



Highlights:

The Task Force in the News

Recent Clips ~ June 17 - 24, 2005

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

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Dave Noble Speaks at Nashville Pridefest

The speech below was delivered by Dave Noble, Political Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, at the June 4, 2005, Nashville Pride Festival.

It's a great honor for me to be here today and be part of Nashville Pride – what an amazing turnout! I bring you greetings from Matt Foreman, from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and from activists all across the nation.

I wish I could deliver a happy speech today, but I can't. While we have so much to be proud of – so much amazing progress in the short 36 years since Stonewall – all of us here today need to face some cold, unvarnished truths. Here in Tennessee and in states all across the country, our lives, our love, and our families are under attack.

Their propoganda – and you hear it in the halls of your capitol here in Nashville and on radio and TV – is to say that marriage equality for us – or any form of family recognition for that matter – will destroy the family, is an attack on Christianity and western civilization, and will unravel the fabric of our society – and therefore equality must be crushed. This is the same mentality that led our nation to war in Iraq. But, of course, there are no weapons of mass civilization destruction hidden in gay families, and they know it.



The tip of the spear being used against us is marriage – but you and I know it is about much, much more than that. It is about the forces of political and religious intolerance working not only to push us back, but to advance a broad reactionary agenda including breaking down the wall of separation between church and state, crippling labor, taking away a woman's right to choose, dismantling social security – the list goes on and on. Our lives are merely fodder for the right wing machine.

I've heard both straight and gay people say that the string of losses we've faced at the polls around marriage equality are really our own fault; they argue that our community pushed too hard and too fast. They say we have failed to "educate" the public about who we really are and get beyond the stereotypes – and that it is now our obligation to reintroduce ourselves to the American people. I also repeatedly hear that it's up to us to reframe the terms of the debate away from "moral values" to simpler concepts, such as fairness, which polls indicate resonate most with the public.

I disagree. Rather than reframing the debate away from moral values, we must embrace them. We need to shout about the utter immorality of the escalating attacks against LGBT people. And, equally, the utter immorality in the failure of so many people of good will to stand with us. It is time for us to seize the moral high ground and state unambiguously that anti-gay discrimination in any form is immoral. People of faith and those among us who believe in the intrinsic goodness of all people have a moral responsibility to fight anti-gay discrimination in every form it appears.

By any measure, LGBT people are targets of discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations. FBI statistics show that more people are being murdered because of their sexual orientation or gender identity than for any other bias reason. Our young people are still routinely bullied in schools. The examples of injustices in the area of partner and family recognition are too many to list.

No thinking or feeling person can deny these realities, which, as always, fall hardest on LGBT people of color and those who are poor.

But, alarmingly, rather than seeing a groundswell of support for measures to combat these injustices, the opposite is occurring. In Congress and in statehouses nationwide, it's open season on LGBT people. For example, over the last nine months, anti-marriage state constitutional amendments were put on the ballot in 14 states, 10 of which also prohibit the recognition of any form of relationship between people of the same gender. It's likely that another 12 states – and that includes Tennessee – will have similar measures on the ballot within three years.

Nothing like this has happened since the Constitution was ratified in 1791 – essentially a national referendum inviting the public to vote to deprive a small minority of Americans of rights the majority takes for granted and sees as fundamental.

This is not democracy. This is the tyranny of the majority, the very thing our Bill of Rights was created to prevent.

Our opponents – like Rep. Bill Dunne, Rep. Chris Newton, Senator Jeff Miller and Senator Williams - say this is simply the way for the “will of the people” to be expressed. In most states in this country, Americans would not have desegregated schools, allowed people to marry someone of another race, granted access to contraception or women the right to choose – if those rights were put up to a popular vote.

No, Senator Miller and Senator Williams – this is not about democracy – this is about you using lies, myths, stereotypes and fear to advance your own political career by debasing, defaming and demonizing gay people.

And who's been there to fight these amendments? Besides a few heroes in your legislature, like Senator Cohen and Representative Briley, it's been us, the very minority under attack. Mainstream media and churches are largely silent to our opponents' lies. Most progressive organizations and political campaigns steer clear. There have been sterling exceptions, but they have been few and far between.

