Quote of the Week:

“This [the Senate’s plan to vote on Federal Marriage Amendment] is just about feeding red meat to their base, trying to re-energize the far right portion of their party….This time around, it is a measure of their desperation that they have to divert public opinion from the war, gas prices, health care -- the top issues for 98 percent of Americans.”

– Matt Foreman
San Francisco Chronicle
May 15, 2006

“I want to begin by saying that everything I know about queer activism I learned at [Boston College] Law. Put that in your admissions brochure.”

– Kara Suffredini, legislative lawyer for the Task Force
Speech at Lambda Law annual dinner, quoted in “Is BC Beyond Conservativism?”

Task Force response to Howard Dean

1. **GOP in Congress must produce to avoid defeat**
   San Francisco Chronicle May 15, 2006

2. **The Buzz: Dean misspeaks — again**
   Kansas City Star May 14, 2006

3. **Democratic National Chairman’s Latest Gay Gaffe**
   Gay City News May 18 -24, 2006

4. **Dean courts fundies, infuriates gays**
   Bay Area Reporter May 18, 2006

5. **On the Stump**
   Memphis Commercial Appeal May 15, 2006
6. **SHe Said (Matt Foreman on Dean statement)**  
PrideSource.com  May 18, 2006

7. **Sound Off! : Dean’s ‘700 Club’ dalliance was cold calculation**  
Washington Blade  May 18, 2006

8. **Party seeks to reassure angry gay Democrats**  
Washington Blade  May 19, 2006

9. **Howard Dean: How’d he screw this up?**  
The Q and O Blog  May 12, 2006

10. **Dean: We Oppose Gay Marriage Too**  
Newsmax.com  May 11, 2006

**Federal Marriage Amendment**

11. **Task Force urges all to lobby senators on Federal Marriage Amendment**  
The Empty Closet  May 18, 2006

12. **Senate panel OKs federal amendment banning gay marriage**  
Washington Blade  May 18, 2006

13. **Senate to Debate Anti-Gay Marriage Amendment**  
Boston Edge  May 18, 2006

14. **Judiciary Committee Sends Anti-Marriage Amendment to Senate Floor**  
Common Dreams Newswire  May 18, 2006

**Other highlights**

15. **Gay leadership conclave shuns the spotlight (National Policy Roundtable)**  
Washington Blade  May 18, 2006

16. **Is BC Beyond Catholicism? (Kara Suffredini)**  
The Conservative Voice  May 18, 2006

17. **Anti-gay extremism bad for Midland and Michigan**  
Midland Daily News  May 14, 2006

18. **In reversal, U.S. backs U.N. role for gay group**  
Houston Voice  May 17, 2006

19. **In N. Va. Kickoff, 100 Launch Drive Vs. November Ballot Amendment**  
Falls Church News-Press  May 18 - 24, 2006

20. **Gay activists see chance in Wisconsin**  
TheState.com (South Carolina)  May 14, 2006

21. **Focus on: 'Healing' gays: Can homosexuality be 'treated' at a clinic? Does it need to be?**  
Knoxville News Sentinel  May 16, 2006

22. **Orlando ministry says it helps heal 'unwanted homosexuality'**  
Daytona Beach News-Journal  May 14, 2006
23. Conservative women's group launches grassroots effort targeting schools that accept homosexuality  
RawStory.com  May 16, 2006

24. Va. activists launch campaign to defeat amendment  
Washington Blade  May 19, 2006

25. When discrimination is a religious virtue and civil equality an “anti-religious” attack  
Online Journal  May 17, 2006

26. Transgender equality: Boise City includes transsexuals in its discrimination policy  
Boise Weekly  May 17, 2006

27. Marriage Equality Opponents Fail In Effort to Place Discriminatory Measure on California's November 2006 Ballot  
Independent Media Center  May 15, 2006
GOP in Congress must produce to avoid defeat
Republicans looking to shore up base, woo suburban voters
Marc Sandalow, Washington Bureau Chief
Monday, May 15, 2006

Washington -- Republicans are scrambling for legislative achievements as time runs out on the congressional calendar and polls show their hold on the majority is in jeopardy.

President Bush will address immigration reform in a nationally televised speech tonight from the Oval Office, and the Senate also is to take up the issue today. Tax cuts passed by both chambers last week await the president's signature. Votes on constitutional amendments to forbid same-sex marriage and flag burning are expected in June. And a series of smaller measures aimed at suburban voters will be taken up throughout the summer.

There is some question as to whether the flurry of activity will overcome voter worries about the war in Iraq, the price of gasoline and the leadership of the Republican president. Republicans remain divided over fundamental matters such as how to balance the budget and whether to focus their efforts on their conservative base or swing voters in the suburbs.

And last week's disclosure that the National Security Agency has secretly compiled phone data on tens of millions of Americans is a reminder that unanticipated news developments could overshadow today's priorities, or roil the conventional wisdom over who might prevail in an election still 25 weeks away.

But there is a broad consensus that Republicans, facing their most dire electoral landscape in a generation, must boast of further accomplishments if they are to have a credible chance of retaining their majority in November.

"We have to produce," said Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, whose district extends into the East Bay, making him the only GOP House member with Bay Area constituents.

"What have we done on energy that produces more energy? What have we done on immigration that solves the immigration problem? What did we do on the deficit when we let spending get out of control and we ran up the deficit?" Pombo asked.

Hopes of enacting sweeping changes to Social Security and the tax code that seemed within reach after the 2004 election disappeared last year. And even more modest efforts to limit the influence of lobbyists or rein in health care costs failed to meet expectations.

Though Republicans cheered the confirmation of two conservative Supreme Court justices, many have expressed disgust with their own party's inability to reduce government spending.

"They have nothing to brag about. What are they going to say when (constituents) ask them what they've done?" asked Larry Sabato, a University of Virginia political scientist.

The election is still six months away, but the legislative calendar is much shorter. There are just 13 weeks left on the schedule, and with three-day workweeks the norm, that leaves barely 40 days for the 109th Congress -- among the most Republican Congresses in a century -- to make its mark.

Republicans hope to address some of those issues over the coming weeks.

House Majority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, said it is foolhardy to hope for a "triple bank shot" or "silver bullet" to boost the GOP's sagging approval rating, which has dipped below 30 percent in some polls.
"What we need to do every day is a simple blocking and tackling that any team goes through if they are going to win," Boehner said, focusing on cutting taxes, balancing the budget and limiting government regulations.

The tax measure to be signed by the president this week is likely to be followed by another tax cut measure in the next month, and it is already being heralded by Republicans as a major triumph that distinguishes them from Democrats, most of whom voted against the cuts.

If the Senate can work out its differences with the House and pass an immigration measure, it could be among the most substantive policy changes enacted by the 109th Congress.

**Republicans also are pushing on a pair of socially divisive issues, neither of which is likely to prevail.**

The Senate has scheduled a June 5 vote on a constitutional amendment to define marriage as exclusively between a man and woman, and it is also expected to take up a constitutional amendment making it a crime to burn the American flag. Neither is expected to win the two-thirds vote needed for passage.

The House passed both measures last year and need not act again, but may nevertheless take a vote if only to create political difficulties for Democrats representing conservative districts.

"There are a lot of people that feel very strongly about these two issues, and I think the Congress ought to take up the debate and take a vote," Boehner said last week.

Many Democrats believe the debate will backfire by motivating their party's liberal base and turning off moderate voters who want Congress to focus on priorities like Iraq and high gas prices.

"This is just about feeding red meat to their base, trying to re-energize the far right portion of their party," said Matt Foreman, president of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "This time around, it is a measure of their desperation that they have to divert public opinion from the war, gas prices, health care -- the top issues for 98 percent of Americans."

Iraq is an issue of great concern to Republican strategists, who fear that voters may voice their opposition to Bush's policies by voting against GOP congressional candidates in November.

One Republican strategist said it is critical for Bush to lay out a plan for Americans to begin leaving Iraq no later than this summer.

"Unless he does ... bar the door when it comes to Republicans this November. Unless Bush lays out a trajectory for withdrawal, I fear for Republican chances," said the strategist, who declined to be identified for fear it would anger potential clients.

Boehner also has promised a debate on the House floor over Iraq, which could be divisive. Some suspect Republicans will introduce little more than a benign measure supporting the troops, but others are urging a full debate on the merits of the U.S. involvement.

To win back core Republicans, some are urging the party to focus on pocketbook issues that have defined the party.

"They need to talk about issues that matter to average working men and women who live in the suburbs," said GOP consultant Mike Collins, who believes the party's message of lower taxes and limited government is still a winning platform.

Last week, two dozen Republicans House members introduced a suburban agenda to try to woo swing voters by offering legislation to provide tax-free saving accounts for families, boost spending to battle gangs and help government protect green spaces from development.

"This is just real stuff for real people, real problems, real solutions," said House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-III.
Political scientist Sabato said Republicans will need to adopt some substantive legislation if they are to overcome the public's pessimism over the direction of the country.

"They have so many problems weighing on one side of the scale that they have to find some things to balance the other side," Sabato said.

"They have to pass something that really matters."

Chronicle staff writer Zachary Coile contributed to this report. E-mail Marc Sandalow at msandalow@sfchronicle.com.
The Buzz: Dean misspeaks — again

Posted on Sun, May. 14, 2006

The left-leaning blogosphere and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force are denouncing Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean’s appearance last week on the Christian Broadcasting Network.

Dean acknowledged he was wrong about the party’s platform about gay marriage. Trying to reach out to evangelicals, he said the Democratic platform specifically said that “marriage is between a man and a woman.” But the platform does not define marriage this way.

Dean: "I misstated the Democratic Party’s platform, which does not say that marriage should be limited to a man and a woman, but says the party is committed to full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and leaves the issue to the states to decide."

Compiled from news services and Web sites by Keith Chrostowski. You can reach him at chrostowski@kcstar.com.
Democratic National Chairman's Latest Gay Gaffe
BY ANDY HUMM
Volume 5, Number 20 | May 18 -24, 2006
http://www.gaycitynews.com/gcn_520/democraticnationaql.html

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean, once the darling of the gay community, appeared on Reverend Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network last week to establish some common ground between his party and evangelicals and asserted, "The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says that marriage is between a man and a woman. That's what it says."

If Dean were hoping to neutralize the same-sex marriage issue, he only succeeded in drawing attention to it and setting off a firestorm of indignation from LGBT leaders, including some of his most ardent supporters. In bringing to a head gay anger over Dean's leadership on LGBT issues, some are saying it may lead to improvement.

"Governor Dean is wrong about what the Democratic platform says about marriage equality," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "Disturbingly, this is not the first time he has misrepresented this important and affirming plank."

The Task Force returned a $5,000 donation from the DNC in protest.

The 2004 Democratic platform plank reads, "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families." It continues, "In our country, marriage has been defined at the state level for 200 years, and we believe that it should continue to be defined there." The platform also rejects President George W. Bush's push for a federal constitutional to ban same-sex marriage.

In his CBN interview, Dean did add, "Where we may take exception with some religious leaders is we believe in inclusion. That everybody deserves to live with dignity and equal rights under the law is important."

But this did not placate his critics.

Jeff Soref, co-chair of NGLTF's board, who resigned from the DNC in frustration with Dean's handling of LGBT issues, said, "I don't think what he said was accidental." Soref called it "blatant pandering" and noted, "I've had conversations with him about it many times. He has been called on it before."

Soref worries that this is a "trial balloon" on the part of "somebody gearing up to insert that language into the 2008 platform"-that marriage is between a man and a woman. While Soref did not specify who might make such a move,
Democratic frontrunner Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York opposes same-sex marriage as does New York's senior senator, Charles Schumer. Soref was vice chair of the platform committee in 2004.

"Hillary and Chuck need to understand that civil unions [which they support] are not workable and not what the gay community wants," Soref said.

Ethan Geto, campaign manager in New York for Dean's 2004 bid for the White House and a longtime gay activist, had an e-mail exchange with Dean over this flap.

"I told him, 'You know gay rights issues represent a challenge to the Democratic Party because they are manipulated by the other side.

There is no way to neutralize it other than the extent to which we can persuade voters that gay-baiting is a cynical diversion by Republicans to avoid being held to account for their massive failures,'" Geto said. Distancing the party from full equality will "backfire," he added.

