



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

October 24 - 28, 2005

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quote of the Week:

"Rosa Parks's legacy will live on for generations," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, "providing inspiration for all those striving to extinguish the inequalities that continue to plague us, from racial and economic injustices to discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people." (from *Bay Area Reporter*)

If we do better than expected when Texans vote on an anti-gay marriage amendment on Nov. 8, much credit should go to the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. (by Dale Carpenter from *MetroWeekly*)

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BAY AREA REPORTER ON THE WEB

Achtenberg named to NGLTF board

By by Alexandra L. Woodruff

Former San Francisco Supervisor Roberta Achtenberg has joined the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's board** of directors. The Washington DC-based organization said the appointment could help defeat proposed California antigay marriage ballot initiatives that are expected on the ballot next year.

"Roberta is one of the most respected leaders in our community. We're incredibly fortunate to have her on our board," said Matt Foreman, the task force's executive director.

The task force was founded in 1973 and was the first LGBT civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. The organization is now planning to focus its resources on defeating as many as two antigay ballot initiatives slated for next year's election in California. If passed, the measures would ban same-sex marriage in California, revoke all domestic partner rights, and threaten related LGBT court rulings.

Currently, the task force is involved in fighting an antigay marriage initiative on the Texas ballot next month [see OutRight, page 9].

"I'm hoping that my political experience will be of value," Achtenberg said.

Achtenberg brings years of political and organizing experience to the board.

She was the first openly gay person confirmed by the U.S. Senate for a federal position. She served as an assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the Clinton administration. Most recently, she was a vice president of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. Currently, Achtenberg is senior adviser to the CEO of JMPT Inc., an enterprise software company.

She is the founding executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the vice chair of the California State University Board of Trustees.

"She has just an incredible wealth of experience, wisdom, and leadership, and we're just so incredibly glad to have her and her mind," Foreman said.

Achtenberg said the task force is an important organizing tool in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community.

"I believe in the task force and want to be helpful," Achtenberg said.

Achtenberg's appointment comes at a crucial time for the campaign against the 2006 ballot initiatives, Foreman said. The organization is planning on devoting hundreds of thousands of dollars into defeating the measures, he said.

Her experience and knowledge of California politics will be an asset to the task force's objectives, Foreman added.

"We're really going to be relying on her advice to help make sure our investment gets the greatest return possible," he said.

Achtenberg will help organize and advise the campaign and hopes her political experience will be valuable.

"I want to do anything I can to support that effort," she said.

Foreman said it is important for California to defeat the 2006 ballot initiatives.

"It's going to send a very strong message across the country that not only can we win but we can win in the country's most populous and diverse state," Foreman said.

Achtenberg plans on attending the NGLTF's Creating Change conference next month in Oakland. She said she won't have a formal role, but will be there as a student and an observer.

The nonprofit organization elected two other board members, Alan Horowitz of St. Paul, Minnesota and Hans Johnson of Washington, D.C. Horowitz is the coordinator of St. Paul's Out for Equity program, one of six school-based LGBT programs in the country. Johnson is the president of Progressive Victory, a consulting firm that works with interfaith, labor and progressive organizations.

Board members can serve up to seven years with the task force. There are now 29 members. The board meets three times a year and helps steer the organization's priorities.

"They serve as the eyes and ears of the organization to communicate to us what the people in the community are thinking," Foreman said.



October 28, 2005

Task Force releases study on Hispanic same-sex couple households

A groundbreaking study, *Hispanic and Latino Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States: A Report from the 2000 Census*, will be released in Houston, Texas, on Nov. 1, 2005, by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Latino/a Coalition for Justice.

This report is the first to analyze the demographics and experiences of Hispanic same-sex couple households nationwide captured by the 2000 U.S. Census. The areas of the country with the largest number of Hispanic same-sex couple households include the southwest (California, Arizona, Texas), the New York City metropolitan area, Florida and the Chicago metropolitan area.

This study reveals important new information on Hispanic same-sex couples and their children, a community that has been virtually invisible to the public and the media. The study, which analyzes Census data on age, immigration status, language, educational attainment, income, employment, home ownership, residential patterns, parenting rates and military service, also analyzes the impact of anti-gay family policies, including laws and constitutional amendments restricting marriage or other forms of partnership recognition, on these families. The study concludes that Hispanic same-sex couple families have more at stake in the same-sex marriage debate.