Many people who see themselves as supporters of equal rights for all tolerate this because they believe prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation is profoundly different than that based on race or religion – that is comes from an understandable disapproval of our “behavior”. Homosexual behavior, they feel, is “unnatural”. Pundits say there is an “ick” factor – that the thought of gay sex revolts non-gay people, and that this seemingly innate reaction is proof there is something wrong with homosexuality.

This rationale is hardly unique to gay people. Scholars point to comparable “ick” sentiments about Irish immigrants in the 1880s, and describe how they were used to strengthen control over slaves and to justify the taking of Native American lands, as well as to marginalize Jewish people.

Fact is, there is no justification for anti-gay prejudice – for any prejudice – the “justifications” for it are as unfounded as those used to support the second-class treatment of other minorities in past generations.

So, what needs to be done?

First, let's stop ceding faith and morality to religious extremists. Surveys show that 76% of us identify as being a person of faith. Can everyone here who is a person of faith put your hand up? You know that our lives, our families, and the way we love and the way we are loved in return are part of God's sacred creation. All gay people need to support you in your quest to reclaim faith – particularly Christianity – from those who have manipulated Jesus' message of unconditional love.

Second, everyone must realize that when straight people say gay people should not have the freedom to marry or adopt or be protected from discrimination, they are saying we are not as good, or as deserving as they are. It's that simple, no matter how they try to sugarcoat it. This is unacceptable – and it is immoral.

Third, while we should talk to straight people honestly about our lives, we must flatly reject the notion that we are somehow to blame for all of this because we have not effectively communicated our “stories” to others. Fundamentally, it is not our job to prove to others that we can be good neighbors, good parents, and that wow,

we're actually people too.

Fourth, equality will remain elusive if we keep relying on intellectualized arguments or by dryly cataloguing, for example, each of the 1.138 federal rights and responsibilities we are forced to forgo due to marriage inequality.

The other side goes for the gut; we've got to too.

In this vein, we must put others on the spot to stand up and fight for us. As the cascade of lies pours forth from the Anti-Gay Industry, it is the moral responsibility of non-gay people to speak out with the same vehemence as they would if it was another minority under attack. Ministers and rabbis must be challenged with the questions, "Where is your voice?" Elected officials who meet with and attend events of the Anti-Gay Industry, must be met with the challenge, "How can you do that!? How is that public service?"

The orchestrated campaign to deny us jobs, family recognition, children, and housing is immoral. Silently bearing witness to this discrimination is just as immoral.

America and Tennessee are in the midst of another ugly chapter in its struggle with the forces of bigotry. People of good will can either rise up and speak for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans, or look back upon themselves 20 years from now with deserved shame.

All of you, here, are models for standing strong in the face of attack. You are proof that no matter how hard Bill Frist, Jeff Miller, or James Dobson try to beat us down – we will not stop being honest about who we are, living true to ourselves, and fighting for a fair and just America. You are proof that despite how much they claim to preach moral values, we will not let them forget about their moral responsibilities. Thank you, the LGBT and allied community of Tennessee, for giving me and LGBT people everywhere hope, and the confidence that comes from fighting alongside people who don't back down, no matter how strong the attack. You have every reason to be proud today. Happy Pride, have fun today, sign up at the Tennessee Equality Project booth, and thank you!

Skeleton in gays' closets: Racism Bias investigation at Castro bar opens dialogue about prejudice

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, June 26, 2005

They are among the most maligned groups in society, but when it comes to discrimination, many say, gays can give as good as they get.

A city investigation of S.F. Badlands, one of the largest and most popular bars in the heart of the Castro neighborhood, has added evidence to that argument. In April, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission found that the bar discriminated against African American customers and job applicants.

That finding, which is vigorously disputed by the bar's owner, is elevating the murmurs of racism in the gay community to a national discussion. National gay media have followed the controversy, and comedian Margaret Cho blogged about the bar -- and racism -- after a tour stop in San Francisco.

Protesters have picketed the bar every week for the past eight weeks, turning a Saturday night into an ethical quandary for patrons. The leading national scholar of racism among gay men calls the situation a catalyst.

"People have discussed racism in the community for a long time, but to have such sustained public demonstrations out in the street in the very central part of the Castro -- it's a new moment in the history of the community," said Niels Teunis, an anthropologist and assistant professor of human sexuality studies at San Francisco State University.

