheridan Square that followed a march from the East Village was getting started, Aviance himself made a dramatic appearance, speaking through teeth clenched by a wired broken jaw from the assault by four young men. Four suspects have been arrested and charged with hate crimes.

"What's up New York?" Aviance said to cheers and shouts of "We love you."

"You can't keep a good queen down," he said. "Stop the violence! Stop the hate! Love, love, love!"

Aviance said he was tired, hungry, and in pain, but proclaimed, "I'll get better."

Asked why he was so upbeat, he credited his God and "the way my mother brought me up." Aviance said he had no intention of leaving New York, calling it "the only place I could live. They can't take my spirit away."

And when asked what needed to be done to combat anti-LGBT violence, he said, "It starts with you. You have to stop the hate. I am only one person."

More than 700 turned out in support.

Tony Frankenberg, 38, a teacher at the Hunter School of Social Work, got the ball rolling with an e-mail soon after the attack on Aviance, calling for a demonstration from the East Village at 5 p.m.

"I was outraged when I heard about this," he said. "It is horrifying that this was against someone who is so much a symbol of our freedom—so fully himself. That attacks all of us."

The Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (AVP), led by executive director Clarence Patton, soon came on board and moved the action to 2 p.m. and were joined by drag leaders such as Hedda Lettuce, who keynoted the rally.

"The government is condoning our deaths," said Hedda, mounting a lamppost in Sheridan Square. "The president is telling us that we are second-class citizens and should be killed. There are a lot of stupid people who listen to George Bush. We have to learn to defend ourselves and look after each other."

Hedda also called for "embracing all our differences. We're not just gay people wearing suits and adopting children."

Pornographer Michael Lucas, who also spoke at the rally, accused mainstream gay groups of trying to represent us as "straight-acting professionals."

The attack on Aviance has also raised awareness of the need to have a strategy when attacked.

“Be careful,” Hedda said. “The best defense is really running, but if you can’t, stop, drop, and roll.”

She also attacked Mayor Michael Bloomberg for failing to appear and for giving so much money to the Republican Party.

Some political leaders were on hand, including Duane, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, and City Councilman Eric Gioa of Queens whose district is near the multiple anti-gay attacks in Astoria the same weekend as the Aviance assault. LGBT leaders in Queens are planning a public response to those attacks, which involved a baseball bat assault on one of three gay men targeted early Saturday, June 10, and the stalking of a gay man early the next morning on the N train which led to him being thrown down the stairs of an elevated station platform and kicked in the head as he lay helpless on the ground.

Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, who represents the area where Aviance was attacked, is an out lesbian and said that she has “experienced acceptance” in the district. When she speaks in local schools, she talks about “being a girl who likes girls” and hears from children who have gay or lesbian parents. She hopes that Bloomberg will revisit his decision not to enforce the comprehensive school anti-bullying law that the Council passed several years ago.

With Speaker Christine Quinn, Mendez visited Aviance in the hospital shortly after the assault.

“He’s said everyone has been so helpful,” Mendez reported. “He’s seen everyone’s humanity. That’s what this city has been about.”

Chris Cooper, a veteran gay activist and East Village resident, said, “I don’t know if anti-gay attacks happen here more than anywhere else. I hold my boyfriend’s hand here. But I’m going to start carrying pepper spray again.”

Eva Yaa Asantewaa, dance critic for this newspaper, said, “People are encouraged to do violence from the messages coming out of Washington and the churches.” She wonders if the 16-year old who was allegedly part of this attack “will ever get the help he needs” and if the cycle of violence will be broken.

Joe Kennedy, whose contributions go back to the Gay Activists Alliance in the early ‘70s, felt that when attacks like this take place, “queers have to bash back.” He said, “It is only the hardcore that gay-bashes and they have to know there are enough of us and we have the law and everyone else on our side.”

Many of the demonstrators said that they themselves have survived gay-bashings. Ted Rauch, 72, recalled anti-gay attacks on himself in the 1950s and ‘60s. Brendan Fay, 48, of the Lavender and Green Alliance, was stabbed in Williamsburg in the early 1990s, but finds his Astoria neighborhood welcoming despite the recent spate of attacks there.

Sebastian Maguire, 29, of the Metropolitan Community Church said when he complained to police about anti-gay harassment in Brooklyn and at the South Street Seaport, their reply was, “If we don’t see blood, we can’t do anything.” He said he had not experienced problems living in Jackson Heights.

Patrick Hartz, 27, said that he was out in the same area the night Aviance was attacked. “It’s my wake-up call,” he said. “We need to be more aware.”