Hispanic and Latino Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States: A Report from the 2000 Census will be available Nov. 1 on the Task Force's Web home page at <http://www.theTaskForce.org> .

Los Angeles Times

October 27, 2005

SPORTS EXTRA / BASKETBALL

Swoopes, 'Tired of Having to Hide,' Says She Is Gay

By Mike Terry, Times Staff Writer

She has just finished one of her best seasons — leading the WNBA in scoring and winning an unprecedented third league most-valuable-player award.

But now five-time All-Star Sheryl Swoopes is taking the biggest shot of her life.

Swoopes, 34, has "come out," saying she is a lesbian. It's a decision that has taken her seven years to reveal, but one she no longer can keep private.

"I am just at a point right now in my life where I'm tired of having to hide, and having to pretend to be somebody I am not anymore," Swoopes said by phone Wednesday from her Houston home.

"It wasn't an easy decision. ... I woke up one morning and said I'm going to do it. And we will see what happens."

Before going public, Swoopes said the only other person she told was her older brother James. She needed his support to help her eventually explain to her mother and other two siblings.

"I come from a strong Baptist family; that is where my battles are now," Swoopes said. "My mom is big into that. She still loves me, but it's hard for her and me. She has been there for me throughout my career. But at the same time, not being able to live my life, be free and be happy, I don't feel my life has been complete."

Before her revelation, the only thing most people knew about Swoopes was her outstanding athletic career.

She first received national acclaim in helping Texas Tech win the 1993 NCAA title, scoring a record 47 points in the championship game against Ohio State. She was the Final Four MVP, and her jersey was retired by Texas Tech in 1994.

She has won Olympic gold medals with the 1996, 2000 and 2004 U.S. teams. In 1997 she was assigned to the Comets. Though her rookie season was shortened to nine games because she was pregnant, Swoopes became an integral part of the Comets' four consecutive league championships from 1997 to 2000.

Besides three WNBA MVP awards, Swoopes is a three-time defensive player of the year. And Nike made her the first female basketball player to have a shoe named after her, "Air Swoopes."

She was married to former football player Eric Jackson, whom she first met in high school, in 1995. (The couple divorced in 1999.) They had a son, Jordan, in 1997.

She has always said her son "comes before everything else" in her life. But she also realizes a need to honest with herself.

"I feel a huge burden has been lifted," she said. "I feel like for the last six or seven years I have been pretending and sacrificed my happiness to make sure other people were OK. And it didn't matter about my feelings and what was important to me."

There was support Wednesday for Swoopes' announcement.

"Nike is proud to count Sheryl Swoopes as one of our athletes and as a longtime member of the Nike family," said Raye Pond, a sports marketing manager for Nike. "We've had a relationship with Sheryl for more than 11 years and she has inspired us all as a pioneering female athlete."

Said Matt Foreman, executive director of the national Gay and Lesbian Task Force: "We applaud her action and we hope her courage will inspire other professional sports players to follow her lead. It's always a positive thing when a prominent person and leader comes out and lets Americans know that we are everywhere, playing important roles in our society."

Steven Levitt, president of Marketing Evaluations Inc., a Manhasset, N.Y.-based firm that measures the familiarity and appeal of celebrities, said that research done in 2003 suggests that Swoopes is "about average" when it comes to public recognition.

As far as her future in sports sponsorship deals, Swoopes' value will continue to be determined by two forces that govern sports marketing in general — whether there's a viable connection between Swoopes and the product she chooses to endorse, and how much the sponsor wants to pay for the association.

Sense in Advertising

Commentary: OutRight

by Dale Carpenter

Published on [10/27/2005](#)

If we do better than expected when Texans vote on an anti-gay marriage amendment on Nov. 8, much credit should go to the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. The Task Force is airing seven ads on Houston-area television stations. They are the first-ever to defend the idea of gay marriage, and they do so on essentially conservative grounds. In contrast to the badly flawed, Texas-based "No Nonsense in November" campaign (which I criticized in detail two weeks ago in this column), the Task Force ads are right tactically and substantively. They could provide a template for future marriage-amendment campaigns.