The protesters are affiliated with a group called And Castro For All, which formed around the issue, and have a stated short-term goal of putting bar owner Les Natali out of business and a long-term aim of "fostering a generally welcome Castro neighborhood ... and exposing actions that undermine inclusion."

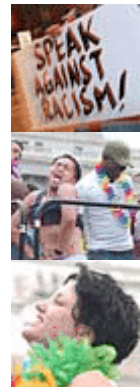
The human rights commission found that Natali had referred to African Americans as "non-Badlands customers" and had denied them entry by requiring them to show multiple forms of identification and by inconsistently applying a dress code and a "no bag" rule.

Natali owns two other Castro bars, including the neighborhood bar with the largest number of African American patrons. He bought that bar, the Pendulum, in December. Natali said he believes that this trouble began because of that last purchase and has demanded that the human rights commission rescind its findings. He insists that the allegations stem from "misperceptions and misunderstandings" and that he asks people to leave his bar only if they have had too much to drink or are on drugs.

On Friday, former Mayor Willie Brown agreed to mediate the dispute at the request of Mayor Gavin Newsom.

Whatever the outcome, this community built on tolerance and diversity has to answer to members who say those ideals do not match reality.

"I was told that Harvey Milk would be rolling in his grave if he knew a black man was running San Francisco's gay pride parade. I was told Martin Luther King would be rolling in his grave. I was told that I



was not qualified," said Calvin Gipson, who was president of the parade committee from 1998 to 2000 and on the board of directors for five years. He is the director of human services for Glide Memorial United Methodist Church.

"I have been called 'big, black nigger bitch' while walking on the street in the Castro," said Zwazzi Sowo, a lesbian who has lived in San Francisco for 20 years. "I am 52 years old. Nowhere else in my life have I experienced walking down the street and someone calling me a nigger."

There have been few studies of racism among gay men and no current research on lesbians, which makes it difficult to determine the extent of the problem in that community. Lesbians who have spoken with And Castro for All consistently say two things, according to John Newsome, who started the group.

"When I asked lesbians if they had experienced or heard of discrimination at Badlands, they generally offered one of two responses: 'My friends and I feel unwelcome almost everywhere in Castro,' or simply, 'I don't even go to the Castro anymore,' " Newsome said.

A 2002 survey of 2,600 gay black men attending pride celebrations, though unscientific in selection, found that 48 percent of respondents thought racism was a problem among white gays.

That survey was published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, which in 2004 released the results of a similar survey of 125 mostly gay Asian Americans living on the East Coast. Eighty-two percent of respondents in that sample believed such a problem exists.

A national survey of Latinos will be published later this summer, said Jason Cianciotto, research director for the institute.

Teunis finds evidence of racism in the portrayal of minorities in gay media.

During 2003, the only photographs of nonwhite men published in Out magazine -- a leading gay publication -- were of Latino musicians and black men in advertisements for HIV and AIDS medication, he said.

"You get very lonely in this city being a gay black man," said John Weber, who made several allegations of discrimination against Badlands.

The Badlands situation resulted from firsthand reports of perceived discrimination, which the human rights commission investigated.

Marvin Miller, who is African American, visited Badlands in the fall of 2003. He said he left the bar at one point, and when he tried to re-enter, he was stopped at the door by Natali.

"Mr. Natali blocked my entrance and asked to see two or three forms of ID. ... (He said) this would include a driver's license, birth certificate, Social Security card and a passport," Miller said in his complaint to the commission.

"I asked Mr. Natali why he needed to see multiple pieces of ID. He said that it was the bar's policy. I thought this was strange as I do not know many people who carry that many forms of ID to get into a bar," he said.

That complaint is the basis for one of the commission's findings. Natali said there is no supporting evidence for Miller's claim and notes that he was allowed inside the bar.

In all, the commission's report is based on eight complainants who made 32 allegations of discrimination against the bar. The commission found 13 of those to be valid, though Natali disputes each of them.

"We don't discriminate against people of color," Natali said. "I'm a businessman. I see green."

The commission has no regulatory teeth to enact penalties, but the state agency that issues liquor licenses also has investigated complaints against Badlands and the results of that inquiry are expected any day.