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and a former head of AVP, said, as he marched along 13th Street, “People are not born hating gay people—they learn it.” He hopes the state will finally pass a school anti-bullying law. As a city Human Rights Commissioner, he will be asking the mayor to do more as well.

Rich Volo, 36, of BigGayApple.com, remembers coming to the East Village in 1992 and always walking in the middle of the street at night for safety, though not in recent years. He’s more on guard after the attack on Aviance, but said, “It’s nice to see a demo again.”

AVP itself grew out of the Chelsea Gay Association that formed to combat anti-gay violence in that emerging gay area in the late 1970s. With this action, Patton said, “We’re getting back to our neighborhood roots—challenging ourselves and the broader community to pay more attention to this issue.”

Officer Thomas Verni, of the NYPD’s Community Affairs Bureau, told Gay City News this week that the youngest arrestee in the Aviance case, Gerard Johnson, 16, of East 20th Street, who may be trying to mount a “gay panic defense,” is a member of the Bloods gang and “gangs are particularly homophobic.” He did not get a sense from canvassing the area where Aviance was attacked, however, that these incidents are becoming more common.



Leather, Laughter Under the Sun

Volume 5, Number 25 | June 22 - 28, 2006

BY TIM MURPHY

A blistering 90-degree sun on Sunday didn't stop Baroness Helga from sliding her sadistic self into full leather dominatrix gear and heading over to 28th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues, right in front of the gay leather bar the Eagle and the straight strip club Scores.

She was among the 7,000 to 8,000 leather/SM fetishists and onlookers who showed up for the 10th annual Folsom Street East fair, organized by the Gay Male S/M Activists (GMSMA). The laid-back street fair, named in honor of its long-running, much larger predecessor in San Francisco, was the centerpiece of Leather Pride weekend and is meant to bring the leather/SM scene and its devotees out of the dark shadows of the dungeon and into the bright, unthreatening public light of day.

"Sadism is a consensual medium," explained Baroness Helga, brandishing a riding crop. She said she worked as a dominatrix at Pandora's Box, a New York City dungeon with a secret address (call 212-242-4571 to obtain it).

"This gives me an outlet for my darker side," she said. "You can't just walk up to someone on the street and start whaling on them."

On Sunday, a wide array of participants—dressed in everything from full rubber body suits to leather chaps and harnesses to tanks and flip-flops—seemed to revel in the chance to strut their SM stuff and schmooze in an atmosphere more like a classic New York street fair than a shadowy vault outfitted with instruments of torture. (Not that there weren't plenty of them around on Sunday.)

"It's about expressing our individual colors and celebrating sexual freedom," is how Leather Pride weekend was described by Robert Valin, 42, who with his friend "CirrTone," 38, founded Leather Invasion, a group that holds leather outings in public spaces. Recent venues have included the MoMA and Ikea.

"They were great," Valin said of Ikea. "They gave us a tour and served us Swedish meatballs."

The day before Folsom Street East, about 50 Leather Invasion members had held a picnic on the Christopher Street Pier, Valin said. "Some twink came over to check us out," he said. "They were like, 'That's cool.'"

As fair-goers drank cheap beer from kegs outside the Eagle and tables offered everything from free condoms and health information to a wide array of leather/SM gear and toys, performers including gay rapper Cazwell, vocalist Sylvia Tosun, and the opulent drag queens of the Imperial Court of New York entertained the crowd. Elsewhere, boot-cleaning and rope-tying demonstrations enjoyed captive audiences.

Speakers included openly gay state Senator Tom Duane and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force head Matt Foreman. Both men saluted Leather Pride weekend as an example of the diversity and inclusiveness of New York's LGBT community.

Though the crowd was made up primarily of gay men, a fair number of women—some of them in full regalia such as Baroness Helga—were also in attendance. Perhaps because of the sweltering heat, those sporting a "leather-lite" look—shirtless chests with leather accessories like aviator caps or armbands—by far overwhelmed those rocking heavy gear.

"I have the look but I don't live the lifestyle," said Stephen Lane, 31, a Chelsea hairstylist with tattoos up his arms and leather suspenders across his brawny, furry bare chest.

In recent years, more gay men have gotten into leather/SM activities in conjunction with doing crystal meth, according to Spencer Cox, who heads the Medius Institute, a gay men's health advocacy group. "It's my impression that meth is really dividing the hardcore leather community," said Cox.

He added that a growing number of leather veterans—many of whom are in recovery—are starting to speak out strongly about the dangers of mixing meth or other hard drugs with SM activities like torture or fisting, which require strong presence of mind for people not to go too far and hurt themselves or others.