Dean wrote back to Geto, noting his support for inclusion in the CBN interview and adding, "It is unfortunate that some in the community would prefer to attack the Democratic Party-an act which ultimately benefits those who are supporting various anti-gay amendments to the Constitution. Hopefully, this will be resolved and we can move on to the real problems before all our rights are eroded."

Having worked closely with Dean, Geto said he is "extraordinarily comfortable with gay people" and "surrounded" with gay people at the DNC at all levels.

"His heart is in the right place," Geto said.

Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, the LGBT lobby in Washington, said, "Governor Dean's comments weren't a mere slip of the tongue, but a glaring reminder of the governor's lack of leadership on this issue." On the brink of a vote June 5 on the federal marriage amendment in the U.S. Senate, Dean "should have used the opportunity to speak out about the lack of values involved in the current constitutional debate."

Dean issued a statement in response to the flap: "I misstated the Democratic Party's platform, which does not say that marriage should be limited to a man and a woman."

Ken Sherrill, professor of political science at Hunter College and a veteran gay activist, said, "If this was a memory lapse by Dean, it is astounding given the financial support the LGBT community provided to his presidential campaign. I would not expect Howard Dean to forget what the party platform says on issues of concern to the Jewish community," noting that gays and Jews are two reliable constituencies.
Sherrill warned that since half of LGBT people have Republican parents and many are voting Democratic for the first time in their families, Dean risks alienating them.

"Everyone knows Democrats are nor as bad on LGBT issues as Republicans, but when Dean waffles, all he does is reinforce the image of his party as weak and unprincipled," he said. "That's what cost us the election of 2004."

Foreman said, "We need elected officials to take a stand for us and not just be on the defensive when asked about LGBT issues." Senator John Kerry, the Democratic nominee for president in 2004, was quick to say, "I believe marriage is between a man and a woman" virtually every time he was asked about the issue.

The Republican Party platform in 2004 "vigorously" supports the federal marriage amendment, which Kerry opposed, and would deny the "accompanying benefits" to gay couples as well. It also opposes out gays in the military.

But Foreman still believes in bipartisanship.

"You have to demand better from everyone," he said. "I truly believe that we will never advance on the backs of one party. We've got to make inroads in both parties."

HRC is also sticking with bipartisanship, despite an acknowledgement from David Smith, vice president of programs, that a Democratic takeover of both houses of Congress would benefit LGBT issues.

"We've gotten positive indications from the Democratic leadership," he said, on an agenda that includes hate crimes legislation, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, domestic partnership for federal employees, rights for immigrant partners of American citizens, extension of Social Security to same-sex partners, and domestic partner tax relief. Nevertheless, in Rhode Island where incumbent Republican Senator Lincoln Chafee, a same-sex marriage supporter, is opposed by Democrat Sheldon Whitehouse, a former attorney general and also pro-gay marriage, HRC has endorsed the Republican.

John Marble, communications director for National Stonewall Democrats, said, "This situation really presents the DNC with the opportunity to lay out their plans about how they're going to motivate the LGBT community to vote for Democrats this fall and how they're going to motivate Democrats to vote against anti-gay ballot initiatives."

Marble believes the DNC is committed to both those goals, but laments that the Michigan party failed to feature in all its 2004 literature its opposition to the state constitutional amendment that passed that year. He said Stonewall is getting a good response from state parties to the idea of doing better on that score this year.

Marble does not believe that the 2008 platform will include anything about marriage being for a man and a woman only and noted that an attempt to support "civil unions" in the 2004 platform was kept out so as not to preclude support for same-sex marriage. There are six state Democratic parties with platforms supporting gay marriage-California, Colorado, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, and Washington.
No leader has criticized Dean for appearing on the Christian Broadcasting Network and Andrew Tobias, the out gay treasurer of the DNC, said, "If by reaching out we can get 37 percent of the evangelical vote, as President Clinton did, instead of 21 percent as Senator Kerry did, we will win elections and get the country back on track."

Tobias added, "Showing evangelicals that they have a home in the Democratic Party, and that they don't 'necessarily' have to support gay marriage—even our 2004 candidate didn't—is not unwise and does not work against GLBT interests."

Damien LaVera, an out gay spokesman for the DNC, said that Brian Bond, the new director of the party's Gay and Lesbian Leadership Council, put together a conference call this week with state party leaders and HRC in the run-up to the debate on the federal anti-gay marriage amendment. He said that through Dean's State Partnership Program, directing resources to build state parties even in solid red states, the DNC is "helping these parties fight ballot initiatives and take back state legislatures which have been passing these amendments."

LaVera noted that Dean is scheduled to address the National Stonewall Democrats on June 3.
With the Senate expected to vote on the federal marriage amendment in three weeks, supporters and opponents of marriage equality have been turning up the volume. Last week, Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean also spoke out, and infuriated gays in the process.

Dean appeared on *The 700 Club* - Pat Robertson's television show - Wednesday, May 10, in an effort to court Christian evangelicals who constitute the political base of the Republican Party. While on the show, Dean claimed that the Democratic Party platform said "marriage is between a man and a woman."

But that is not in fact what the platform says.

Rather, it states, "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families." The platform, which was adopted at the 2004 convention in Boston, also supports the tradition of states defining their own marriage laws and opposes amending the U.S. Constitution to change that.

The latest misstep by Dean, coming on the heels of his decision to fire gay party outreach worker Donald Hitchcock earlier this month, has triggered a wave of angry statements from the LGBT community, many of whom saw Dean's comments as a cynical political ploy. The incident served to ratchet up the growing discontent with Dean and the party within the community.

Dean also said during his television appearance, "Everybody deserves to live with dignity and respect and equal rights under the law are important. I'm not saying we'll agree with everything between the more conservative evangelicals and Democrats but I think there's more common ground and we're willing to work with the evangelical community."

Dean, the former Vermont governor, signed the country's first civil union bill into law several years ago, after that state's high court found state law discriminated against same-sex couples.

The court ordered the state to correct the problem either by allowing same-sex marriage or creating a parallel domestic partnership status.

The Vermont legislature passed a law creating civil unions, which Dean signed.
"Is this a bald-faced lie to pander to the religious right? I'd like to give Dean the benefit of the doubt, but some Democratic insiders who have corrected Dean on this very point in the past say yes," wrote David Mariner on the blog www.outfordemocracy.org. Mariner was active in Dean's 2004 presidential campaign, which spawned the blog.

Dean's misstatement on marriage prompted the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to issue a blistering statement.

"Governor Dean's record on LGBT issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking. The Democratic Party chair should stand by and fight for the party's own platform and values," said Matt Foreman, NGLTF executive director.

Putting its money where its mouth is, Foreman returned a recent $5,000 contribution the task force received from the DNC.

"Governor Dean's comments weren't a mere slip of the tongue but a glaring reminder of the governor's lack of leadership on this issue," stated Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese in an unusually tart comment for that organization.

"As we face a Senate vote in June that threatens to put discrimination in our Constitution, Governor Dean should not only have known better but he should have used the opportunity to speak out about the lack of values involved in the current constitutional debate," Solmonese added.

In an interview with the Bay Area Reporter last Thursday, right after the story broke, Solmonese, who was in San Francisco, said he hadn't talked to Dean yet.

"People need to remember that there are certain Democrats who are leading the charge on a number of issues that are important to our community. There are individual Democrats all around the country working on behalf of us," he added.

Dean issued a clarifying statement the following day. "I misstated the Democratic Party's platform, which does not say that marriage should be limited to a man and a woman, but says the party is committed to full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and leaves the issue to the states to decide ... our party continues to oppose constitutional amendments that seek to short circuit the debate on how to achieve equality for all Americans."

Hitchcock, reached Monday, declined to comment on the incident. His partner, Paul Yandura, who wrote an open letter critical of Dean that led to Hitchcock's dismissal from the DNC, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

**Local reaction**

Locally, Democratic political leaders expressed frustration and disappointment with Dean.
"I think he's proven to be a great disappointment to many and I think the Democratic Party would benefit from leadership that eagerly embraces inclusion and equality," Assemblyman Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) told the B.A.R.

Leno said the controversies that have marked Dean's tenure as head of the party are nothing new. "I remember reading in the paper the day after Dean became chair that he said the Democrats don't support gay marriage."

Scott Wiener, a member of the San Francisco Democratic County Central Committee and co-chair of the Alice B. Toklas LGBT Democratic Club, said Dean's comments about the party platform and marriage "were very disappointing."

"While it is understandable that Chairman Dean wants to reach out to all sorts of different people to build the party's electoral base, we must never forget that central to the Democratic Party is a belief in equality and fairness," Wiener said. "The chairman of the Democratic Party should not be writing discrimination into the party platform."

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco), the House minority leader, had no comment on the incident, said her district aide Dan Bernal. Leslie Katz, chair of the San Francisco Democratic Party, did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

Mayor Gavin Newsom said Tuesday, May 16 that he wasn't surprised because marriage equality is still a hot-button topic, especially outside California.

"I confess I haven't been watching The 700 Club much lately," Newsom joked. "But seriously, has anyone ever read our party's platform? The only people who read it are opposition research folks to use it against us.

"But I suggest look how far we've come on this issue. In the gubernatorial race both Democratic candidates support same-sex marriage," Newsom said.

Supervisor Tom Ammiano, who said he generally supports Dean, said, "He really has to get his facts 'straight.'"

**Political pros**

Chicago political consultant and fundraiser Michael Bauer said he is "willing to take Dean at face value that he misspoke. I don't think that Howard Dean is the enemy. He has problems with same-sex marriage that we need to keep working on. But he is a strong advocate for gay and lesbian equality - the level of recognition we can argue over."

"Governor Dean needs to understand the perspective that the [LGBT community] views this from," Bauer said. "That includes John Kerry's opposition to gay marriage in Massachusetts and his support of a constitutional amendment to ban it in Missouri during the 2004 presidential campaign, as well as attempts to pin Kerry's loss on gays and marriage. Dean's elimination of the LGBT outreach staff at the DNC also ruffled feathers."
Bauer is calling for an ongoing dialogue within the party to lower the rhetoric and discuss the substance of the issues. "We need to keep working on convincing members of the Democratic caucus that not only should they be opposed to the federal marriage amendment, but understand why marriage equality is a fundamental right for us," he said.

Ken Sherrill, a Democratic activist and professor of political science at Hunter College in New York City, is not so generous toward Dean. "It can't be incompetence; if his memory is that bad, who would trust him to remember what he learned in medical school," he said, referring to Dean being a medical doctor. Sherrill called it "A calculated attempt by Dean to rewrite history for the purpose of neutralizing voters."

Many of the Christian evangelical viewers of The 700 Club, who voted overwhelmingly for President Bush, are growing disenchanted with the president and the Republican Party over a range of issues. Reducing their perception of Democrats as a threat might at least decrease their participation in the next election, to the Democrats' benefit, observers said.

Sherrill believes that Dean and the Democrats are "trying to get rid of a distraction [gay marriage and gays in general] to focus on the core issues that they think they can win on in the election."

The first question is whether Dean is seen as credible to those viewers. "But given some of the things that Pat Robertson has said, some of these people are awfully gullible," Sherrill added.

Sherrill predicted that Karl Rove, the president's political strategist, would run commercials of Dean's 700 Club appearance juxtaposed against his appearance at LGBT events and raise the charge of flip-flopping. "That undermines the party's credibility and reinforces the view that these people will say anything to get elected."

He noted that people often vote for candidates with which they disagree on some issues because of the personal character. The charge of flip-flopping was what in large part cost Kerry the election. "To reinforce the attitude that cost the Democrats the presidency in 2004 is one of the dumbest things imaginable," Sherrill said of Dean's comments. "It invites the message that the Democrats don't have the courage of their convictions. When the nation is at war, the voters don't want cowards in charge."

Cynthia Laird and Matthew S. Bajko contributed to this article.
On the Stump
May 15, 2006

Be careful on gay issue, Laura warns

WASHINGTON -- Some election-year advice to Republicans from a high-ranking source who has the president's ear: Don't use a proposed constitutional amendment against gay marriage as a campaign tool.

Just who is that political strategist? Laura Bush.

The first lady told "Fox News Sunday" that she thinks the American people want a debate on the issue. But, she said, "I don't think it should be used as a campaign tool, obviously."

"It requires a lot of sensitivity to just talk about the issue - a lot of sensitivity," she said.

The Senate will debate legislation that would have the Constitution define marriage as the union between a man and a woman early next month, Majority Leader Bill Frist said on CNN's "Late Edition."