The standard by which the Badlands situation should be judged is simple, said Shelby Steele, a fellow with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

"If the bar is rejecting people on the basis of race, then there is no excuse for that whatsoever," he said.

Steele calls racism an evil that afflicts everyone, regardless of the color of a person's skin.

"Racism is a universal human impulse. I think the definition itself, or certainly one definition, is pretty simple, and it's the inability to distinguish individuals within a racial group. It's a rejection of the human as an individual," he said.

That includes personal ads that specify which races are desired or undesired, Steele said.

Such a judgment is one that Teunis at San Francisco State said he agrees with, though he said gay men's openness about sexual preferences complicates the situation. Entire portions of the gay community define themselves by physical characteristics and create a sub-subculture of bars, barbershops, street festivals and the like to cater to men who look like they do.

"In the gay community, you have to have a sexual preference, and that makes it more difficult to talk about race and racism," Teunis said.

Wilson Fang, a board member of Gay Asian Pacific Alliance in San Francisco, said he believes those complaining about discrimination at Badlands are being hypersensitive and said he is not bothered if someone is not sexually interested in him because of his race.

"Sure it's slightly bothersome, but to suggest an individual is racist because he doesn't have a preference for someone, I don't think that's valid," Fang said. His organization supports the action against Badlands, but with the caveat that "many people in the gay Asian community feel conflicted on the issue of racism," he said.

As debate and discussion continue, Teunis said the gay community's examination of its own skeletons still in the closet is a good sign.

"I think it means the community is growing up," he said.

Chicago Tribune

June 22, 2005 Wednesday
RedEye Edition

Proud parents; Gay families still fighting for rights and recognition

By Kathryn Masterson, RedEye.

Ben Robinson doesn't hide the fact that he has two moms.

At work, the 23-year-old displays photos of siblings Jordan, 9, and 4-year-old twins Kamrynn and Bryanna, the biological children of his "second mom " and the adopted children of his biological mother.

Ben's mom Kaleen divorced his father and came out as a lesbian when he was young, and she and her longtime partner, Cheryl Richardson, used a sperm donor to have three children.

This month, Ben shared his experiences growing up with two moms in an essay for Hewitt Associates, where he and Kaleen work in the Lincolnshire office. The company marked Gay Pride month with an exhibit celebrating same-sex families.

"In reality, this is the most stable relationship I've ever seen in my life," Ben said.

But not every workplace or every person is as welcoming of same-sex families. In Illinois, where gay individuals and couples can adopt, a poll released Tuesday by Equality Illinois shows a split on gay adoption: 44 percent oppose it; 48 percent support it.

"There is not overwhelming support for same-sex couples to adopt," said Rick Garcia, head of Equality Illinois. "There's still a number of people out there, larger than we thought, opposed to mixing gays and kids."

Gay couples who chose to raise children are a major part of the fight over gay marriage, which is illegal in Illinois. Advocates say gay couples need marriage to legally protect their families, while opponents say gay marriage opens the door to more kids being raised without a mother or father figure.

"It would make it much easier to put children in homes that intentionally don 't have a mom or a dad," said Illinois

Family Institute leader Peter LaBarbera, who is opposed to homosexuality and believes children do best with both a mother and a father.

On the other side, the American Psychiatric Association has put its support behind same-sex marriage on the basis that stable adult partnerships are a positive influence on all members of a family.

Kaleen Robinson and Cheryl Richards aren't activists--their lives are overscheduled with work and raising three young children--but they say they'd like to get married if it ever becomes legal in Illinois.

Jordan Richards, who is in 3rd grade, is matter-of-fact about the law, telling his moms that he knows they can't get divorced because they can't get married.

Cheryl says she and Kaleen are open with him about why they're not allowed to wed. They tell their children there are many different possibilities for families.

"We're partners, remember?" Kaleen explains to an inquisitive Kamrynn one recent evening at the kitchen table. "Some people have a mommy and a daddy who love each other. You have two mommies who love each other."

Anecdotally, families with two moms or two dads seem to be becoming more common. No exact count of gay and lesbian parents exists, but the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates there are between 2 million and 8 million gay parents in the U.S.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, one of three lesbian couples and one of five gay male couples reported to the U.S. Census they are raising children.

