

## Not Without Our “T”

by TRACY BAIM  
10-03-2007

The GLBT community is not just a series of letters thrown together out of convenience. Rather, our movement includes those four key letters because each are inter-connected in their histories, and their experiences.

It has taken a long time for our community to more fully embrace the differences within, even though “transgender” individuals have always been intimately linked with our movement (from cross-dressing Hollywood stars to drag queens at Stonewall) .

But society does not so easily separate us. When an employer fires a butch lesbian because of what she wears, he or she does not do this because they understand the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity. An effeminate gay or straight man may be fired because of how he talks, “like a girl.”

And even if our enemies had a sophisticated understanding between homophobia and transphobia, should it matter why they fire a G, L, B or T? Because lesbians are more acceptable to general society (or at least ignored) , should we first get coverage for them, and then the bisexuals, then gay men, and then the transgendered?

No, we will not be divided.

The misguided attempt by U.S. Rep. Barney Frank and U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi to compromise on our rights should be stopped. Most national GLBT organizations are opposed to the moves last week to create a separate and unequal path for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Frank justifies creating a separate gender identity and expression bill because, by including it in the main bill, we risk losing.

The bottom line is that ENDA has very little chance of becoming law because George W. Bush has said he would not sign it. To throw people off a sinking boat now is not only inconsequential to immediate success, it is wrong. New York state learned the hard way, excluding trans coverage in their state law as a compromise, and five years later the trans community still waits for their rights.

The activists should look to Illinois for an example of a “no compromise” plan that succeeded. Our state bill included sexual orientation and gender identity, and it is now the law of the Land of Lincoln.

Rep. Frank’s rationale for these maneuvers sounds good on paper, but does not represent the reality for our community. We cannot ever justify exclusion as a course of action. To sever a significant part of our community would be wrong. If it takes losing “T” to get our rights, none of us should want those rights.

It is good that on Monday, Pelosi and Frank said they would delay any action until the issue is further debated. The rush to compromise was a serious threat to our movement. There should be far more consultation among leadership—there is no one GLBT leader ( despite Frank’s long

years of service ) or one GLBT organization that speaks for our community. Rather, there are dozens of key national and state groups, and hundreds of important voices to hear to build a reasonable consensus for our community.

We are glad that Rep. Tammy Baldwin decided not to compromise, at least at this stage. We are glad groups such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force are standing firm against this change. We are also happy the Human Rights Campaign joined the tide against the compromise, even if a little later than most.

We do not want our rights at the expense of anyone else. That is too high a cost to pay.

#### QUOTES ON ENDA

“As members of the labor movement, we see every day the effects of divide and conquer strategies at the bargaining table. We won’t sell out our transgender brothers and sisters for the sake of crass political expediency. Transgender people face the highest rates of unemployment in our community and it would be unconscionable for us to sit idly by and see them stripped from this important piece of federal legislation.” — Nancy Wohlforth, Co-President of Pride At Work.

**“It is politically inexplicable and unconscionable that some congressional leaders are rushing to strip protections for transgender people from ENDA—just as the Senate votes overwhelmingly to pass transgender-inclusive hate crimes legislation.” — Matt Foreman, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director.**

“African-Americans did not say, Hey, let’s put forth a bill to protect all the light-skinned blacks—those who can pass and are less threatening to whites—and we’ll come back to the blackest of the black later. And make no mistake: the trannies are the queerest of the queer; they are the ones who need protections more than anyone else. ... Regarding all the high-minded pledges from various people who say we will come back for the transgendered and make sure we add them later: We have seen an unfortunate history of leaving people behind within this movement, I’m sorry to remind you. Soon after the onset of the HIV drug cocktail, for example, many middle class gay white men went back to their lives ... while HIV ravages other communities in this country and much of the rest of the planet. The political will within the gay community in America to help those other communities has all but died.” — Columnist and radio host Michelangelo Signorile.

“Without gender identity and expression language, gay and lesbian people will continue to face legal discrimination in the workplace because of their lack of congruence with societal norms of gender presentation and behavior.” — The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition.