



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

October 18 - 24, 2005

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quote of the Week:

"It is an outrage that White House advisors and sitting judges are assuring right-wing leaders like James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Gary Bauer of American Values, along with others, that Harriet Miers will vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade*... We can no longer listen to the White House's disingenuous words about Miers' independence. Neither can the Senate Judiciary Committee. It must now get to the bottom of this new evidence."

—Eleanor Acheson, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

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Court Rules Kan. Can't Single Out Gay Sex

By JOHN HANNA, Associated Press Writer Fri Oct 21, 7:39 PM ET

The Kansas Supreme Court on Friday unanimously struck down a state law that punished underage sex more severely if it involved homosexual acts, saying "moral disapproval" of such conduct is not enough to justify the different treatment.

In a case closely watched by national groups on all sides of the gay rights debate, the high court said the law "suggests animus toward teenagers who engage in homosexual sex."

Gay rights groups praised the ruling, while conservatives bitterly complained that the court intruded on the Legislature's authority to make the laws.

The case involved an 18-year-old man, Matthew R. Limon, who was found guilty in 2000 of performing a sex act on a 14-year-old boy and was sentenced to 17 years in prison. Had one of them been a girl, state law would have dictated a maximum sentence of 15 months.

The high court ordered that Limon be resentenced as if the law treated illegal gay sex and illegal straight sex the same. He has already served more than five years.

Limon's lawyer, James Esseks of the American Civil Liberties Union's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project, said: "We are very happy that Matthew will soon be getting out of prison. We are sorry there is no way to make up for the extra four years he spent in prison simply because he is gay."

Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline said in a statement that he does not plan to appeal.

A lower court had ruled that the state could justify the harsher punishment as a way of protecting children's traditional development, fighting disease or strengthening traditional values. But the Supreme Court said the law was too broad to meet those goals.

"The statute inflicts immediate, continuing and real injuries that outrun and belie any legitimate justification that may be claimed for it," Justice Marla Luckert wrote for the court. "Moral disapproval of a group cannot be a legitimate state interest."

The Kansas court also cited the landmark 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision that struck down a Texas law against gay sodomy.

Limon and the other boy, identified only as M.A.R., lived at a group home for the developmentally disabled. Limon's attorneys described their relationship as consensual and suggested that they were adolescents experimenting with sex.

Kline's office described Limon as a predator with two previous such offenses on his record. Kline contended that such a behavior pattern warranted a tough sentence and that courts should leave sentencing policy to the Legislature.

Kansas law prohibits any sexual activity involving a person under 16.

However, the state's 1999 "Romeo and Juliet" law specifies short prison sentences or probation for sexual activity when an offender is under 19 and the age difference between participants is less than four years — but only for opposite-sex encounters.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said the Texas decision and Friday's ruling "shore up the principle that gay people are entitled to equal protection."

"But no one's quite sure how firm that foundation is," he said.

Mathew Staver, attorney for the conservative Orlando, Fla.-based Liberty Counsel, said the different treatment was justified by the state's interest in protecting children and families. He also said the court does not have the right to rewrite the statute.

"That's a legislative function," he said. "This is clearly a sign of an activist court system."

Patricia Logue, a senior counsel for the gay rights organization Lambda Legal, said she hopes the decision will slow efforts in various states to enact legislation targeting gays.

"A lot of the reasoning used here by the state comes up again and again," she said. "What the court is saying is, 'If you've got a better reason, you would have told us by now. The ones you've come up with are not good enough, and they amount to not liking gay people.'"



October 18, 2005

It's National Breast Cancer Month -- have you had your mammogram?

WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 — October has been National Breast Cancer Awareness Month for more than 20 years, educating women about early breast cancer detection, diagnosis and treatment to fight the disease.

Lesbians and bisexual women, for a variety of reasons — including barriers to treatment — are at an increased risk of developing breast cancer. **The National gay and Lesbian Task Force urges all women to stay healthy and join the fight against breast cancer by having mammogram screenings this month.**

National Mammography Day is Oct. 21, 2005. Early detection through annual mammograms is a critical tool in combating cancer. Every 2 minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer, and it is the leading cancer among white and African-American women.

Lesbians and bisexual women face unique health challenges, one of them being access to medical treatment. Women often face a barrier to just visiting the doctor for a check-up because they may not be out in their community and may not feel comfortable answering questions from their health provider about their sexual orientation.

“The biggest challenge in working on lesbian health issues involves understanding that there are many different types of lesbians and just one message about health behavior won’t work. In the same that health promotion messages about safe sex and HIV/AIDS have come to be tailored to various subgroups, the same is true for, let’s say, breast health screening,” says Kathleen Maloy, chair of the board at the Mautner Project and professor of health policy at George Washington University School of Public Health. “Age, race and class are all part of the issue.