Dean flubbed Democratic stance

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean didn't make any new friends in the gay community last week when he appeared on Pat Robertson's "700 Club" show on the Christian Broadcasting Network and misstated his party's position on same-sex marriage.

Dean said "the Democratic Party platform from 2004 says marriage is between a man and a woman." In fact, the platform said: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families.... (M)arriage has been defined at the state level for 200 years, and we believe it should continue to be defined there."

Dean later retracted his comment, but it was one of several episodes that have led some in the gay community to question his commitment to their issues.

"Governor Dean's record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking," said a statement from Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.
"I don't think it should be used as a campaign tool, obviously. ...It requires a lot of sensitivity to just talk about the issue - a lot of sensitivity."
- Laura Bush speaking on "Fox News Sunday" about the proposed constitutional amendment against marriage equality, as quoted by The Associated Press, May 14, 2006.

"It all smacks of the pseudo-controversy when Lynne Cheney, Mary's mother, pitched such a fit when Kerry and Edwards mentioned her daughter's lesbianism. Why was she so upset? Surely not that she was embarrassed by her daughter? She's said many times that she isn't. The only thing I can think was that the indignation was a very helpful emotion to play to the Republican base. How dare the Democrats accuse Dick Cheney's daughter of something that is true?"
- C.W. Nevius.blog on Mary Cheney's new book, as posted to SFGate.com, May 11, 2006.

"[Mary] Cheney is certainly no profile in political courage.... Still, it's awfully easy for an outsider to say what Mary Cheney should have done when family loyalty collided with personal conviction."

"Governor Dean's record on [LGBT] issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking. The Democratic Party chair should stand by and fight for the party's own platform and values. In light of Governor Dean's pandering and insulting interview today with the Christian Broadcasting Network, we have decided to return the DNC's recent $5,000 contribution to us. We do so with great sadness, knowing that the Democratic Party has long been a champion of our rights."

"[During a May 10 Christian Broadcasting Network interview] I misstated the Democratic Party's platform, which does not say that marriage should be limited to a man and a woman, but says the Party is committed to full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and leaves the issue to the states to decide."
- Howard Dean in a May 11, 2006 statement issued by the DNC.

"Howard Dean puts his foot in his mouth so often that he should open a pedicure wing in the DNC."

"It's well known that legal solutions like so-called 'civil unions' are gaining ever greater acceptance, even if, while they exclude the responsibilities of marriage, they claim the same rights. Sometimes, there is the wish even to change the definition of marriage to legalize homosexual unions, granting them the right to adopt children."
- Pope Benedict XVI urging Christians to defend traditional heterosexual marriage as a "pillar of humanity," as quoted by ABC News Online, May 14, 2006.
Sound Off!

Thursday, May 18, 2006

Dean’s ‘700 Club’ dalliance was cold calculation

Re “Dean slams gay marriage on ‘700 Club’” (news, May 12):

Howard Dean appears on the Christian Broadcasting Network to court religious voters, and the headlines scream “Howard Dean Irks Gay Groups.” Wow. Is there a better way to demonstrate empathy with the radical right than to piss off the gays? No wonder he is grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Why are we surprised that Howard Dean misrepresented the party’s position on gay marriage? During the 2004 campaign, he misrepresented his record as governor of Vermont again and again. He was a deplorable choice to lead the Democratic National Committee from day one. **Bravo to the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force for being the first gay group to call Dean on the mat.**

I can’t believe that it has taken so long for the Human Rights Campaign to recognize that Howard Dean has shown a lack of leadership on marriage equality. It isn’t some new position he adopted as DNC chair, it manifested itself the day the court challenge was filed in Vermont.

Once again, the joke is on us. We thought mainstream Democrats abandoned Howard Dean at the polls because he “supported” gay rights. Turns out they rejected him because he’s an arrogant self-promoter. Funny how clear Iowa air allowed for better vision than the smoky haze of the dance floor.
Party seeks to reassure angry gay Democrats
Dean’s ‘700 Club’ remarks trigger backlash

By LOU CHIBBARO JR
Friday, May 19, 2006

Democratic Party Treasurer Andy Tobias, the party’s highest-ranking openly gay official, sought to calm irate gay Democrats last week after party chair Howard Dean’s appearance on the Christian Broadcasting Network.

In an e-mail message to gay Democratic activists, Tobias defended Dean’s taped appearance broadcast on Pat Robertson’s “700 Club” program, saying Dean was reaching out to evangelical voters, and that could help Democrats in the congressional mid-term elections this fall.

“If by reaching out we can get 37 percent of the evangelical vote, as President Clinton did, instead of 21 percent, as Senator Kerry did, we will win elections and get the country back on track,” Tobias wrote.

He was referring to Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry’s defeat in the 2004 presidential election by a razor-thin margin to President George W. Bush. Some political observers said conservative religious voters decided the election by rejecting Kerry on grounds that the Democrats were sympathetic to gay marriage, even though Kerry himself opposed same-sex marriage in favor of civil unions.

Dean outraged many gay activists last week when he stated in the CBN interview that the Democratic Party platform called for leaving marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The platform, in fact, has no such language. Instead, it calls for providing equal rights and benefits to gay families, and it leaves the question of marriage to the states.

Dean later issued a clarification, saying he misspoke in his reference to the party platform. Like Kerry, Dean has long said he opposes same-sex marriage and favors civil unions. He has been a longtime gay rights supporter on other issues.

Dean’s dispute with gays about marriage, coming on the heels of his earlier decision to fire the Democratic National Committee’s gay outreach adviser, and his decision to abolish the DNC’s constituency desks, including the gay desk, have fueled speculation that he is positioning the party more to the center for the fall elections.

This has always been the mantra of the party’s moderate-to-conservative wing, led by the Democratic Leadership Council, a party think-tank that liberal critics have called the party’s “Republican wing.” Although Dean famously remarked that he considers himself from “the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party.”

Terry Michael, a former DNC press spokesperson who now is director of the Washington Center for Politics & Journalism, said Dean might be hurting rather than helping the Democrats’ chances of winning back Congress this year.

Michael, who is gay, said a centrist strategy often works in presidential elections but usually fails in midterm congressional elections, when far fewer voters turn out to the polls.

In low-voter turnout elections, Michael said, loyal activists of both major parties — referred to as the parties’ “base vote” — play a pivotal and often decisive role in the outcome of an election.
Tobias and DNC spokesperson Damien LaVera took issue with Michael’s conclusions. Both disputed Michael’s claim that Dean or the party were pandering to the religious right.

While noting that not all Democrats agree on the gay marriage issue, LaVera pointed to Dean’s statement in his Christian Broadcasting Network interview that the Democratic Party supports full equality under the law for all Americans. LaVera said Dean also believes he did the right thing to agree to be interviewed by the Christian Broadcasting Network.

“We can’t be a national party if we write off any block of voters, including evangelical voters,” LaVera said. “We feel the issues we stand for, such as fighting poverty, immigration reform, and the environment, appeal to evangelical voters.”

Tobias said it would have been a mistake for Dean to have declined the interview request.

“Should he have said, no I won't do it, I'm not interested in the concerns of millions of evangelical and Christian voters?” Tobias asked. “That makes no sense.”

Dean’s decision to reach out to evangelical voters on the Christian Broadcasting Network last week could backfire on the Democrats, Michael said.

“I feel he undercut the party’s strength with the center of the electorate,” he said. “The center is turned off by the Talibanic wing of the Republican Party. Andy Tobias is wrong. He is mixing up presidential elections with midterm elections. Midterm elections turn on the party base.”

Political strategists from both parties have said the GOP base is divided and demoralized over a wide range of issues plaguing its leaders, including President Bush. Between corruption scandals among GOP lobbyists, the Bush administration’s handling of Hurricane Katrina, the ongoing casualties in Iraq, and the threat of an indictment hanging over top Bush political adviser Karl Rove, the Republican Party is heading into an election in a weakened condition.

With this as a backdrop, Dean is turning off gay voters and possibly a good portion of the center of the electorate by reaching out to the evangelical conservatives, Michael and other party critics have said.

Earlier this week, Dean began calling gay rights leaders, including Human Rights Campaign head Joe Solmonese, to offer assurances that he remains committed to gay rights causes, if not to marriage equality.

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Director Matt Foreman, who reacted the loudest to Dean’s misstatement of the party platform about marriage, said Dean had not called him as of earlier this week.

But that doesn’t really matter, Foreman said.

“The point is it was said, and it has been said before,” Foreman said. “And I will bet you a million bucks it will never be said again,” he said. “And that's the important thing.”
Howard Dean: How’d he screw this up?
Posted by: McQ on Friday, May 12, 2006

Say what you will about Howard Dean (and I usually have plenty to say), he usually gets the party talking points right. So what happened here?

Democratic Party Chair Howard Dean has contradicted his party's platform and infuriated gay rights advocates by saying the party's platform states "marriage is between a man and a woman."

"The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says marriage is between a man and a woman," Dean said May 10 during a "700 Club" program hosted by conservative Christian leader Pat Robertson on his Christian Broadcasting Network.

What in the world was Howard Dean doing on the "700 Club"? Oh it's understandable that Dean would like an opportunity to recruit among the "white, mostly Christian" Republicans I'm sure he thinks watch the show, but isn't the "700 Club" like going to, oh, I don't know, Bob Jones University for a liberal?

And this isn't the first thing Dean has done to upset the gay community:

Within hours of the program's broadcast, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force denounced Dean's misrepresentation.

"Disturbingly, this is not the first time he has misrepresented this important and affirming plank [of the Democratic Party platform], and he has been asked before to correct the record and to cease making these misleading statements," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the Task Force.

"Governor Dean's record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking," Foreman said. "The Democratic Party chair should stand by and fight for the party's own platform and values."

Not only that, there have been a couple of other occurrences that haven't set well with LGBT community:

On May 2, Dean fired the Democratic Party's gay outreach adviser Donald Hitchcock. The firing came less than a week after Hitchcock's domestic partner, Paul Yandura, a longtime party activist, accused Dean of failing to take adequate steps to defend gay rights.
And:

Last year, Dean upset some gay Democratic activists by eliminating the DNC constituency desk system, including the GLBT outreach desk. He said he replaced the desk system with a new system of integrating constituency outreach work throughout all DNC offices and programs.

Not to mention:

But some gay Democrats were further angered in February, when the DNC released its "Annual Report to the Grassroots," which omitted any mention of gays or the party's gay outreach efforts. Activists pointed to a similar grassroots report issued a year earlier by Dean's predecessor, Terry McAuliffe, which included a detailed account of the party's gay outreach program.

So while Dean likes to talk the talk (and he even screwed that up), he's not been much for walking the walk according to many in the LGBT community. Dean has admitted to misstating the Democratic positon on the "700 Club":

"I misstated the Democratic Party's platform, which does not say that marriage should be limited to a man and a woman, but says the party is committed to full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and leaves the issue to the states to decide," Dean is quoted as saying in the statement.

That is, btw, as I see it as well ... it is up to the states to decide. But on the subject of Dean, I can only wonder if he was in full "pander" mode on Robertson's show. And I'm not the only one. In fact, a donation made to a gay group by the DNC was returned in protest:

[Matt] Foreman said in response to Dean's "pandering and insulting interview" with the Christian Broadcasting Network, the [National Gay & Lesbian] Task Force would return a $5,000 donation it received from the DNC.

I know many out there think Dr. Dean is the greatest thing since sliced bread when it comes to fund raising (and even that's been questioned), but continuing to misstate his party's platform, pander to those he usually denounces and alienating key Democratic constituencies doesn't seem like it would fall in the job description of the Chairman of the DNC.
Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean has angered supporters in the gay and lesbian community by stating that his party opposes gay marriage.

Appearing on the Christian Broadcasting Network’s program “The 700 Club” on Wednesday, Dean declared: “The Democratic Party platform from 2004 says that marriage is between a man and a woman. That’s what it says. I think where we may take exception with some religious leaders is that we believe in inclusion, that everybody deserves to live with dignity and respect, and that equal rights under the law are important.”

Dean, however, "misrepresented" the party platform, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which has returned a $5,000 contribution from the Democratic Party in a protest over Dean’s remarks.

According to the blog PageOneQ, the Democratic Party’s actual platform reads: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits and protection for these families. In our country, marriage has been defined at the state level for 200 years, and we believe it should continue to be defined there. We repudiate President Bush’s divisive effort to politicize the Constitution by pursuing a ‘Federal Marriage Amendment.’"

The Task Force’s executive director Matt Foreman said in a statement: "Governor Dean is wrong about what the Democratic platform says about marriage equality. Disturbingly, this is not the first time he has misrepresented this important and affirming plank, and he has been asked before to correct the record and to cease making these misleading statements."

In an effort to drum up support in the Christian community before the 2006 midterm elections, Dean also stated on the show: "One of the misconceptions about the Democratic Party is that we're godless and that we don't have any values. The truth is, we have an enormous amount in common with the Christian community, and particularly with the evangelical Christian community.

"One of the biggest things that Democrats worry about is the materialism of our country, what's on television that our kids are seeing, and the lack of spirituality. And that's something we have in common."

Dean even tried to downplay the Democratic Party’s traditional strong pro-choice stance, saying: "I think what we have in common with the evangelical community is that we ought to have a lot fewer abortions than we do. The abortions have actually gone up in the last few years. We should have far fewer abortions ... we ought to make sure that there's not just abstinence, but family planning used to get rid of abortion, and that is something that we share."

Asked if it is important for Democrats to tap into the evangelical community to win in 2006, he responded: "I think it's important, and I think it's a good idea for the Democratic Party." But if Dean’s comments were designed to garner support from evangelicals, they no doubt alienated many in the gay and lesbian community.

In his statement, Foreman said: "Governor Dean's record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues since becoming DNC chair has been sorely and sadly lacking. "In light of Governor Dean’s pandering and insulting interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, we have decided to return the DNC’s recent $5,000 contribution to us."
Task Force urges all to lobby senators on Federal Marriage Amendment
Written by NGLTF
Thursday, 18 May 2006

Matt Foreman of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has issued the following open letter:

Last week, thousands signed the petition opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA), adding their names to the growing list of Americans who are rejecting the politics of hate and division — and holding their elected officials accountable.

Today, it's time to speak even louder:

Sign up to lobby your senator.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is embarking on an unprecedented effort to coordinate grassroots meetings between our members and Senate staff. All senators have offices throughout their states, where you can schedule a meeting with your senator or their staff. We urge you to schedule an appointment.

As a citizen, you have the right and responsibility to petition your government. We urge you to do it in person.

It is critical that senators hear directly from you about your opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment. An in-person meeting with a constituent who believes in LGBT equality counters the postcards and calls with which the right wing is trying to flood Senate offices.

Receive the Local Leadership Kit.

The Task Force is here to help. When you sign up to schedule your appointment, we will e-mail you a Local Leadership Kit, providing everything you need for a successful visit including:

* advice about setting up the meeting
* a letter to leave behind outlining why the Federal Marriage Amendment is wrong
* key talking points to use in your discussion

Let us know what happens.

As our eyes and ears on the ground, what you learn from these meetings is an important part of our national strategy to fight the Federal Marriage Amendment. We ask that you report back to us, using our online form, and let us know how the meeting went.

Our movement must be more than Washington insiders — it must be people like you, in neighborhoods across the country, standing up for yourself and your rights. When real change has happened, it's always been because of action in the grassroots.

Sign up to lobby your senator today.

Thank you for making a difference in this fight.

Sincerely,
Matt Foreman
Executive Director NLGTF
Senate panel OKs federal amendment banning gay marriage
Feingold, Specter clash as measure is sent for early June Senate vote
By DYANA BAGBY | May 18, 2:13 PM

The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday approved a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage after a heated exchange between Republican committee chair Arlen Specter and Democrat Russ Feingold.

The committee voted 10-8 along party lines to send the proposed amendment to the full Senate. The full Senate is expected to vote on the measure during the week of June 5, as Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) had requested.

Specter, the Pennsylvania Republican, and Feingold, from Wisconsin, argued angrily during today's committee meeting with Feingold walking out as Specter wished him "good riddance."

"I don't need to be lectured by you. You are no more a protector of the Constitution than am I," Specter shouted after Feingold said he opposed the amendment and treasured the U.S. Constitution and then stormed out of the meeting.

"If you want to leave, good riddance," Specter said.

"I've enjoyed your lecture, too, Mr. Chairman. See ya," Feingold responded.

Feingold issued a statement condemning Specter's decision to hold the panel meeting in a small committee room where general public access is denied.

"Unfortunately, the majority leader has set a politically motivated schedule for floor consideration of this measure that the chairman felt compelled to follow, even though he says he opposes the amendment," Feingold said.

"Such a measure should be considered by the Judiciary Committee in the light of day, open to the press and the public, with cameras present so that the whole country can see what is done," he added. "I will continue to fight this mean-spirited, divisive, poorly drafted, and misguided amendment when it comes to the Senate floor."

And while Specter voted in favor of the amendment in the committee, he said he is "totally opposed" to it but felt it deserved a debate in the Senate. Feingold, who is weighing a 2008 presidential run, not only opposes the amendment but recently became only the second U.S. Senator to publicly back full marriage equality for gay couples. Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy (D) is the other.

The proposed amendment reads: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese also chastised the panel for meeting out of the general public's view and accused the GOP majority of resorting to a "shameful election-year ploy."

"Using the constitutional amendment process as a political tool is bad enough, but doing it behind closed doors is appalling. The U.S. Senate shouldn't be playing fast and loose with our most fundamental freedoms," he said.
Eldie Acheson of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force said today's vote shows lesbian and gay families are being used as "political pawns."

"It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment — so reads the right-wing playbook. And once again the Republican-led Senate, driven by its extremists, is utilizing the time and resources of the Judiciary Committee to send this offensive proposal to the full Senate," Acheson said in a statement.

HRC has also addressed rumors on Capitol Hill that the amendment might be amended on the Senate floor to delete the second sentence as a way to "attract more votes."

The second sentence of the proposed amendment could be legally interpreted to also ban civil unions and other legal protections for same-sex couples, explained HRC spokesperson Jay S. Brown.

"There is increased chatter and discussion among the authors of the amendment and the radical right on what the amendment should say — the way it's written now, it's extremely possible that it includes civil unions," he said.

National polls have shown that while many Americans do not approve of same-sex marriage, a majority do believe that gay couples are deserving of legal protections.
WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Voting along partisan lines, the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 18 sent the Federal Marriage Amendment to the full Senate for debate. The proposed constitutional amendment restricts marriage to one man and one woman.

All 10 Republicans voted for the measure, and all eight Democrats voted against it. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has committed to bring the legislation up for a full Senate vote the week of June 5.

Two of the nation’s largest GLBT advocacy groups condemned the bill.

"With gas prices hitting $3 a gallon, millions living without health care, a broken immigration system and an endless war in Iraq, Congress should be helping make America stronger, not weaker by trying to put discrimination in the United States Constitution," Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese said in a May 17 statement. "Tampering with the Constitution in order to pander to a political base is wrong, and all fair-minded Americans should call their members of Congress to speak out against the Federal Marriage Amendment."

"It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment--so reads the right-wing playbook," Eleanor Acheson, director of public policy and government affairs at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, stated May 18. "And once again the Republican-led Senate, driven by its extremists, is utilizing the time and resources of the Judiciary Committee to send this offensive proposal to the full Senate. While the committee vote was predictable, it in no way lessens the appalling fact that every majority member of the committee voted to advance a measure that would harm millions of lesbian and gay families."

The National Stonewall Democrats targeted Judiciary Committee Chair Arlen Specter, the Pennsylvania Republican, in a statement it issued after the vote.

"Specter underscores the chronic control that corrupt special interests hold over Senate Republicans," NSD Interim Executive Director Jo Wyrick said. "A Democrat-controlled Judiciary Committee would have defended the Constitution by killing this amendment on the spot. Instead, Republicans will once again use this measure to divide Americans for partisan purposes. Democrats do not believe in forcing the federal government to dictate family policy to individual states."

The NSD also said anti-gay organizations lauded Specter and other committee Republicans. "Today's party-line vote illustrates a stark contrast between [Republicans and Democrats]," said Family Research Council President Tony Perkins. "Chairman Specter is to be thanked for scheduling a vote on this most important constitutional amendment."

Introduced by Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., the proposed amendment currently reads: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

According to HRC sources, the amendment will be altered before it comes up for a floor vote to remove the second sentence to attract more votes. The far right’s increasing discontent with the Bush Administration and Congressional leadership is fueling the push for the amendment, the HRC said.
Judiciary Committee Sends Anti-Marriage Amendment to Senate Floor

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force urges senators to denounce measure as attack on gay America and real family values

WASHINGTON - May 18 -

"It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment — so reads the right-wing playbook." — Eleanor D. Acheson, Director of Public Policy & Government Affairs

The Senate Judiciary Committee today voted along partisan lines to send the Federal Marriage Amendment to the full Senate for consideration. The proposed constitutional amendment restricts marriage to a union between a man and a woman. All 10 Republicans voted for the measure, and all eight Democrats voted against it. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has committed to bring the measure up for a full Senate vote in early June. In 2004, efforts in the Senate to reach a vote on the merits of the measure failed.

Statement by Eleanor D. Acheson, Director of Public Policy & Government Affairs

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

"It's an election year, so it's time to bring on the anti-marriage amendment — so reads the right-wing playbook. And once again the Republican-led Senate, driven by its extremists, is utilizing the time and resources of the Judiciary Committee to send this offensive proposal to the full Senate. While the committee vote was predictable, it in no way lessens the appalling fact that every majority member of the committee voted to advance a measure that would harm millions of lesbian and gay families.

"The proposed amendment would write discrimination into the Constitution, reversing the whole course of American history to erase discrimination from that charter and to expand rights under it. It would weaken our First Amendment religious liberty values by enshrining one egregiously intolerant religious view of marriage, and it would undermine our federalist system.

"Once again, lesbian and gay families are being used as political pawns, and the political opportunism of those pushing for the Federal Marriage Amendment is nakedly transparent.

"We trust that a vote on this damaging and dangerous proposal will again be rejected by the full Senate in early June, or whenever it is brought up. When this measure is debated on the floor, we call upon fair-minded senators to join Sens. Chafee, Feingold, Kennedy and Wyden in denouncing it for what it is: an attack on gay America and real family values."

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Gay leadership conclave shuns the spotlight

Directors of dozens of national groups to meet this week behind closed doors

By LOU CHIBBARO JR
Thursday, May 18, 2006

Nearly all of them are accustomed to announcing their upcoming events in carefully worded news releases.

But on May 24, the executive directors of as many as 36 national organizations for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans will meet behind closed doors in a Washington, D.C., office building for the 13th biannual session of the National Policy Roundtable.

There was no public announcement about the meeting, and most gay people have never even heard of the Roundtable or its twice-yearly meetings.

“It’s not that we don’t want the community to know about something,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, which started the Roundtable meetings in 1997.

“It gives people a chance to have a frank exchange of ideas and to express their differences, if they have them, to help all of us understand what’s occurring around any given issue” within the gay rights movement, Foreman said.

According to Foreman, Roundtable sessions provide gay-movement leaders a chance to mull over issues like same-sex marriage, involvement in presidential elections, and votes on gay-related legislation in Congress and state legislatures.

Foreman and the heads of other national GLBT groups involved in the Roundtable insist that coordinated policies are not established during the private meeting, nor do the leaders dictate the direction gay groups take on a day-to-day basis. They said the Roundtable doesn’t issue policy statements on behalf of its member groups.

“It allows people to tell about what they are doing,” said H. Alexander Robinson, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, which advocates for African-American gays. “It has not come up with any binding decision.”

It’s also a way to stay a step ahead of the political competition.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for us to get together and talk about the issues we are working on,” said Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. “It’s not that there are
secrets. But every meeting we go to we talk about sensitive strategy. We don’t want our enemies to take steps to counter what we propose.”

The Task Force released a list of the heads of 36 national gay rights groups that comprise the membership roster of the Roundtable, but declined to provide the agenda set for the upcoming meeting.

“We have never discussed with the National Policy Roundtable making the meeting agendas public and cannot do so without the group’s approval,” said Task Force spokesperson Roberta Sklar.

“Generally speaking, each meeting discusses federal policy, state and local legislation and ballot initiatives, and any emerging issues or longer term plans,” Sklar said.

Sklar said about 75 percent of the Roundtable members attend any given meeting.

The upcoming meeting is expected to take place in a conference room in the Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., office building where the Task Force’s Washington, D.C., offices are located.