Tactically, the ads are exactly right. They are being aired in Houston, which should be the center of efforts to defeat Amendment 2. All of them depict actual Houston residents speaking against the amendment.

Turnout in the state for this election is expected to be very low, perhaps under 10 percent of registered voters. Yet turnout in Houston, where municipal elections are being held the same day, should be disproportionately high. Urban Houston voters are somewhat more socially tolerant than voters elsewhere in Texas. Four years ago, they almost defeated an effort to ban same-sex domestic partner benefits for city workers.

The Task Force's limited resources are thus being spent wisely. By contrast, the No Nonsense campaign is based in Austin, 160 miles away from the center of the action. Yard signs produced by No Nonsense have been scarce, even in Houston's gay neighborhoods.

Substantively, the Task Force ads are impressive. Four of the seven ads feature gay couples. In one, a woman identified as a "Reverend," sits beside her partner in their home. She says: "God loves us like everyone else, and wants the same thing for us as God wants for God's straight children." Her partner adds that when she proposed, she intended a "long-term commitment." The picture fades to black and the following message appears in stark white letters: "How would you feel if you couldn't marry the person you love?"

In another of the gay-couple ads, two men are described as "Together for 18 years." A third gay-couple ad describes a woman as "Committed to partner, Anita, for 21 years." She tells us hers is a family "in every sense of the word."

The two most effective of the seven ads feature parents talking about their love for their gay son and their hopes for his future. In one, the mother emphasizes her religious beliefs. "My entire Christian faith can be summed up with Jesus Christ's two new commandments," she says, "which was to love God and to love each other. He didn't say, 'Love each other unless they're gay.'"

In the other ad, the same mother delivers an eloquent description of the meaning of equality. "My children want the same thing their father and I wanted," she begins. "A home, a community, a church, friends, a job..." Here the father chimes in, "and someone who loves them." "And someone who loves them," she repeats. Describing her son's relationship with his partner, she closes by saying, "I hope they're together forever." The screen fades to black with the message, "Gay people want what we all want."

The Task Force ads are simple and powerful. They don't talk about abstract "rights." They don't list all the legal benefits of marriage, as if this were a struggle over the tax code. There is nothing post-modern about them. There's not a single sexual liberationist in sight.

Instead, the ads emphasize the needs of real gay families, including the children they're raising. They highlight long-term commitment by gay couples. They use religious faith, spoken by religious people, as an argument against the amendment. And they focus on the similarities -- not the differences -- between gay and straight Americans.

Most significantly, they begin to make the positive case for gay marriage. They are not shy or apologetic about it. They do not say that the amendment is "unnecessary" because gay marriage is already banned (although that's true). They don't complain about how broad the amendment is (although it is very broad). They don't warn about Machiavellian politicians pushing the amendment (although that's a big part of the reason this is even on the ballot). They are not in the least politically partisan.

Like it or not, when these anti-gay-marriage amendments reach a ballot, most people do not vote on these sorts of legal and political-insider issues. They vote on marriage.

The Task Force's strategy is a dramatic -- and needed -- departure from the losing anti-amendment campaigns everywhere else in the country. By contrast, the No Nonsense campaign has avoided the "M" word like the plague and has been partisan Democratic in an overwhelmingly conservative and Republican state.

Where the state-based campaign is a tired rehash of losing themes from other amendment fights that have danced around gay marriage and left our side dispirited, The Task Force's ad campaign is refreshingly honest and principled. The amendment, it says simply, should be defeated *because gay marriage is good*.

For Texas, it may be too little, too late. But if tried elsewhere, this straightforward message might help us pull closer. At the very least it begins the long-term process of convincing Americans there is nothing to fear from gay marriage.

Marriage. Commitment. Families. Children. Faith. I never thought I would see this day, but The Task Force is making the conservative case for gay marriage.



Gay groups target Bush over Miers' move

Ann Rostow, PlanetOut Network

Thursday, October 27, 2005 / 12:11 PM

SUMMARY: *Gay advocacy groups blasted the Bush administration Thursday for engineering the departure of Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers.*

Gay advocacy groups blasted the Bush administration Thursday for engineering the departure of Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers in response to pressure from the far right.

"It's clear she had to go because she failed to demonstrate a slavish commitment to the agenda of the right wing," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Eric Stern, head of the National Stonewall Democrats, said anti-gay activists "have corrupted the judicial selection process in the Bush White House," and are now set on "a nominee who will serve their needs rather than those of the American people."

Over at the Human Rights Campaign, Joe Solmonese called Thursday morning's resignation "an extremist veto of Miers' nomination," while Lambda Legal kept the focus on the future, calling for the next nominee to undergo a "serious vetting."

Miers withdrew her candidacy in a phone call to Bush on Wednesday evening. Although the White House insists the decision was hers alone, her call came on the same evening that she delivered a fresh batch of answers to a questionnaire from the Senate Judiciary Committee, the New York Times reports. Miers also spent Wednesday afternoon on Capitol Hill talking to members of the Senate, an unusual activity for a nominee on the verge of stepping aside.

Indeed, it seems likely that the push was not self-inflicted. Discomfort over her nomination from the far right may have metastasized into outright opposition with the recent revelation that, in a 1993 speech, Miers recommended that government steer clear of "legislating religion or morality."

"When science cannot determine the facts, and decisions vary based upon religious belief," she went on at the time, "government should not act."

With the nomination of John Roberts, followed by the selection of Harriet Miers, the LGBT community has twice managed to avoid the specter of an openly -- maybe even unapologetically -- anti-gay nominee to the nation's highest court. There was no guarantee that Roberts or Miers would rule in favor of LGBT equality in some future case, but neither of these individuals had a hostile public record. Nor were these two individuals characterized by the punditry as ideologues, something that cannot be said for every name on the administration's Supreme Court short list.

Court observers are now speculating whether George Bush will capitulate to the far right in his next high court pick, or whether he will nominate another mystery candidate. That, in turn, may depend on whether he thinks his political fortunes will be better served by avoiding an all-out partisan nomination fight, or by winning one.

BAY AREA REPORTER ON THE WEB

Civil rights icon Rosa Parks dies

By **Bob Roehr**

It is difficult for those who did not live through it to truly understand the racism that permeated the United States in the 1950s.

Segregation still is apparent within our society, but then, particularly in the Deep South, it had the force of law and most of the instruments of state and local government to enforce a strict separation of blacks from whites. Too often blacks faced billy clubs, fire hoses, police dogs, and even bullets in the night when they sought to practice their basic rights as Americans.

Rosa Parks was the catalyst that moved the struggle for civil rights to a new level when she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama on December 1, 1955. Some thought that she was simply tired that day and wanted to sit. But as she would explain in her 1992 autobiography *My Story*, "No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

She was arrested for violating the segregation laws and fined \$10, plus \$4 for court costs. Her arrest sparked a 380-day boycott of the city's bus system, and a court challenge to the segregation laws that the Supreme Court ultimately struck down as unconstitutional.

It brought a young organizer of the boycott, 26-year-old Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., to national attention, and it forever changed the face of the civil rights struggle in the United States.

"Rosa Parks sat down in order that we might stand up," the Reverend Jesse Jackson told the *New York Times*. "Paradoxically, her imprisonment opened the doors for our long journey to freedom."

Parks and her husband faced economic retaliation from the white establishment and in 1957 moved to Detroit in order to make a living. She died there at her home, Monday, October 24. She was 92.

"Rosa Parks's acts of courageous defiance clearly demonstrates how one person can awaken the conscience of a nation," said H. Alexander Robinson, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition. "It is this indomitable spirit that will continue to motivate those who strive for equal rights for all and fairness for all families."

"With one simple yet extraordinary action, Rosa Parks made our nation a better and fairer place for all Americans," said Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign. "By insisting on the dignity and respect every human being deserves, Parks boldly moved the country toward fairness."

Eric Stern, executive director of National Stonewall Democrats, said, "The quiet life of Rosa Parks left a resounding testimony to the American ideal. When equal rights are guaranteed by a government, but denied by those who govern, it is the responsibility of the citizen to stand and demand justice. When Rosa Parks affirmed her rights as a citizen, she transformed the civil rights movement and American law."

"Rosa Parks's legacy will live on for generations," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, "providing inspiration for all those striving to extinguish the inequalities that continue to plague us, from racial and economic injustices to discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people."

Harriet, we hardly knew ye

Gay rights groups are openly disagreeing about why Harriet Miers withdrew her nomination yesterday to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Miers claimed her withdrawal was forced by persistent Senate Judiciary Committee requests for documents showing what advice she has given to President Bush in a series of high-level positions, including White House counsel. But almost no one accepts that explanation because the president rebuffed similar requests relating to John Roberts' tenure in his father's administration, and he still won approval as the court's chief justice.

The two most prominent national gay political groups are in sync, claiming that her nomination was effectively "vetoed" by social conservatives who they claim control the Republican Party.

"This was an extremist veto of Miers' nomination," said Joe Solmonese, who heads up the Human Rights Campaign, in a statement released yesterday. "Her withdrawal today demonstrates that the president is beholden to extremist groups rather than to the American people."

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, echoed that assertion. "This is a sorry testament to the absolute control right-wing evangelicals have over this administration," he said. "Harriet Miers' intellectual and professional abilities and accomplishments were never really on the table. Instead, it is clear she had to go because she failed to demonstrate a slavish commitment to the agenda of the right wing."

But Lambda Legal, the country's most important gay legal group, disagreed with that analysis, claiming her nomination was tanked over concerns about her qualifications and close relationship to the president.

"Harriet Miers faced right-wing criticism on social issues," acknowledged Lambda Legal's Michael Adams, in the agency's official statement on the withdrawal. "But what made her especially vulnerable was not principally that, but was the combination of her lack of judicial experience and her extraordinarily close connection to President Bush, which led to the repeated suggestions that she was nominated based on 'cronyism' rather than her qualifications."

So who has it right? Certainly not Lambda Legal, at least when it comes to the actual reason for Miers' withdrawal. If her views on hot-button social issues were more clearly conservative, then her record and relationship to the president would not have generated the pressure to force her withdrawal. And as I laid out near the end of a blog post just hours before she withdrew, Miers' record actually compares favorably with Sandra Day O'Connor, the justice she was nominated to replace.

HRC and the **Task Force** are no doubt correct that pressure from the right robbed Miers of the base of support the president relies upon in the Senate for confirmation fights. Conservative groups are far more effective at pressuring the GOP White House and Congress than are liberal groups when Washington is run by supposedly gay-friendly Democrats. Instead, organizations like HRC and NGLTF almost uniformly bite their tongue when it comes to criticizing their supposed



Harriet Miers withdrew her nomination to be a Supreme Court justice Thursday, Oct. 27, 2005, in the face of stiff opposition and mounting criticism about her qualifications. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

allies in Washington. The right-wing "veto" of Miers shows us all just how effective independent lobbying can be when done correctly. Let's hope Solmonese and **Foreman** were taking notes, in between press releases.

Speaking of the gay rights movement's supposed allies in the Senate, where were they on Harriet Miers? As I laid out in my blog post, Miers' record is about as muddy on gay rights, privacy and AIDS issues as O'Connor's. Much more importantly, Miers was undoubtedly more friendly and open-minded on these issues than any of those on President Bush's short list to fill the slot now.

But Democrats in the Senate, and progressive lobbying groups like HRC, were enjoying too much the political injuries being inflicted on the president to keep their eyes on the prize: a comparatively moderate Supreme Court selection by a very conservative president. If Democrats and moderate Republicans had spoken out more for giving Miers a fair hearing on all of these issues, her nomination might have been salvaged, to all of our benefit.

Unfortunately, way too many Democrats follow Bill Clinton's amoral example of valuing power over policy, and are only raising their voices after the fact, and now simply to inflict further injury on Bush. Our gay rights groups, too beholden to Democrats and more focused on their own financial bottom line than their mission, failed to apply pressure for Miers when it could have made a difference.

Soon enough, we will all find out just how serious the damage will be to our civil rights as a result of these short-sighted political calculations.



Posted by **Chris Crain**, Executive Editor | Oct. 28 at 1:59 PM | ccrain@window-media.com