“Furthermore, lesbians, like women in general, have a higher rate of being uninsured because women tend to be in lower paying jobs and so access to treatment and screening is even more difficult.”



Maine one of six states to protect transgender people

October 24, 2005

AUGUSTA, Maine --If voters in November keep the state's gay rights law, Maine would be the seventh state to bar discrimination against transgender people as well as gays and lesbians.

Maine voters will decide Nov. 8 whether Maine law should bar discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, credit, housing, public accommodations or education.

The law defines sexual orientation as "a person's actual or perceived heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality or gender identity or expression." The inclusion of "gender identity or expression" means the law protects Mainers who have changed sex, as well as those who see themselves as belonging to the other gender but have not actually changed.

Supporters of the Maine law say it is important to include transgender people because a law that bans discrimination against gays and lesbians without protecting transsexuals and others is not comprehensive and makes arbitrary distinctions.

Marty Hagglund of Farmingdale, who underwent a sex-change operation in 1998 to become a woman, said most voters don't know what transgender means or how the law would help transgender people such as her.

"On a scale of one to 10, this (language) is a 20" in importance to transgender people, Hagglund said. "We're being discriminated against. It's for real. It's not a figment of our imaginations."

Opponents say it is problematic to include transgender people in the law.

They predict, for example, that a job applicant who gets hired as a man and shows up for work dressed as a woman will be legally protected. So will a man who dresses as a woman and insists on using a women's restroom, they say.

"You can't legally define" actual or perceived gender identity or expression, so "the whole thing is a can of worms," said Tim Russell of the Christian Civic League of Maine, which is fighting the law.

Protecting transgender people is nothing less than "redefining the norms on a global scale," said Paul Madore of the Maine Grassroots Coalition, which opposes the law.

The Legislature passed the gay rights law earlier this year, but opponents collected enough signatures to force a statewide vote on the issue.

Wisconsin was the first state to adopt a gay rights law in 1982, but it wasn't until 1993 that Minnesota became the first state to outlaw discrimination based not only on sexual orientation but also on gender identity, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Rhode Island followed suit in 2001 when it added "gender identity" safeguards to its laws. New Mexico and California did the same in 2003, followed by Hawaii, Illinois and Maine in 2005. The District of Columbia has a similar law.

Officials in Minnesota and Rhode Island, where laws protecting transgender people have been in place the longest, report relatively few discrimination complaints based on gender identity or expression.

In Minnesota, the state received 40 discrimination complaints based on sexual orientation in 2004, and only four of those involved charges of transgender discrimination.

Rhode Island has received only two transgender discrimination complaints since the law was enacted, and the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights did not find probable cause in either case, according to Michael Evora, the commission's executive director.

Founded by LCCR and LCCR Education Fund



www.civilrights.org

Press Release - National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Calls Upon Senate Judiciary Committee to Question Under Oath:

Karl Rove, Texas Supreme Court Justice Nathan Hecht, U.S. District Court Judge Ed Kinkeade, and Focus on the Family's James Dobson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 17, 2005

Roberta Sklar

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Today, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that presidential advisor Karl Rove arranged for two of Harriet Miers' close friends and professional colleagues -- Justice Nathan Hecht of the Texas Supreme Court and U.S. District Court Judge Ed Kinkeade -- to speak with members of the executive committee of the Arlington Group, an umbrella alliance of 60 religious conservative groups formed to oppose marriage equality for lesbian and gay people. The article reports that the two judges were asked, based on their personal knowledge of Miers, if she would vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade*?" Kinkeade is reported to have said, "Absolutely," and Hecht concurred.

The following is a statement from Eleanor Acheson, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"It is an outrage that White House advisors and sitting judges are assuring right-wing leaders like James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Gary Bauer of American Values, along with others, that Harriet Miers will vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The Senate Judiciary Committee must interview under oath Mr. Rove, Texas Supreme Court Justice Nathan Hecht, U.S. District Court Judge Ed Kinkeade, as well as Mr. Dobson and others who participated in the reported conference call, to learn not only what was discussed but whether the involvement of Mr. Rove and the participation of the two judges reached back to the nominee herself.

"The independence of the judiciary and of every single federal judge who is part of it must be maintained, both in the appointment process and throughout the tenure of the judges' themselves. To date, President Bush has used Miers' faith to signal her constitutional views and has asserted that he 'knows' that Miers' views will not change. All of that is cause for alarm. Now we have his closest White House advisor arranging for his closest political allies -- religious conservatives -- to be assured that Miers would vote to overturn *Roe*. Mr. Dobson has said 'when you know some of the things that I know -- that I probably shouldn't know -- you will understand why I have said, with fear and trepidation, that I believe Harriet Miers will be a good justice.' We can no longer listen to the White House's disingenuous words about Miers' independence. Neither can the Senate Judiciary Committee. It must now get to the bottom of this new evidence."