Ben Robinson says he has received few negative responses to his family, though he kept his mom's sexuality a secret in school. It wasn't until the end of high school that Ben felt comfortable opening up about his family.

"I came to realize this is my family, and if you don't like it, tough," he said. "These are the people who are going to be there for me no matter what."

Kaleen and Cheryl came out publicly after Jordan was born because they wanted their children to be comfortable with their family. They're open at work, at church and with their children's teachers and coaches.

Most people have been accepting of the family, Cheryl said, especially when they get to know them. They own a home in suburban Grayslake with a yard and a two-car garage. Both moms work, and the kids are busy with piano lessons, baseball, soccer and gymnastics. Ben, who works and goes to school full time, lives there, and his girlfriend, Colette Ruscheinsky, hangs out there too.

Still, they know they'll have to prepare their kids for those who won't accept them.

Kaleen, who says her evangelical Christian parents have let her and Ben know they don't agree with her family choices, has tried to tell Jordan he could be teased for having two moms. Jordan, she says, doesn't understand why.

"You have to teach your child that somebody's not going to like them because of who his parents are," Kaleen said.

What makes someone a parent?

You can argue that parenthood requires an emotional or physical bond with a child, but it's a legal bond that defines a parent in the eyes of a court, said Patricia Logue, senior counsel for Lambda Legal.

For gay parents, that legal relationship can happen in two ways: being the biological parent or adopting the child. In Illinois, gay individuals or partners may adopt.

"The difference between legal and not is night and day," Logue said. A legal relationship allows an adult to have the child on his or her health insurance and allows rights if something happens to the biological parent. If the couple breaks up, both parents have a right to petition for custody or visitation.

Illinois does not recognize "de-facto" parents who act as parents but have no legal ties to a child, Logue said. Current Illinois case law shows that if a same-sex couple with children breaks up, a non-biological parent who has not adopted the child has no rights to custody or visitation.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
June 25, 2005 Saturday Home Edition

WHERE GAYS GO TO GRAY; As retirement nears, more find places to live, love freely

GAYLE WHITE

Zionville, N.C. --- Tucked into the forests of the North Carolina mountains is a gated community designed by developers for people like them.

Lesbians and gay men.

At Carefree Cove near Boone, Cathy Groene and Gina Razete are selling more than wooded lots with views of Snake Mountain. They're marketing the freedom to walk down the road hand-in-hand, dance together at community socials, and talk unself-consciously about a same-sex partner.

Atlantan Jeanne Dolan, 53, an online college instructor, bought the concept.

"I liked the idea of living in a community where I could be open and accepted, even embraced for who I am," she says.

Razete, 50, and Groene, 57, are pioneers in the growing business of second-home and retirement developments for lesbians and gays. Others are going up in California, New Mexico and downtown Boston.

The women are also part of a graying gay population estimated at 2 million. The number of gays and lesbians in their 50s or older is expected to swell to 5.7 million by 2020, according to a 2004 study by the Maryland-based market research publisher Packaged Facts.

Some live openly and don't want to spend their leisure time or retirement years struggling for acceptance. Others, who have kept their sexual orientation hidden, would like to come out of the closet.

Gay and lesbian developers understand that.

"We really think of ourselves as a lifestyle company," says Amy Errett, CEO of Olivia, a San Francisco-based travel company for lesbians that is planning a \$300,000-up townhouse community in Palm Springs.

Gay and lesbian developers say they will sell to anyone who is gay-friendly, but most say no nongays have inquired. Laws about housing discrimination vary from state to state.

Massachusetts prohibits discrimination in housing based on sexual orientation, says David Aronstein, 52. As president of the not-for-profit Stonewall Communities, he is planning a community of \$400,000-to-\$600,000 apartments in Boston.

One potential buyer said: "It doesn't have to be exclusively gay and lesbian. I just want to be in the majority for once in my life," Aronstein recalls.

In North Carolina, Groene and Razete say, they could legally sell only to gays because the state doesn't include sexual orientation in its anti-discrimination housing laws.

"No one who is straight has tried to move in," Razete says. "I would guess if it happens it's going to be somebody's good friend or family member."

They're advertising the \$40,000-and-up lots at their mountain getaway through gay publications and at events such as this week's Atlanta Pride festival.