That message seemed to prevail on Sunday, when a wide swath of leather devotees professed that not only did they and their peers not do hard drugs like crystal meth, but that strongly mind-altering substances were not compatible with SM's activities or its deeper purpose.

According to Leather Invasion's Valin, S/M "is more about self-awareness and self-discovery, and more people on that path choose not to do drugs and cloud their awareness of themselves."

At the volunteers table, GMSMA member Bill Stokes, 66, a retired musician, said he has not seen a rise in the use of meth or other hard drugs among the members of GMSMA or other organized leather groups. "You can't do [the stuff we do] drug-induced," he said.

Indeed, the tone of Sunday's fair was anything but druggy, with leather veterans and neophytes alike basking in the milieu—part night out at the Eagle, part activist rally, and part community carnival—despite the searing heat.

Inside Scores, the usually straight strip club, part of the proceeds from an event with male strippers, courtesy of popular gay party promoter Daniel Nardicio, went to the beneficiaries of the fair outside—the LGBT Community Center, the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, and the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom, an SM lobbying group.

According to fair organizer John Weiss of GMSMA, there were no unhappy incidents at or around the event, which took place one weekend after beloved gay performer Kevin Aviance was brutally gay-bashed after leaving the East Village gay bar the Phoenix. Two years ago, said Weiss, someone was gay-bashed walking home from Folsom Street East. This year, the Anti-Violence Project handed out info cards at the event.

The event's proceeds, from a small suggested entry fee, was not yet fully counted, said Weiss, but it likely exceeded last year's take of nearly \$20,000. "I think it was a smash success," he said of Sunday's event. "It begs the question of why there's not more things like this throughout the year."

Perhaps there will be, given how the event tapped into the desire of many participants to engage in leather/SM not just as a mode of sexual discovery but of civic pride and community building at a time when drug-fueled Internet hookups have left many gay men feeling more isolated and alienated than ever.

Leather Invasion cofounder Valin put it this way: "It's like an urban outing for kinky people."

Learn more at gmsma.org, folsomstreeteast.org, and leatherinvasion.com.



Gay couple starts tax-protest effort

by Robert DiGiacomo
June 21, 2006

April 15 -- tax day -- was notable for what Charles Merrill didn't do.

For the second year in a row, the Edneyville, N.C., resident and his partner, Kevin Boyle, neither filed nor paid federal taxes.

Their personal tax revolt is in protest of the federal government's treatment of same-sex couples, who cannot take advantage of more than 1,000 tax and economic advantages available to married heterosexuals.

"I wanted to do something for future generations of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people," Merrill said. "I thought this would be a good way to do it because it's an everyday protest. It's not a once-a-year walk across the Brooklyn Bridge."

Merrill, 72, has created a Web site, www.gaytax.org, to spread the word about his protest and to encourage others to follow his lead.

Sean Cahill, director of the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, praised the couple for taking a stand, although he stopped short of giving an official endorsement on behalf of his group.

"What Kevin and Charles are doing is very brave and very courageous," Cahill said. "It fits into a very long tradition of civil disobedience dating at least back to Henry David Thoreau, who refused to pay taxes because he opposed the war against Mexico of 1846.

"There is a precedent of things really coming through the grassroots," Cahill said. "I certainly support what they're doing and admire and respect it. I think it's a brave thing to do because there are legal implications to not paying their taxes, but we are not endorsing it officially."

Merrill doesn't expect his David-vs.-Goliath battle to be advocated by registered nonprofit groups because of the legal implications.

"This should stay on an individual level and not be organized," he said. "The long-term goal is to recognize gay marriage in the tax code and have equal treatment for everybody and not taxation without representation."

By refusing to file or pay his taxes, what's he's really seeking is his day in court.

Anticipating an eventual courtroom showdown, Merrill is planning a November relocation to California, so that his case could be heard in the relatively liberal 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in San Francisco.

"I want to be in a more favorable jurisdiction when the IRS takes us to federal court," he said. "We wouldn't stand a chance in North Carolina or the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals in Virginia."

However, it's not a done deal that the Internal Revenue Service would sue Merrill, according to IRS spokeswoman Michelle Lamishaw.

"Most of the people who go to tax court are the taxpayers," Lamishaw said. "The IRS might prosecute somebody, but there would have to be some determination that there is some sort of criminal or civil activity. We look at everything on a case-by-case basis. We can't automatically assume that a particular course of action would happen."

Still, Merrill, who estimates his tax bill for both years at "less than \$100,000," could face some hefty fines for not paying.

For failure to file, fines begin at 5 percent per month after the first 60 days, with a maximum fine of 25 percent of the balance due, Lamishaw said. The failure-to-pay penalty starts at 0.5 percent of the balance due per month and tops out at 25 percent of the balance due.

