



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

June 12 – June 29, 2006

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quote of the Week:

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

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

Eric Rofes, 1954–2006

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The New York Times

Eric Rofes, Commentator on Gay Issues, Dies at 51

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Published: June 29, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

He defended unprotected sex as, at least, unavoidable.

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

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

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

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



Eric Rofes last year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

San Francisco Chronicle

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

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, June 28, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Activists mourn passing of Eric Rofes

Wednesday, 28 June 2006

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

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

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

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

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



As gay pride hits stride, transgendered find more acceptance

Posted 6/24/2006 7:50 PM ET

By Lisa Leff, Associated Press

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

San Francisco Chronicle

Make-or-break time for gay community

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Saturday, June 24, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

By Michelle Maitre and William Brand, STAFF WRITERS

June 25, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Braley said events like the Pride Parade help show unity.

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

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

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

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

San Francisco Chronicle

Gays want more from Dems on marriage

Proposed same-sex bans seen as test

By Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

June 13, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

500 Rally For Marriage in the Rain

Crowd crosses Brooklyn Bridge as equality movement awaits decision from NY high court

BY ANDY HUMM

Volume 5, Number 23 | June 8 - 14, 2006

Despite heavy rain, more than 500 marchers with a rainbow of umbrellas streamed across the Brooklyn Bridge into Lower Manhattan on Saturday, June 3 to demand the right of same-sex couples to marry in New York. The Marriage Equality/ New York demonstration, matched by one over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, came just three days after the final appeal in four same-sex marriage cases was heard before the state's highest court in Albany. A decision is expected this summer.

"I hope New York follows Massachusetts," said Elmer Lokkins, 87, who was there with his husband, Gus Archilla, 89. They have been together 61 years, marrying in Canada two years ago. New York recognizes, in some respects, same-sex marriages performed elsewhere but will not perform them.

"Send a message to Albany that it is time to say, 'I do,'" Ron Zacchi, co-director of Marriage Equality, told the marchers at a morning rally in Cadman Plaza. Not even the overwhelmingly Democrat State Assembly has so much as taken up a bill opening marriage to gay couples.

Also speaking at the rally was Nyack Mayor John Shields, a plaintiff in the only gay marriage case that has not gotten to the high court, who said his was "the first municipality in the state to say that any marriage legal elsewhere was legal in our town."

Shields has said that Attorney General Eliot Spitzer told him that it will take 10 years before the state Legislature will grant marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Spitzer, who has enjoys a wide margin in the polls over any of the other remaining contenders in this year's gubernatorial contest, has pledged to introduce a bill for marriage equality if the gay plaintiffs lose in court. Last Wednesday, his office was in court arguing that gay couples do not have a constitutional right to marriage in New York.

Few elected officials joined the march this year, but Sean Patrick Maloney, an out gay candidate for the Democratic nomination for state attorney general, spoke, accompanied by two of his three children. He has said that as the chief law enforcement officer of the state, he would be obligated to defend the state's marriage law, despite the fact that he believes it has "serious constitutional problems." He had no comment on the arguments made by Spitzer's office and lawyers for Republican Mayor Michael Bloomberg at the Court of Appeals, saying he had not read them.

At the closing rally in Battery Park, Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner, who ran for mayor in 2005 and may again in 2009, attacked Bloomberg for overturning the February 2005 ruling of Justice Doris-Ling Cohan ordering him to issue



Rich Tran, 34, and **Jacob Zimlichman**, 31, have been together for six years and want to marry in August; **Dylan Stein and Gabriel Blau**, both 26, together three years, celebrated a Jewish wedding ceremony just last week and are hoping for the chance to get civil recognition of their marriage as well.

licenses to gay couples. “Anyone who believes the city was just going through the motions is wrong,” he said. “He is doing all of us a disservice. The lawyers for the city don’t speak for us.”

Cathy Marino-Thomas, co-director of Marriage Equality, said, “Bloomberg talks a good game, but he doesn’t show up on a day like today.”

Zacchi, in an e-mail message, took a different tone, saying, “We are working with Mayor Bloomberg to gain his assistance in our struggle toward marriage equality in NY.”

The mayor sent his counsel, Anthony Crowell, to read a joint proclamation supporting the march issued by Bloomberg and out lesbian City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, a Chelsea Democrat, who was also not on hand, but was represented by her liaison, Keri Sender. Neither Sender nor Crowell responded to press questions.

Just last year, Quinn excoriated the mayor for appealing the Ling-Cohan ruling. “This is the second time in less than a year that Mayor Bloomberg has gone to court with my tax dollars to make sure that I am not an equal citizen in this city.”

Reached by telephone this week, Quinn said that she was “deeply upset by the papers of the lawsuit” but added, “the mayor reached out to me and said he wants to get a marriage bill passed.”

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and a Bloomberg appointee to the city Human Rights Commission, said in an e-mail that he was “disturbed” by the City’s argument in court “that because gay men and lesbians are not subject to discrimination, a more stringent standard of legal scrutiny is not warranted. I’m pleased that specious argument got shot down quickly.” Foreman praised Bloomberg’s recent radio address reiterating his “support” for same-sex marriage and his alliance with Quinn on the issue.

As of yet, however, there is no evidence of results from the mayor’s pledge to work to turn thinking around among his fellow Republicans in Albany. In 2004, however, Bloomberg took steps to ensure that gay marriages performed elsewhere would be recognized in New York City for purposes of pensions and other benefits.

Asked to assess the mayor’s impact to date, Alan Van Capelle, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, who was pointedly excluded from a marriage summit Bloomberg hosted at Gracie Mansion earlier this year, said, “The mayor has been speaking out publicly about his support for marriage equality and people take notice when that happens... We look forward to his advocacy to advance marriage equality in New York.”

Asked whether Bloomberg has given the Pride Agenda any money to advance the marriage drive, Van Capelle responded, “The mayor is not a donor to the Pride Agenda and we have never asked for his financial support.”

Some marchers are taking concrete action to advance marriage equality. Kelitta Maxime, 21, of Freeport, LI, there with her lesbian sister, Marie, 23, said, “I refuse to get married until gay people can.”

Geert Martens, together with his husband Ray Murray for 17 years and married in his homeland of Belgium last June, has gotten the United Nations, where he works, to recognize their marriage for pension purposes but not health insurance yet.

Rose Ann Hermann, 50, a Westchester mother of two gay children, said, “I talk to every person I can about marriage equality and everyone from my 80-year old neighbor to young people have been very responsive.” She is in the Empire State Pride Agenda’s “marriage ambassador” program.

David Ball and Tim Hare, together 30 years, are battling the anti-gay marriage amendment in their home state of Pennsylvania. Richie Tran, 34, and Jacob Zimlichman, 31, together six years, want to marry in August. Their friends Gabriel Blau and Dylan Stein, both 26, celebrated a Jewish wedding ceremony just a week ago and are hoping to get civil recognition of their marriage.



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The left finds its voice

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

Pamela Miller, Staff Writer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Voices being heard

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

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

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

Mixing church and state?

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

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

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

What about separation of church and state?

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

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

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

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

Pushing `American principles'

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

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

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

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

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

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

Faith and gay rights

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Solid middle ground

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

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

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

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

Inspiration, not ammunition

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

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

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

CHRONICLING THE MOVEMENT

Books and websites linked to the religious left include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

by Steven Ertelt

LifeNews.com Editor

June 1, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Related web sites:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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