Who’s who in the movement

Among the other groups listed as members of the Roundtable are the Human Rights Campaign; the ACLU’s Lesbian & Gay Rights Project; the gay Catholic group Dignity USA; the National Center for Lesbian Rights; the World Congress of GLBT Jews; the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs; and Parents, Families, Friends of Lesbians & Gays.

The National Stonewall Democrats, which represents gay Democratic Party clubs throughout the country, and the gay Log Cabin Republicans are also members.

Other member groups cover issues ranging from gays in the military and youth advocacy to electing openly gay politicians to public office and gay-supportive personnel policies at major U.S. corporations. One of the smaller groups, Two Spirit Press Room, educates the news media on issues of concern to gay Native Americans.

Foreman said a number of national AIDS groups participated in the Roundtable meetings during the first few years of its existence. He said AIDS groups have since moved to “separate infrastructure and coalition and leadership” meetings of their own, and have not been regular members of the Roundtable in recent years.

He said an official with the national group AIDS Action was scheduled to attend the Roundtable meeting on May 24 to discuss issues surrounding the Ryan White CARE Act.

Foreman said a steering committee made up of member groups has set two requirements for membership in the Roundtable: an organization must be national in scope and must address policy issues.

Chamber not invited

One group that appears to fit that bill has not been invited to join the Roundtable and has not received a reply to its request for consideration, according to its leader.

Justin Nelson, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, said his group could provide an important perspective on gay-owned businesses and workplace issues to the Roundtable, but the Task Force has yet to reply to his written request for information on how to join.
Foreman said he was unaware that the NGLCC had sent such an inquiry and said he would look into the matter.

Nelson said his group lobbies Congress for passage of gay-related legislation such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which calls for banning employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. He said the group, which he said includes 24,000 member businesses, has lobbied for an immigration bill that would allow foreign-born domestic partners of American citizens the same right to live in the U.S. that foreign-born spouses of heterosexual Americans currently enjoy.

Roundtable members happened to be meeting in Washington last year when the Ford Motor Co. initially bowed to pressure from the anti-gay American Family Association and announced it would stop placing advertisements promoting Ford cars in gay publications.

Foreman said the Task Force used the Roundtable’s contact list to put together a working group of gay leaders that approached Ford and urged the company not to discontinue its ad campaign in the gay press. A short time later, Ford reversed its initial decision and said it would continue to place car ads in the gay press.

**Building trust, cooperation**

Jody Huckaby, executive director of PFLAG, said the Ford development highlighted the Roundtable’s ability to provide a mechanism for gay leaders to act quickly and in a coordinated way to fend off an anti-gay campaign against Ford by the American Family Association.

“I have found the policy discussions meaningful as PFLAG determines its work plans and assists our chapters in being more engaged in various legislative initiatives across the country,” Huckaby said.

Steve Ralls, a spokesperson for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, which represents gay service members, said Dixon Osburn, the group’s director, regularly attends Roundtable meetings.

“SLDN feels the most important aspect of the gathering is the resulting trust and cooperation that has been built among the LGBT organizations represented at the Roundtable,” Ralls said.

HRC Executive Director Joe Solmonese said the Roundtable has been helpful in coordinating efforts among gay groups to oppose the Marriage Protection Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment pending in Congress to ban same-sex marriage.

“I found them an opportunity to discuss strategy as well as policy,” Solmonese said.
Is BC Beyond Catholicism?
by Malcolm A. Kline
May 18, 2006 09:13 AM EST

When Boston College bucked an academic trend and invited a Republican U. S. Secretary of State to address its graduating class, professors on the campus were outraged. One hundred of them sent a protesting letter to the BC’s president. One actually resigned. “Maybe Condi Rice should speak at more college campuses!,” syndicated columnist Michelle Malkin observed.

“Many members of the faculty and student body have already voiced their objection to the invitation, arguing that Rice’s actions as Secretary of State are inconsistent with the broader humanistic values of the university and the Catholic and Jesuit traditions from which those values derive,” adjunct English professor Steve Almond wrote in his resignation letter. “But I am not writing this letter simply because of an objection to the war against Iraq.”

At BC, any concerns that the school’s fathers might have about the Secretary of State’s position on abortion are trumped by opposition to the war in Iraq. As we have noted in previous issues of the Campus Report, BC hosts a UNICEF chapter on its campus despite the Vatican’s suspension of support for the United Nations agency over its role in promoting abortion.

We should note that BC is one of a minority of colleges that allows the Reserve Officers Training Corps on its campus. Four-fifths of American colleges and universities are not nearly so accommodating to the U. S. Military.

BC also hosts a Lambda Law Students Association that promotes gay marriages. The Catholic Church, of course, refuses to allow its priests to perform such matrimonial ceremonies. “I want to begin by saying that everything I know about queer activism I learned at BC Law,” Kara Suffredini, a legislative lawyer at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said at Lambda Law’s annual dinner. “Put that in your admissions brochure.”

The Church views marriage as a sacrament. While the Church has always urged compassion towards homosexuals, it, nonetheless, views homosexuality as a sin.

BC plays down its Catholicism most of the time. “You know, I don’t ever remember seeing a Crucifix in the dorms or in the lecture halls,” Diane Macedo, a 2004 graduate of BC recalls. The school cafeteria serves meat on Friday during Lent.

Ironically, the detachment of the authorities at BC runs in inverse proportion to the spirituality of the student body. Thus, practicing Catholics might be unable to practice their Catholicism on a Catholic campus.


But they frequently go outside the designated religious spaces to do so. “The latest BC Senior Survey found that the two most popular places to pray on campus were ‘in my room’ and ‘outdoors’ (‘on-campus Chapels’ was third),” Rev. Fleming writes. “Follow-up interviews revealed the importance of ‘reflective spaces’ on campus.”

“The wall next to the bronze ‘Tree of Life’ fountain, the Reservoir running path, and the simple and reassuring statue of the Blessed Mother on the Bapst Library lawn were often cited as ‘places where I like to pray.’”

“CURA [Companions Understanding Reflection Awareness] prayer groups have grown from six to 24,” the Rev. Fleming notes. “In each case, the growth of these programs has been stunted not by lack of desire or hard work but by limited space.”
“BC could lose its distinctive personality causing some of the more talented in our ‘niche’ application pool to look elsewhere for an institution that knows who it is.” Conversely, BC has no problem making room for programs on its campus for which demand is far less intense.

Last year, I reported on our website that BC’s 36-year-old Black Studies program drew about as many students—30—as it did instructors—27. “When Assoc. Prof. Cynthia Young (English) came to Boston College last fall to direct the Black Studies Program, she brought with her a vision that entails a new direction, a new lecture series and, most immediately, a new name,” Stephen Gawlik reported in The Boston College Chronicle earlier this year. “Recently, the program announced that it will now be known as African and African Diaspora Studies.”

What’s in a name? Apparently, inflated attendance numbers. “Today, African and African Diaspora Studies offers some 40 courses a year on the history, culture and experience of African-Americans that enroll more than 1,200 students,” Gawlik reported.

Malcolm A. Kline is the executive director of Accuracy in Academia.
Most people believe they have strong principles and usually believe they are the most principled person they know. Most people report that faith is strong in their lives and also do not support discrimination. So how do people reconcile wanting to be fair, inclusive, kind and value-driven, while supporting discrimination and intolerance toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people?

Several years ago Gary Glenn came to Midland as a conservative political activist with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. Soon thereafter he rekindled the American Family Association (AFA) of Michigan, based in Midland. Since that time, the AFA has been on a non-stop campaign to deny basic freedoms, safety and dignity to GLBT people.

The American Family Association claims to be a "pro-family" organization but a recent study by the Policy Institute showed that the AFA and similar groups do little for families, but instead spend their time trying to outlaw abortions, stop equal rights for gay people, and boycott companies they claim support indecency. Actually according to the Policy Institute, the issues most important to families include: health insurance, jobs, poverty, domestic violence, child support and divorce. None of which are priorities for the AFA. (www.thetaskforce.org)

Here are some things the AFA doesn't want you to know. AFA opposes adding protections for gay victims of hate violence to Michigan's hate crime law. AFA wants to maintain Michigan's sodomy law, basically making it a fifteen-year felony for gay people to engage in an act of intimacy with their partners. They have launched ballot measures in cities across Michigan, which, if passed, would have allowed gay people to be fired from their jobs, simply because of their sexual orientation. AFA opposes domestic partner benefits, which in many cases are the only means for gay couples to protect their families when illness strikes. AFA supports so-called "ex-gay ministries" which destructively and irresponsibly claim to turn gay people straight. These "ministries" have no basis in psychology, and have actually lead to wrecked marriages, divided families, depression, suicide and a near zero percent success rate.

Are these the positions of mainstream value-centered Christians? I don't think so. The truth is that the AFA has a radical agenda for Michigan. Many Christians may believe homosexuality is wrong, but also believe that gays should not lose their job or be attacked; should be able to access health insurance with their life partner; and not be thrown in jail for loving another person.
If anything, discrimination and violence toward gay people is the real harm to society, not homosexuality. Using the gay community as a scapegoat for America's problems is not the answer. If the institution of marriage is in crisis, let's do things to help families.

The truth is that gay and lesbian people are very much a part of the fabric of our community. We are in every church, family, classroom, office and sports team in Midland. We may not come out because it is unsafe. It is unsafe because currently organizations like the AFA and leaders like Jerry Falwell have waged a campaign of spiritual violence on our community. Why is so much energy being wasted taking aim at gay families? Because fear is a powerful motivator and, if you can convince the public that someone is out to harm them or their children or their job or family, then they can be convinced to set aside good sense and follow those who say they will protect them from the trumped-up fear image that has been created.

Stop and ask yourself -- just because progress on gay and lesbian equality seems to be all around us, does that really mean it is a threat? Can anyone really say that by allowing gay youth in schools to have a club of their own so they can feel supported, that they are pushing a "gay agenda" on society as the AFA contends? If a gay couple holds hands in public, are they flaunting something or are you just not accustomed to same-sex intimacy? If gay families pay taxes and obey the law and want the right to receive survivor benefits from social security when their partner dies, are they attacking the institution of marriage? Absolutely not.

*Jackie Anderson is a resident of Hope, Mich. She is board chairman of the Triangle Foundation.*
In reversal, U.S. backs U.N. role for gay group
But overall vote still goes against consultative status
By JOSHUA LYNSEN | May 17, 6:19 PM

United Nations member states again voted to deny a gay group the ability to officially influence proceedings, but the United States is once again backing the group's effort to be included, according an international human rights organization.

Mark Bromley, a spokesman for Global Rights, said United Nations members voted May 16 to deny a German gay organization's bid to obtain consultative status. The status is required for any organization hoping to speak at United Nations meetings, or lobby member nations.

"We were pretty outraged," Bromley said, "as were a lot of other organizations."

Bromley said that Global Rights, which has consultative status, assisted the German group with its bid to join.

Global Rights supports gay rights, but also advocates for other human-rights issues. Bromley said that no gay-focused organizations have yet received consultative status from the United Nations, despite several attempts in recent years.

An estimated 3,100 organizations have consultative status at the United Nations. Those groups primarily participate in social and economic discussions.

More votes were expected later this week for other gay groups seeking consultative status.

Bromley said the remaining applications — from the International Lesbian & Gay Association's European office, and a Canadian organization — likely also would be denied.

"If the German group was rejected," he said, "the ILGA group [and the Canadian group are] almost certainly going to be rejected."

Bush administration now supportive

According to Global Rights, nine nations voted to reject the German group's application. Opponents included China and Iran.

France and the U.S. were among the seven nations that voted to support the application. Two countries — India and Turkey — abstained.

Bromley said it was significant that U.S. officials voted May 16 to support the German group's application. In a vote earlier this year, U.S. officials opposed applications by gay-focused groups.
"I think that sort of the big change from our perspective — and the small victory — is that the U.S. government changed its vote," he said. "That's a real step forward."

Following the January vote, a coalition of 40 organizations, led by the Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights Watch, the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, urged Bush administration officials to support future bids by gay groups.
Exuding confidence that “the tide may be turning,” that there might be a unique historic opportunity to reverse a national trend, organizers gearing up to oppose passage of the Marshall-Newman Constitutional Amendment measure on the November ballot held a Northern Virginia kick-off rally Monday night that drew one hundred activists. Del. Jim Scott of Falls Church was one of three state delegates who spoke to the lively rally, urging on the organizing effort.

The proposed amendment to the Virginia state constitution was certified for the ballot by a vote of the state legislature in January. Labeled the “marriage amendment” by its Republican sponsors, it actually reaches far beyond the issue of marriage to make virtually all contractual relations, including business partnerships, between two non-married persons illegal. Moreover, it is superfluous as laws are already on the books in Virginia addressing the matter of marriage as limited to a man and a woman.

Democrats, including Scott, Del. Adam Ebbin and Del. Brian Moran speaking at Monday’s event, call the amendment a “Republican Get Out the Vote” ploy for November’s statewide elections. But, as Clare Guthrie Gastanaga, the campaign manager for the Commonwealth Coalition, a broad based alliance created to defeat the amendment, stated, given the shifting political trends in Virginia and nationally, “this could be the right moment in time to make history, to catch the wave.”

Similar measures have already passed in 19 other states, but Scott said Tuesday that if the trend could be reversed in Virginia, “It would set an enormous precedent for the entire nation.”

Gastanaga quoted former U.S. Senator and Virginia Governor Chuck Robb, who called the measure “a declaration of intolerance.” She noted that Republicans, themselves, are having a problem with it, citing the refusal of the New Kent County Republican committee to endorse its passage.

She pointed to polls that show 80% of Virginians think “there are more important things than this” which their elected officials should be focused on and that 57% of Virginians support some form of civil unions for persons of the same sex.

(The same night as the rally Monday, the 8th District Committee of the Virginia Democratic Party, meeting at the Falls Church Community Center, adopted a resolution calling for the defeat of the amendment, and that was followed by a unanimous vote in support of the same position by the Falls Church City Democratic Committee the next night. The FCCDC also voted to forward its resolution to the Falls Church City Council).

Matt Foreman, the New York-based executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, spoke at Monday’s meeting, held in the sanctuary of the Metropolitan Community Church of Fairfax in downtown Fairfax City, saying that the amendment tells all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people that “you are not fully human,” and puts that into the state’s constitution.

“By creating the Bill of Rights, the founding fathers knew that issues pertaining to fundamental rights cannot be put to a popular vote,” he said. “In this case, it is an overwhelming majority pitted against a very small minority of persons whose fundamental rights those who cheat, steal and use our lives to raise money would deny us.”

“Most people,” he said, “don’t even think about this issue. They’re reaction is purely visceral. But even a 30 second face-to-face engagement about its implications flips two thirds of them.”
“Everyone who talks to a friend makes a difference,” Gastanaga said. “Silence is not an option for me as a straight person.”

Monday’s event was organized by Equality Fairfax, an affiliate of Equality Virginia, which can be reached at “equalityfairfax.org.”

Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, who has said publicly that he will vote against passage of the amendment, determined that the wording of the entire amendment, instead of an abbreviated version, will appear on the November ballot.

That wording includes the following, “The Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance or effects of marriage. Nor shall this Commonwealth or its political subdivisions create or recognize another union, partnership or other legal status to which is assigned the rights, benefits, obligations, qualities or effects of marriage.”

As noted Monday, this language jeopardizes all contractual relations, including business partnerships and elderly persons sharing living quarters, between two persons who are not legally married, although proponents of the measure deny this.

The Marshall-Newman amendment is named for its Virginia House and Senate primary sponsors, Republicans Del. Robert G. Marshall of Manassas and Sen. Stephen D. Newman of Lynchburg. As required by Virginia law, the measure passed the Republican-controlled legislature in two successive years to qualify for inclusion on the general election ballot this November.
Gay activists see chance in Wisconsin
State has ballot proposal banning gay marriage
Knight Ridder Newspapers
Posted on Sun, May. 14, 2006

WASHINGTON — In an election year roiled by Iraq, immigration and gas prices, gay marriage might seem like a second-tier issue.

But next month, the U.S. Senate will consider a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. And this fall, voters in at least a half-dozen states — including South Carolina, on Nov. 7 — will decide ballot proposals banning gay marriage.

Wisconsin is emerging as the main event. Gay rights supporters have never defeated such a referendum and are convinced Wisconsin is their best shot at ending that cross-country losing streak. Their success — in the ultimate swing state — would give the contest national significance.

In a recent speech here to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Senate Democrat Russ Feingold vowed to help defeat the Wisconsin referendum, declaring that marriage “is not always and should not always be between a man and a woman.”

Along with his state, Feingold might provide his own case study in the politics of gay marriage.

Like most Democrats, he opposes a constitutional amendment defining marriage, an amendment that is expected to fail in the Senate next month. But he has gone a significant step further and declared his personal belief that gays and lesbians should be able to marry. He is one of only four U.S. senators — and the only potential 2008 presidential candidate — to do so.

Opponents of gay marriage say all it would take is another controversial judicial ruling to stoke feelings on the issue, and court cases are pending.

The issue “ebbs and flows with what’s happening in the courts and what’s happening in an election,” said Julaine Appling, coordinator of the Wisconsin Coalition for Traditional Marriage.

The view on both sides is that supporters of the marriage ban have started out ahead in the battle for public opinion. But gay rights groups and allies have organized early and avidly through a group called Fair Wisconsin, which claims 6,000 volunteers.

“It really is a state (where) for many reasons, the stars are aligning,” said Carrie Evans of the Human Rights Campaign, a leading national gay rights group.

She cites the early mobilizing as well as the vocal support of prominent Democrats, which has sometimes been lacking in other states. Other opponents of the marriage ban say Wisconsin’s perceived independence and unpredictability, along with its relatively low share of evangelical voters, are helpful.

Appling concedes the battle is not a slam dunk. “We’re not in the Bible Belt,” she said. “We take nothing for granted.”

Still, she contends the referendum’s opponents have “misjudged the demographics” — that the “rank and file Wisconsin citizen, when he or she goes into that voting booth, will read (the proposition) and say, ‘Yeah, marriage is between a man and woman.’”
Focus on: 'Healing' gays
Can homosexuality be 'treated' at a clinic? Does it need to be?
By TRAVIS REED, Associated Press
May 16, 2006

ORLANDO, Fla. - Matthew Walker was always teased as a kid for being small, awkward and different. He felt different, too, but wasn't sure exactly why.

He must've been about 7 or 8 years old when he pointed toward a bouncer at a country music festival in Branson, Mo., telling his brother something like, "You know, if I was a girl, I would date him."

By the time he got to Oklahoma State University, Walker was dating guys. But now, at age 34, he has been out of homosexuality for more than seven years.

He's one of thousands of former homosexuals who enlisted the help of an Orlando-based Christian group called Exodus International, an organization with 135 member ministries in the United States that works to "heal" gays and lesbians through prayer, counseling and group therapy.

The ministry is at the forefront of an increasingly high-profile "ex-gay" movement that claims it's possible to leave homosexuality behind. The ministry estimates it has successfully treated tens of thousands of people since it began three decades ago in San Francisco.

It has also drawn sharp criticism from gay-rights advocates who say it's not any more possible to change a person's sexuality than it is their ethnicity - and trying to "treat" homosexuality can cause alienation, depression or worse.

"It promotes treatment for people who do not need to be treated (and) promotes the idea that homosexuality is a mental illness," said Roberta Sklar, spokeswoman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "It promotes things that are very deleterious to families - the idea you should be scrutinizing your 5-year-old to catch them before their sexual orientation is marred."

Walker always knew homosexuality didn't cohere with his devout Christian upbringing but says he did it to fill a void in his life for male attention. He did it because his father paid more attention to his brother and because he always felt more comfortable around girls.

He lived a gay life for nine years before he saw his world falling apart.

He was $25,000 in debt, his mother was sick, and he returned to Oklahoma to help care for her. There he made a decision to leave homosexuality behind.

"I grew up knowing that God thought this was wrong, but at the same time battling with the fact that there was no point in my life that I felt like homosexuality was inserted into my life. It was always there," Walker said.
"I no longer believe that I was born gay. I can look at my early life experiences and influences and see each one directed me down a path toward homosexuality," he said.

Exodus president Alan Chambers said the group fields about 400,000 inquiries a year, up from about 250,000 calls in 2002. Some, like Walker, are homosexuals who want to change; some are parents and relatives worried about a gay or lesbian loved one. Others are youth pastors or other church leaders who want to learn how to get involved.

Besides Chambers, there are 11 people who work at the ministry's national headquarters in Orlando.

The office itself is just a reference, with no therapy or counseling. All of that happens around Exodus' affiliate ministries, where at any given time Chambers estimates about 1,000 people are going through a program.

About three or four of them are residential, he said. There is no way to generalize them entirely, but most, like the one Walker attended, consist of regular monthly meetings where attendees share their trials - much like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Chambers is quick to point out that Exodus isn't about "curing" anyone or "turning people straight." In fact, many who go through the program might never have a heterosexual relationship, he said.

Instead, it's about refraining from activities that violate their beliefs - in God or anything else - and addressing "unwanted homosexuality."
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Most gays and lesbians who seek help are Christians, Chambers says, but not all.
Besides Chambers, there are just 11 people who work at the ministry's national headquarters in Orlando -- on the second floor of a two-story, yellow and brick rectangle building that bears no sign.

The group might draw protesters if it advertised too much, says Chambers, himself an ex-gay who now has a wife and child. (Back in 1996, a group called the Lesbian Avengers dropped 1,500 crickets into the office, then based in San Francisco, to simulate a plague of locusts.)

The office itself is just a reference, with no therapy or counseling. All of that happens around Exodus' affiliate ministries, where at any given time Chambers estimates about 1,000 people are going through a program.

Only about three or four of them are residential, he says. There is no way to generalize them entirely, but most, like the one Walker attended, consist of regular monthly meetings where attendees share their trials -- much like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Like AA, Chambers estimates, Exodus has about a one-third immediate success rate. Another third decide they were happy being gay in the first place, while the remaining third are still floating somewhere in between.

Chambers is quick to point out that Exodus isn't about "curing" anyone or "turning people straight." In fact, many who go through the program might never have a heterosexual relationship, he says.

Instead, it's about refraining from activities that violate their beliefs -- in God or anything else -- and addressing "unwanted homosexuality."

"These are people who have identified that they struggle with same-sex attractions and are conflicted about that, and they want to find some sort of level of support and ability to overcome those feelings, move beyond them or live with them in conjunction with their Christianity," Chambers said.

Interestingly, Exodus keeps a somewhat peculiar place in the canon of Christian conversation about how homosexuality develops. For them, it's more complicated than being simply a choice, lifestyle or abomination -- and could involve biological causes, though Chambers doubts there is a "gay gene."

"There is no quick answer or one thing that causes homosexuality," Chambers says. "It's a combination of factors that play in someone's life that lead them to deal with that issue."

Chambers says the most prevailing theme is a "a deficit in their same-sex relationships, starting with their same sex parent and going into their peer relationships" -- a deficit like Matthew Walker felt.

Still, their comparatively open explanation hasn't stopped criticism from gay rights groups who say Exodus and other ex-gay organizations dangerously ignore the American Psychological Association position that homosexuality is neither treatable nor a disorder.

In a report released last month, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute questioned whether the therapies are ethical or effective and said state and federal authorities should provide greater oversight when they involve youth.

It mentions several cases in which parents allegedly forced their children to enter programs, including one who was driven to the facility in handcuffs.

"They're given this trust that people who don't normally associate themselves with religious faith are not given, and they end up misleading parents and families," study author Jason Cianciotto said.

Cianciotto also cited reports that reparative sexual therapy can cause low self-esteem, alienation and depression leading up to suicide. He said groups like Exodus send a dangerous message that parents should watch their children for signs of homosexuality and kids somehow need to be "cured."
"It feeds into that general stigma and fear about gay and lesbian people that's raised so much money and made them so prominent," he said. "The notion that you can somehow become gay, or that gay and lesbian organizations are somehow recruiting."

Chambers says he and other ex-gays are living proof the programs can work.

"If someone doesn't want to be gay, why tell them that they don't have an alternative when they do?"

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On the Net:

Exodus International: http://www.exodus.to

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: http://www.thetaskforce.org
Conservative women's group launches grassroots effort targeting schools that accept homosexuality

05/16/2006 @ 1:59 pm
Filed by RAW STORY

The largest conservative Christian organization targeted at women has quietly introduced a grassroots "risk audit" program aimed at rolling back gay, lesbian and HIV programs in American schools, RAW STORY has found.