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

ARCUS FOUNDATION EXPANDING Gay-rights leader takes helm

Monday, October 24, 2005

By John Liberty

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Concealed inside the 5-foot-2-inch frame of new Arcus Foundation Executive Director Urvashi Vaid is the mental attitude of a square-jawed fullback.

It only takes a few minutes in her presence to understand why Arcus founder and President Jon Stryker chose her to head his rapidly growing foundation, which is holding a private grand-opening celebration Tuesday for its Kalamazoo offices at the Arcus Depot, where Vaid will be introduced to the guests.

The voice that gave an impassioned speech for gay and lesbian rights 12 years ago at the March on Washington has not lost its edge. Although she sat in a comfortable blue chair in the renovated office building at 402 E. Michigan Ave. on Thursday, it was as if she were challenging Capitol Hill again as she spoke of the foundation's mission to celebrate diversity and promote tolerance, particularly of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

"I've dedicated my life to this work," she said. "What I define as 'this work' is social justice and civil rights. This was just a tremendous, rare and wonderful opportunity to continue in that work."

Vaid, 47, has been one of the most recognizable faces of the GLBT community for more than 25 years. She's championed GLBT rights as a lawyer, author, philanthropist and head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

In September, she took over the Arcus Foundation's newly established office in New York City. It is her job to help the foundation reach the nation with its mission.

"Urvashi's experience as a grant-maker will be invaluable as we seek to increase the impact and scope of our local, national and international work," said a press release issued by Stryker, a grandson of the founder of Stryker Corp. who has channeled part of his inheritance into the foundation.

Vaid left her post as the deputy director of the Ford Foundation's Governance and Civil Society Unit to take the reins at Arcus, which has awarded grants totaling more than \$55 million to the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, **the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, the International Primate Protection League and Kalamazoo College since it was established in 2000.

Vaid said the foundation will give out more than \$15 million in grants this year.

"The growth from when (associate director) Linda (May) and Jon (Stryker) started is astronomical," Vaid said. "But what we're seeing is that we're almost scurrying to keep up with the growth. We need to add some staffing here and obviously at the national level to sort of manage all these great ideas coming our way."

Although some in the Kalamazoo area have voiced concern that the expansion may leave them high and dry, that will not happen, Vaid said.

"Arcus is here to stay," she said.

Arcus' new home

If the expansion of Arcus hits closest to home for anyone, it's probably May, the foundation's first executive director. She left her job as an insurance agent in Jackson when Stryker hired her as the foundation's first employee five years ago. They shared his approximately 700-square-foot office at his architectural firm and sat only a pencil throw away from each other for three years.

Her desk was his drafting table.

“In five years, look how far we've come. We've really made an impact,” May said as she became choked up.

May is now the associate director and will focus on grant-making in southwestern Michigan and throughout the state. Oh, and she now has her own office in one of the most eye-catching structures in town.

The landmark Whistle Stop Depot, built in 1874, now causes people to stop and whistle at the old depot. May said someone even asked to buy train tickets shortly after the foundation began filling the structure. Others circle the building, peering through the windows.

“Linda and I will be at our computers and feel a presence,” program associate Carol Snapp said.

Stryker bought, renovated and donated the property to his foundation in 2002. Cambridge Seven Associates of Boston faced the task of blending more than 100 years of history with a modern stroke. The development carried a \$2 million price tag.

Among the original features and materials still visible are the wood trusses at the south end, limestone window sills and exterior brickwork.

“It's probably the best example of historical renovation in this county,” said Nelson Nave, a local architect and 10-year member of the Historic District Commission. “I think it's a benchmark for downtown.”

The vaulted glass of the Winter Garden, where many events will be held, connects the two buildings and is believed to be the only one in the country, according to Marty Yager, project manager for Architectural Glass and Metals, which installed the glass, manufactured by the Pilkington Group in England.

“The glass and engineering are done in the United Kingdom and shipped via a boat,” he said.

The “warehouse,” or south end of the building, houses four nonprofit organizations that share the vision of the Arcus Foundation: Advocacy Services for Kids, the Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan, the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council and Parent to Parent of Southwest Michigan. Another tenant is on the way. More than 25 employees of the foundation and the nonprofits occupy the Arcus Depot.

“It's just been a tremendous benefit to this organization to be able to be housed here,” said Pat Winston, executive director of the Fair Housing Center.

New Delhi to New York

Vaid and her family moved from New Delhi, India, to Potsdam, New York, in 1966, when she was 8 and the United States was going through one of its most turbulent times.

As a teenager, she wore glasses with finger-thick frames. Her straight hair streaked to her waist. She had an Indian accent. She buried her nose in books, almost clipping through her parents' library by age 12 -- about the same time she began giving political speeches and protesting military action in Vietnam.