But possible fines of up to \$25,000 for each violation don't seem to faze the affluent artist and former horse trainer, who says he's related to the founder of Merrill Lynch and is the widower of the former Evangeline Johnson, daughter of the founder of the Johnson & Johnson consumer products company.

"I'm not concerned," said Merrill, who has received several form letters from the IRS inquiring about his tax status.

As for the IRS, Lamishaw emphasized that her agency can only enforce the tax code, which is set by Congress. For that reason, the IRS is not interested in the "why" behind Merrill's nonfiling and nonpayment.

"There have been a number of tax protests over the years for any number of causes," Lamishaw said. "The IRS doesn't look at causes. As far as we know, people should pay what they owe when they owe it."

"Whatever their private reasons are for not doing it, that's their business," she said.

While Merrill's site and subsequent media coverage have started to attract a following, none of several supporters contacted by the PlanetOut Network had actually stopped paying his or her taxes.

Jim Van Riper, co-chairman of The Family Tree LGBT Community Center in Tallahassee, Fla., is taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the protest.

"I personally believe taxation without representation shouldn't be allowed," said Van Riper, who works for a government agency. "If the government is going to proceed with constitutional amendments that discriminate against people, a lot of us should be considering what's out there."

"At this point, it's curiosity," he said. If the government were to move forward with the now-becalmed constitutional marriage ban, though, "all bets are off," he said.



The Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX) launches with the support of over 100 organizations

June 28, 2006 12:00 PM US Eastern Timezone

WASHINGTON--(BUSINESS WIRE)--June 28, 2006--More than 100 subscribers representing approximately \$200 million in annual direct hotel expenditures formally announce the creation of the Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX). INMEX is an organization that researches, analyzes and distributes information about the global hospitality industry to subscribers. INMEX is a clearinghouse of information, services and best practices for consumers in the meetings market. At its launch on June 28, INMEX subscribers already represent some of the largest and most highly-respected associations and organizations in the LGBT, African-American, Latino, Academic, non-profit and labor communities.

"We can't take for granted the power of our organizations' dollars in the hospitality industry, and how those dollars affect communities of color in a very concrete way," said Julian Bond, Chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "We want to ensure that our money is spent in a way that is consistent with our organizational values and priorities. INMEX will allow all of our organizations to be more informed consumers before we book our next meetings and conventions. By giving us concrete information on potential labor disputes, strikes, boycotts or upcoming negotiations, our organizations are kept in the loop. As a result, our meetings and conventions will have a higher likelihood of success."

"As a civil rights organization committed to equality and justice, we are excited about the opportunity INMEX provides," said Matt Foreman, Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "The LGBT community spends billions of dollars every year in the hospitality industry. With INMEX, we are going to be able to make more informed choices about which hotel companies we chose to do business with. Additionally, by joining INMEX with so many key national organizations - many of which conduct several meetings a year, we can exchange ideas and suggestions on best practices and our experiences with different hotels and cities."

Cecilia Munoz, Vice President of the National Council of La Raza, agrees that the impact of their organization's meetings conventions dollars makes them a key consumer in the hospitality industry. "We have approximately 20,000 people participate in our annual conference each year. That translates into millions in economic impact to a destination city. Most of the people that make our conventions successful are the men and women who clean our rooms, serve our food and prepare our meals. We have to make sure that they are getting a fair share of our meeting dollars, as well as safe workplaces and respect. And that's the beauty of INMEX; this is a service that provides us key information about how the hotel industry treats its workers and its customers, so that we can make responsible business decisions that affect our members in a positive way."

John Wilhelm, President of the Hospitality Division of UNITE HERE, which is the Union that helped launch INMEX, sees this as an opportunity to speak to a broad audience about issues that are important to the industry in a unique and

meaningful way. "The organizations here represent the most lucrative, consistent and highly sought after customer segment in the hospitality industry. The largest global hotel corporations, like Hilton for instance, rely on meeting and convention business from groups like these for approximately one-third of their annual revenue. INMEX is a useful tool for all organizations to ensure they have the most accurate information about the hotel industry before they book meetings and events."

"The hotel industry has realized record profits in the last few years, and I think our groups are beginning to understand that global hotel corporations rely on our groups' business to sustain those profits," said John Stephens, Executive Director of the American Studies Association and Board Chair of INMEX. "Subscribers will use INMEX to help them make more informed decisions about where and how they spend their highly coveted meetings and conventions dollars. With this type of transparency and information exchange, all of us can ensure that the dollars we spend have a positive impact on hotel workers lives and the communities they live in."