Concerned Women for America, a $10 million-a-year nonprofit and lobbying group, announced their "risk audit plan" in late April. The plan seeks to engage parents in a broad national effort to target schools which "promote" gay and lesbian activity by embracing non-discrimination policies and safe-sex curricula or harbor "objectionable" gay and lesbian novels aimed at children.

"Every school district in America has an absolute responsibility to protect children while they are at school," the group writes in their 24-page audit plan. "There is no legitimate rationale for giving or implying endorsement of homosexual, bisexual or gender-variant behaviors among children of any age."

"It is not a viewpoint," they write, "but a high-risk and often lethal behavior."

According to the document, homosexuality increases the risk of anal cancer, smoking, domestic violence, breast cancer and promiscuity.

Perhaps most striking about the audit plan is a detailed survey which allows parents to rate their children's school based on how tolerant it is to homosexual themes. The 100-point audit questionnaire singles out topics such as "anti-harassment or anti-bullying" policies, "objectionable books" in libraries, "diversity days" and curricula that include "tolerance programs" or "families headed by homosexuals." Schools are penalized most for including HIV/safe-sex curricula, "homosexual clubs," or required teacher sensitivity training.

"It's a good way to determine quickly if your school has knowingly or unknowingly let homosexual activists and materials in the door under the radar of 'diversity' or 'anti-bullying' or 'AIDS education,'" CWA's Virginia State Director Patricia Phillips said in a release.

Gay group says audit 'sad'

Gay groups are troubled by the audit. Jason Cianciotto, research director at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, says Concerned Women distorts existing research.

"From a research perspective it's just amazing to look at what they pass for justification," Cianciotto said. "They're actually advocating that students should not be protected from violence and harassment in school. And what they're using to justify that is research that's been proven to be false."

"It's a common tactic for these groups to take a social science research article that had a study sample of men of a certain age range who are HIV positive and attributing the behaviors of that study population to say all gay and lesbian people exhibit health and mental issues.

"It almost seems that Concerned Women for America would rather that GLBT youth continue to get beaten up, continue to be at high risk for suicide and continue running away from home," said Human Rights Campaign spokeswoman Candace Gingrich. "It's really sad, because that's the statement they're sending. They'd rather people remain silent and our children remain at risk."
Both the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Human Rights campaign say that the CWA audit likely comes in response to polls showing that American youth are increasingly supportive of gay rights.

"Religious groups like CWA, Focus on the Family and in particular ex-gay programs have really been spending a lot more resources over the last couple of years in reaching out to young people," Cianciotto said. "Young people have been consistently shown in public opinion polls to be far more supportive of equality for lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgendered people than older generations."

Concerned Women for America's media affairs office took a message but did not return two calls for comment.

According to an audio clip posted on their website, the audit was created after the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution in 2005 urging churches to determine if the public schools in their area were promoting homosexuality.

A recent report by the Gay Lesbian and Straight Educators Network, endorsed by the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, suggests the group's audit breaks with current psychological thinking.

"Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have few opportunities for observing positive role modeling by adults due to the general cultural bias that makes gay, lesbian and bisexual people largely invisible," asserts Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth. "It is this isolation and lack of support that accounts in part for the higher rates of emotional distress, suicide attempts and risky sexual behavior and substance use that gay, lesbian and bisexual students report compared to heterosexual students."

Concerned Women for America disagrees. They say schools are putting children at risk by exposing them to the "homosexual agenda." The audit, they assert, gives parents an opportunity to fight back.

"Most parents I would think would be concerned with what they're introducing to the kids directly," says CWA's Director of the Culture and Family Institute Robert Knight in a audio clip posted on the group's website. "And this gives them the tools to find out and do something about it."

"We really recommend that they use them, and also that they tell us what they've found," he adds.

Concerned Women for America's survey also includes 'suggested school districts" for targeted activism. Among them are Grossmont Union High School in La Mesa, California; Denver Public Schools in Colorado; and Lexington Public Schools in Massachusetts.

Concerned Women for America was founded in 1979 by the wife of fundamentalist Baptist minister and Moral Majority co-founder Tim LaHaye. The organization pioneered a "kitchen table activist" grassroots lobbying strategy, spreading the fight from Washington to a panoply of local chapters across the country. The group claims to be the largest women's organization in the country and has a subscription mailing base of 200,000.

In 2004, activist blogger Michael Rogers of blogACTIVE alleged that the group's chief financial officer Lee LaHaye was an "openly gay man." The group did not rebut the charge.

The audit also includes a sample press release which chapters can send to local media.

Simply put, CWA seeks to eradicate teaching that suggests homosexuality is acceptable.

"The majority of students are being successfully indoctrinated with the belief that homosexual behavior is a right and is relatively harmless," the audit plan asserts. "The truth is otherwise."
Va. activists launch campaign to defeat amendment
Politicians join gay rights group in denouncing effort

By ELIZABETH A. PERRY
Friday, May 19, 2006

A group of Virginia politicians joined officials from Equality Virginia this week in the first of a planned series of community meetings aimed at defeating the state’s proposed anti-gay marriage amendment.

General Assembly Del. Adam Ebbin of Arlington, who is gay, and Del. Chuck Caputo of Fairfax County, along with Sen. Janet Howell of Reston, were among about a half dozen politicians and 100 activists who met May 15 in Fairfax to launch a campaign to defeat the marriage amendment when voters go to the polls in November.

In the first of what organizers hope will be many community meetings, Equality Fairfax began the task of forming a grassroots campaign designed to educate Virginia voters about the marriage amendment. Other state politicians at the event included Del. Vivian Watts of Fairfax and Del. James Scott of Falls Church. Del. David Marsden of Fairfax County, Fairfax County officials Gerry Connolly and Dana Kauffman sent representatives. All of the politicians in attendance are Democrats.

Amundson called the amendment a “pernicious evil.”

“This is the first time in a long time that we’ve moved in the other direction,” she said. “It’s simply wrong. It’s going to take away rights of all people.”

Scott said the amendment was an issue of human rights. He said that when Fairfax County wanted to pass the state’s first human rights ordinance in 1974, the question was approved in a voter referendum.

“Fortunately for us, you’ve got to do that to change the Constitution in Virginia,” he said. “This is a cause for many of us, not just in this room. It will send a signal all over the United States that if we can do this it will have an impact far broader than just Virginia.”

Ebbin said laws have been in place from the 1970s limiting marriage to a man and a woman while also limiting civil unions. But, he said, conservatives took the opportunity in 2005 to push to have the laws made part of the constitution.

“Five months later they’ve got the attorney general wanting to put in a little brochure saying, ‘Oh don’t worry — nothing’s affected,’ ” said Ebbin. “But if you read the actual wording, it sure sounds like it to me.”

The text that will appear on the Nov. 7 ballot reads:

“That only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this Commonwealth and its political subdivisions. This Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance, or effects of marriage. Nor shall this Commonwealth or its political subdivisions create or recognize another union, partnership, or other legal status to which is assigned the rights, benefits, obligations, qualities, or effects of marriage.”
The Family Foundation of Virginia, a statewide conservative organization, supports the ban on same-sex marriages. A statement posted to the group’s website acknowledges that state law prohibits same-sex marriage, but says reinforcement of the law is needed.

“The constitution is going to be amended, either by a judge or by the people — we prefer the people decide,” the group said in a statement.

**Tyranny of the majority**

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, said the amendment reinforces the notion that gays “are not fully human.”

What makes defeating the amendment a challenge is that the majority is made up of conservatives who are voting on the rights of the minority this November, he said, adding that gay people make up between 4 percent and 6 percent of the U.S. population.

“People across the country say to me, ‘How is it that 19 states have done this and we haven’t won?’” Foreman said. “A fundamental human right that straight people take for granted is being put up for a popular vote. It’s a vote as to whether we should have that right. That is fundamentally wrong. That is why we have a Bill of Rights — because our founders knew we should not put up fundamental rights for a popular vote.”

Claire Guthrie Gastanaga, Equality Virginia campaign chair, said that despite the odds, she believes the fight against the amendment can be won. She said that when volunteers are able to engage people in conversation and help them to understand that the amendment is not just about marriage, their views are swayed.

“We will be positioned perfectly with your help to catch a wave that is coming,” she told the crowd this week.
Religion
When discrimination is a religious virtue and civil equality an “anti-religious” attack
By Mel Seesholtz, Ph.D.
Online Journal Contributing Writer
May 17, 2006, 11:46

Mention “gay” and “civil rights” in the same sentence, and some people’s hackles go up. Yet most, if not all, of those same people have no problem acknowledging -- and protecting -- the “civil rights” of every other minority. So what’s the difference?

In a 2004 AsianWeek article opposing equal civil rights for gays and lesbians, Rev. Raymond Kwong argued, “We are sympathetic to true minorities. Gays and lesbians are not a genuine minority.” By most estimates, the GLBT community represents about 2-4 percent of the U.S. population. That would certainly seem to qualify as a “minority,” at least according to a standard definition of the term: “a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment; a group having less than the number of votes necessary for control.”

As for “subjected to differential treatment,” University of Chicago historian George Chauncey documented that in his 2004 book Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality. Homosexuals were barred from government jobs by an executive order issued by President Dwight Eisenhower. They were also routinely barred from other forms of employment, as well as housing. During the height of the McCarthy hearings, more homosexuals were “weeded out” than Communists.

Gays were barred from many taverns and restaurants, barred from public assembly, and barred from using the U.S. Postal Service to send newsletters. Homosexuals had no freedom of speech and could be arrested on simple “suspicion” -- behaviors such as “gesturing with limp wrists,” walking “with a sway to the hips,” or “wearing tight fitting trousers” -- and sent to mental hospitals until “cured,” despite claims by prison doctors that such a thing was impossible. Homosexuals and homosexual themes were barred in films by the Hays Code and from the Broadway stage by “padlock laws.”

Those who are currently demeaning, denigrating and fighting to keep homosexuals marginalized and who use their faith-based rhetoric to inspire others to make young gay men and women targets for violence -- “Homophobic Bullying Drives Teen To Suicide,” “In Harm’s Way,” “Schools Remain Unsafe For Gay Students,” “Anti-gay bullying under investigation: Harassment may have played role in South Florida school violence case,” “Gay, Lesbian, & Bi Teens: Students & Schools” -- focus exclusively on what is arguably the most private part of anyone’s life, sexuality. Would it be fair to define heterosexuals’ rights and base judgments of their value, equality and contributions to society solely on their sexuality?

Of course not. Nor is it legitimate to define homosexuals’ rights and base judgments of their value, equality and contributions to society solely on their sexuality. Heterosexual or homosexual, all American citizens should be accorded the same civil equality.

Miami Herald columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. made some pertinent comments in “A reminder that debate is about real people”:

. . . since Richard Nixon’s infamous “Southern strategy” of the late ’60s, his party has sought, won and retained power largely by encouraging voters to ignore and deny the humanity of people who were not like them.

In Nixon’s era, it was blacks. In Ronald Reagan’s era, it was blacks. And yes, in George H.W. Bush’s era -- call for Willie Horton -- it was blacks again. Bush the younger has added a new wrinkle: gays. Indeed,
the Grand Old Party has some Middle Americans so afeared that gays are coming to take their children away that one imagines the poor folks hunkered down with a shotgun, ready to shoot at the first sight of a rainbow bumper sticker.

Marginalized minorities make convenient villains and scapegoats precisely because they are so easy to demonize and objectify. When “gay” is just a concept, or “black” only an abstract, it becomes easier to justify grotesque mistreatment . . .

We’re dealing with human beings, he [Mr. Bush] says. For the record, we always were.

Every minority has had to fight for its legal rights and civil equality. A citation in the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of “minority” is as relevant today as when the word was new to American politics:

1837 U. S. Mag. & Democratic Rev. Oct. 3 Though we go for the republican principle of the supremacy of the will of the majority, we acknowledge, in general, a strong sympathy with minorities, and consider that their rights have a high moral claim on the respect and justice of majorities.

“A high moral claim on the respect and justice of majorities.” How ironic that feigned “morality” and overt disrespect are the primary weapons — indeed, the only weapons — those who oppose civil equality for the GLBT minority deploy to thwart the American promise of “liberty and justice for all.” In such campaigns against civil equality for the GLBT minority, Oscar Wilde’s definition of “morality” is appropriate, although Aldous Huxley’s may be more to the point:

Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people we personally dislike. – Oscar Wilde

Morality is always the product of terror; its chains and strait-waistcoats are fashioned by those who dare not trust others, because they dare not trust themselves, to walk in liberty. – Aldous Huxley

Trust. Can anyone trust those who advocate denying civil equality to fellow citizens?