“I don't know if I would ever say I was shy,” Vaid said.

In three years, she graduated from high school, then attended Vassar College in New York on an academic scholarship. By 18 or 19, she realized she was a lesbian. In 1980, with a bachelor's degree in English and political science already in

hand, she enrolled in law school at Northeastern University in Boston. She helped establish the Boston Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance two years later.

Following graduation from Northeastern, **Vaid worked with the ACLU and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, becoming executive director of the latter's Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., in 1989.** Three years later, she quit to write "Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation." It was released in 1995 and captured the 1996 nonfiction Stonewall Book Award -- an annual award for GLBT advocacy books dating back to 1971 and sponsored by the American Library Association.

NGLTF hired her again in 1997, as executive director, a position she held until 2001, when she moved to the Ford Foundation to give out grants to increase gay and lesbian awareness.

"It's not just about changing laws. It's about changing hearts and minds, and it's about changing culture," Vaid said. "The only way forward for us is to really address the moral and religious misunderstandings and miscommunications."

Getting to know you

In the coming year, Vaid's support staff at Arcus in New York will grow to between six and eight employees, she said. But lately she has focused on getting to know the Arcus employees in Kalamazoo.

They're aware of some things about Vaid, such as her love of '70s punk music and Patti Smith, whom she calls her "heroine, rock 'n' roll goddess." While growing up in New York she popped into the legendary club CBGB's to watch upstart groups such as Talking Heads and the Ramones.

"That wave of punk influenced me a lot," Vaid said. "I loved that music. I still do. It's still so fresh."

But she revealed a stunner recently: She loves the National Football League. At the top of her list are quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and the Pittsburgh Steelers .

"Any given Sunday, you can find me with friends watching football," Vaid said. "I love it. Hey, I'm a 5-foot-2, sort of petite girl, and I think, I wish, I had that opportunity to be that aggressive. I think I channel my aggression through football. ... It must be like a fantasy of mine to run full-tilt down a field."

Well then, hike. Jon Stryker just handed you the ball.

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Gay author fights against prejudice

October 23, 2005

Living Out Loud is a new book that tells the story of a black, gay ordained Baptist minister's account of the discrimination he experienced from the U.S. government and his religious community.

The Rev. Tommie Watkins will discuss his book from 7 to 9 p.m. Saturday at the Main Library.

"I was outed by the individual I dated while at the U.S. Naval Academy," said Watkins. "He was allowed to remain, being the relative of a high-ranking military officer, and I was forced to resign and [received] a bill for nearly \$90,000." Watkins filed a lawsuit against the Navy, which he won in 2000.

After leaving the Navy, Watkins was confronted by new attacks from church and family. His parents stopped talking to him.

He finished his degree at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and accepted a position teaching at a Catholic school in Miami. After a story appeared in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* in May 2000 reporting on his ministry to gay congregants at an African Methodist Episcopal Church in Miami, his contract as a schoolteacher was not renewed.

Watkins is the founder of the Ministry of Reconciliation, aimed at helping gay men and women reconcile their sexuality with their religion. Many gays grew up in the church, but don't go to church as adults because of the bigotry they feel, he told the *Sun-Sentinel*.

Watkins has been featured on television's BET Tonight and profiled in the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's book *I'm Black and I'm Proud*.

The discussion is being presented as part of Gay and Lesbian History Month and will be held in the Bienes Center on the sixth floor of the Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Fort Lauderdale. For more information, call 954-357-7443.

NEW YORK POST

ONLINE EDITION

365gay.com



October 18, 2005 Tuesday

TOP GAY ACTIVIST MENDS FENCES WITH BLOOMBERG

BYLINE: FRANKIE EDOZIEN

Matt Foreman, one of the city's best-known gay activists, has been quietly reappointed to the Human Rights Commission a year after he quit to protest one of Mayor Bloomberg's policies, The Post has learned.

Foreman, furious over Bloomberg's legal challenge to a bill giving health benefits to gay partners of city contractors, left last October.

At the time, he said, "Principle dictates that I resign."

Foreman's reappointment came last Friday, on the same day the Empire State Pride Agenda endorsed Bloomberg's Democratic rival, Fernando Ferrer.

Foreman headed ESPA for years and is now the executive director of the **National Gay & Lesbian Task Force**.

Last Thursday, Bloomberg called Foreman to talk about his administration's initiative to get insurance companies to offer domestic-partnership coverage to small businesses.

Bloomberg also signed an executive order that effectively creates a registry of city contractors detailing which ones offer such benefits.

During their chat, Foreman said he'd be happy to return to the commission.

"What happened is not a substitute [for the benefits bill], but it is a significant move forward, and I'm hopeful that, on appeal, it will be reinstated," Foreman told The Post.

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