A May 1 Associated Press article by Steve Lawrence illustrated the point:

SACRAMENTO -- State Sen. Sheila Kuehl says a key aspect of history is missing from school textbooks — the contributions that homosexuals have made to California and the nation.

Kuehl, D-Santa Monica, has introduced a bill that would fill that void by requiring textbooks and other social science materials to discuss contributions that gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people have made to the state and nation’s economy, politics and society.

The bill also would prohibit textbooks from criticizing people because of their sexual orientation. Current law sets that standard for discussions of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, gender and disabilities. [italics added]

Mr. Lawrence also reported on a group strongly opposed to the legislation, a group notorious for its efforts to marginalize gays and lesbians even further and deny them any form of respect or civil equality:

Benjamin Lopez, a lobbyist for the Traditional Values Coalition [TVC], an Anaheim-based group that views homosexuality as an abomination, doesn’t dispute the fact that gays have been discriminated against and have made contributions to American society.

But he contends Kuehl’s bill amounts to “social engineering and social indoctrination.”

“You’re talking about elevating a practice, a lifestyle, and putting it on par with the struggles of blacks, women and (other) minorities,” he said. “As a minority myself, that’s tremendously offensive.” [italics added]
Mr. Lopez’s feigned “morality” and “not-a-minority” arguments are as transparent as his specious reasoning. Although there is not yet absolute proof that sexual orientation has a genetic and/or neurophysiological basis, evidence is clearly mounting. That aside, apparently Mr. Lopez is unaware that one’s “religion” is, *without question*, chosen.

People can *choose* to be whatever religion they want and can choose to “practice” it as a “lifestyle” with varying degrees of intensity. Lopez and his organization are among the first in line to defend the civil rights and civil equality of those practicing religious choices and expressions, as long as those choices and expressions are in accord with TVC’s parochial socio-political dogma, that is.

Mr. Lopez and the TVC vigorously campaign to have “approved” Christians’ contributions to American society not only noted but underscored in textbooks and every other venue. Yet TVC’s political lobbyist claimed acknowledging the contributions of gays and lesbians would be “social engineering and social indoctrination.”

How hypocritical. How irrational. But Lopez did even better than that in relation to what Huxley said about “morality” and “trust.”

The TVC lobbyist agreed that gays have been discriminated against and have made significant, important contributions to American society, but found acknowledging *that history* “tremendously offensive.” How could anyone trust -- much less respect -- the judgment or reasoning of a member of a minority who fights to keep another minority repressed and excluded?

*Not surprisingly, a recent report issued by The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute documented that legislators with low ratings on gay and lesbian equality issues also received low ratings from organizations that promote the rights of people of color, including the NAACP and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. The rhetoric of America’s premier homophobe Lou Sheldon and his Traditional Values Coalition were duly cited in the report. Why is made clearer every day.*

On May 2, Rev. Louis P. Sheldon, founder and chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, fired off a letter to the president of CBS television. The TVC headline read “CBS & ANTI-CHRISTIAN GLAAD TEAMING UP: GAY & LESBIAN GROUP OFTEN ATTACKS CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS.”

As usual, Sheldon accepts only those “Christians” who agree with his fanatical dogma and ignores all the other Christians who don’t sign on to his pathological campaigns against civil equality for gays and lesbians, many of whom are themselves practicing Christians.

GLAAD is the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination. What CBS and GLAAD produced was a public service spot against discrimination. But Abramoff beneficiary “Lucky Louie” didn’t see it that way.

“No one personifies “hateful” more definitively than Rev. Louis P. Sheldon: the man who after the 9/11 terrorist attacks argued *against* giving aid to the surviving members of gay and lesbian partnerships, many of whom had children, and the man who suggested rounding up gays and HIV+ people -- presumably that would include children -- and putting them in concentration camps he euphemistically called “cities of refuge.”

What other motives did Sheldon have for writing to CBS?

> At the very least, I believe CBS should apply an equal time standard to this sort of activity. My organization, the Traditional Values Coalition, would be willing to discuss some sort of message which would provide the balance lacking from GLAAD’s anti-religious attacks.

Seems Lou was just looking for some free publicity to spew more of his vile bile. His “anti-religious” comment is pathetic, but typical. Apparently Sheldon believes civil discrimination is a “Christian” virtue and “civil equality” an “anti-religious” attack. Even conservatives have questioned Sheldon’s “ethics” and “motives.” Others also saw TVC’s attack on CBS-GLAAD as just another ploy:
Fade in: An advocacy group with an eye toward grabbing newspaper headlines is using a television commercial as its latest target. This time, the culprit in the ongoing war against “traditional American values” is -- cue the organ music -- a soap opera.

With melodrama reminiscent of the television genre it is taking on, the Traditional Values Coalition denounced as “propaganda” a public service announcement that aired at the end of the May 9 episode of the long-running soap opera “As the World Turns.”

Sheldon and the TVC were, of course, outraged:

In spite of receiving more than 3,000 emails from TVC supporters who used our CapWiz email service, CBS ignored their concerns and ran its Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) public service announcement on “As The World Turns” on May 9.

The text of the PSA was designed to promote the acceptance of homosexuality for teenagers. Those opposed to homosexual sodomy were subtly linked to intolerance, prejudice and violent behavior. The PSA said: “Every day people face rejection, prejudice and violence . . . But you can make a difference. Send a message of support and acceptance. Be an ally and a friend. Go to GLAAD.org.”

A whole “3,000 emails.” Seems Lou’s brand of bigotry is loosing its punch as more and more Americans wake up and realize “Every day [gay] people face rejection, prejudice and violence,” not only at the hands of religious fanatics in America, but worldwide:

**Iraqi police ‘killed 14-year-old boy for being homosexual’**

Human rights groups have condemned the “barbaric” murder of a 14-year-old boy, who, according to witnesses, was shot on his doorstep by Iraqi police for the apparent crime of being gay.

Ahmed Khalil was shot at point-blank range after being accosted by men in police uniforms, according to his neighbours in the al-Dura area of Baghdad.

Campaign groups have warned of a surge in homophobic killings by state security services and religious militias following an anti-gay and anti-lesbian fatwa issued by Iraq’s most prominent Shia leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Ali Hill, the co-ordinator of a group of exiled Iraqi gay men who monitor homophobic attacks inside Iraq, said the fatwa had instigated a “witch-hunt of lesbian and gay Iraqis, including violent beatings, kidnappings and assassinations.”

“Young Ahmed was a victim of poverty,” he said. “He was summarily executed, apparently by fundamentalist elements in the Iraqi police.”

History is replete with those who thought they alone knew how everyone should be and live, and what should govern “civil equality.” They always failed in their campaigns of discrimination and bigotry.
Transgender equality
Boise City includes transsexuals in its discrimination policy
By Shea Andersen
POSTED ON MAY 17, 2006

In the end, all it took was a quick vote by the Boise City Council.

But the routine matter of revising the city's employee policy manual was enough to make Nikki Leonard cry, because for the first time in its history, the City of Boise now includes specific references to gender identification in its anti-discrimination policy.

For someone like Leonard, who was born a male but has been living as a woman for the last two and a half years, the news was nothing short of revelatory.

"This is huge," Leonard said. "It's a really progressive move for Boise to make. It's one of the things that makes Boise such a great place to live."

Boise already has policies against discrimination of other kinds, including against gay employees, said City Council President Maryanne Jordan.

"I wanted our policy to be inclusive," Jordan said. "When you really think about it, a discrimination policy that doesn't include one group is by its nature discriminatory."

The policy was adopted in a unanimous vote by the Boise City Council late last month, but done as part of a routine consent agenda, Jordan said.

Currently, neither Jordan nor Leonard are aware of any Boise City employees who might identify themselves as having gender identification issues. In other words, they feel they do not belong with their birth gender. Nor are they aware of cross-dressers or people who, like Leonard, have lived as the opposite gender for a while.

But Leonard, who is the co-chair of Your Family Friends and Neighbors, a gay-rights advocacy group in Boise, said it was only a matter of time before the city had transgendered employees.

Nationwide, more and more cities are creating anti-discrimination laws that explicitly include transgendered people, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a Washington, D.C., advocacy group.

"They realize that sexual orientation alone doesn't cover the issues that people face," said Rep. Nicole LeFavour, a Boise Democrat and the Idaho Legislature's only openly gay member.

In the Pacific Northwest, cities with such laws tend to be larger urban areas such as Seattle, Wash., and Portland, Ore. But Bend, Ore, which has a population of about 53,000 people, also has such a law. Boise is the first city in Idaho to include the language specifically, although McCall does prohibit making employee decisions based on "sexual preference" in its employee manual.
Corporate America tends to lead the way on such policies, Leonard said, because they are trying to attract employees. Hewlett-Packard, which has a substantial presence in Boise, includes specific language covering gender identity in its employee handbook, which makes sense to Jordan.

"We view our employment policies very much as an economic development tool," Jordan said. "We don't pay as much as other organizations do. The main thing we're looking for is talented employees."
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Sacramento - For the second time in a year, California conservative activists have failed to qualify an anti-marriage equality measure for the statewide ballot, according to Equality for All, the statewide campaign to defeat such measures.

Equality for All today declared victory after opponents of marriage equality failed to qualify any of their discriminatory, anti-gay constitutional amendments for the November, 2006 ballot. California is the only state where such attempts to amend the constitution to ban marriage and domestic partnerships for same sex couples have been unsuccessful.

"Today, we are proud to be Californians, where opponents of equality for California families are unable to gather the support they need to place an anti-equality measure on the ballot. And they've failed not once, but twice in 2006. This is a moment for fair-minded Californians to be proud, but not to let up," said Dale Kelly Bankhead, campaign manager for Equality for All.

"It is clear that our strong opposition and early fundraising were part of the reason these extremists have had difficulty gaining support for these discriminatory measures," Bankhead said, "in addition to the fact that Californians are tired of these divisive and costly campaigns."

"In spite of filing 14 nearly-identical initiatives, these religious and political extremists failed to qualify even one for the upcoming elections," said Lorri L. Jean, chief executive officer of the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, and executive committee member of the Equality for All campaign.

"However, we believe it is a matter of not if we face such a ballot measure in California, but when. We remain committed to a vigorous opposition of these types of measures, whenever they occur," Jean said. "Those who oppose equality are already circulating petitions for the next statewide election in June of 2008. We will continue to monitor those efforts and to educate voters about the cost of marriage discrimination and how a repeal of the existing domestic partnership protections would truly harm California families."

Proponents of placing a marriage equality and domestic partnership ban in the state constitution have told the media and their supporters that they expect events between now and 2008 to trigger support for such discriminatory measures. It is likely that two such triggering events would include the passage of legislation to secure marriage equality in state law and a court ruling finding marriage discrimination unconstitutional. Marriage legislation, sponsored by the statewide LGBT advocacy group, Equality California, was passed in 2005, but vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. The bill will be reintroduced during the 2007-08 legislative session.

Constitutional litigation is currently working its way through the court system, with a state appeals court ruling anticipated in 2007, followed by review by the California Supreme Court. San Francisco Superior Court Judge Richard Kramer ruled in 2005 in the case of Woo v. Lockyer that excluding same sex couples from marriage was unconstitutional.
"As the effort to achieve marriage equality moves forward in the courts and the legislature, it is imperative that all fair-minded Californians get involved by voting in every election and by speaking out against discrimination and in support of equality for all," said Geoffrey Kors, executive director of Equality California and a member of the Equality for All executive committee.

Equality for All is a coalition of more than 25 diverse LGBT and allied organizations that was created in 2005 to defeat any anti-marriage measures placed on the California ballot. Member groups include Equality California; the National Center for Lesbian Rights; the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; Lambda Legal; PFLAG and other family groups; the ACLU; California NOW, Planned Parenthood; the GLBT Centers of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego; and groups representing the religious, Latino, African American, and Asian and Pacific Islander American communities. EFA has raised almost $750,000 - nearly four times as much as their opponents - and has established a grassroots network of volunteers who have identified thousands of voters who support marriage equality for same sex couples. More information about the Equality for All campaign is available at http://www.EqualityforAll.com. Visitors to the website can also sign up for ongoing campaign updates.