Frank Bytautas, 47, a real estate agent, and his partner Bill Sevigny, 62, a grocery chain executive, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., plan to begin building soon at Carefree Cove. They'll move there full time when Sevigny retires sometime in the next three years.

"We don't go to all gay restaurants or on all gay vacations," says Bytautas, "but I think growing old and being with people who have the same lifestyle is a great thing."

Because they are less likely than heterosexuals to have children, gays and lesbians are more likely to depend on friends for care, said Jason Cianciotto, research director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

"There's a need for safe places for our elders to go where they can rely on others in their community as they age," he says.

Fifty-five-year-old Bonnie McGowan, a former Minneapolis investment banker, says she and her lesbian friends used to "joke about buying a mansion on a hill and having young lesbians push us around in our wheelchairs." The humor was tinged with fear, she says.

McGowan is developing Birds of a Feather, an environmentally conscious gay and lesbian community in Pecos, N.M. Lots there sell from \$53,000 to \$125,000.

Originally she marketed it for retirees, but --- as in Carefree Cove --- she 's finding that most interest is coming from baby boomers who want a vacation home to which they can later retire.

McGowan's New Mexico neighbors fought her tooth-and-nail over water rights and other issues.

"I don't believe it was a gay-lesbian thing," she says. "They just didn't want development."

Groene and Razete have had no such obstacles in North Carolina. Although all but three of the first phase of 54 lots have been sold and several houses have been built, neither the head of the local chamber of commerce nor the missions director of the local Southern Baptist association even knew of Carefree Cove's existence.

"I haven't heard a word about it," said Barry Nealy of the Three Forks Baptist Association. "They say it's a free country, and people can buy and sell and put things anywhere they want to pretty much."

Carefree Cove is Groene and Razete's second development. The first, begun in 1994 in Fort Myers, Fla., is a community for women who were promised confidentiality.

Two years later, the late Bill Laing of Sarasota bought land in Palmetto, Fla., for the more public development the Palms of Manasota, billed as "America 's First Gay & Lesbian Retirement Community."

Groene, who owned a photography studio, and Razete, who worked in various facets of real estate, were living in Cincinnati when they met through mutual friends. They retired in the early 1990s, bought a big recreational vehicle and hit the road for two years.

In their travels, they ran across a women's RV community in Arizona.

Photographer Groene, not builder Razete, first thought of translating the concept to permanent housing.

Their South Florida property sold out largely by word of mouth. Its clubhouse is a private women's club.

Both women admit that they have changed their minds about inclusivity/exclusivity over the years.

"We went through the '70s, the whole feminist thing, asking 'Why should these men have private clubs?' " Groene says. "Now, we're older. We're wiser. We understand that people want to get together."

Men and women, single and partnered, are building houses at Carefree Cove.

Groene and Razete live in their three-bedroom elegantly rustic mountain house in the summer and spend the winter at the Florida community.

This fall, they plan to put more Carefree Cove lots on the market and hope to begin construction of the community house there.

Razete's speech accelerates with enthusiasm when she talks about the future --- urban and suburban developments, assisted living, commercial elements.

Groene, on the other hand, talks about retiring.

She knows just the place.



Argus Leader (Sioux Falls, South Dakota)
June 23, 2005 Thursday

New GOP moderates ready to speak up

David Kranz

When Randy Frederick became chairman of the South Dakota Republican Party, he promised to build a big tent where everyone is welcome.

A group of moderate Republicans have arrived in that tent, looking to share their philosophy that often gets a deaf ear from the conservative base.

Seven state senators have formed the South Dakota Mainstream Coalition, and they want to be heard, not discredited.

Sen. Ed Olson of Mitchell is the executive director of the group, whose members are fanning out across the state to communicate their message and look for like-minded people to join them.

Other charter members are Tom Dempster and Dave Knudson of Sioux Falls; Stan Adelstein, Royal "Mac" McCracken and J.P. Duniphan of Rapid City; and Duane Sutton of Aberdeen.

Their focus is at the national level, where moderates don't always have an opportunity to speak their mind without being branded, Olson said.

"We don't seem to have a discourse," he said. "I think that certain segments on the left or the right have the undeniable sense of correctness. If you don't feel or think or act the way 'we do,' you are not as correct, as holy, as 'we are,' " Olson said.

The battle over the life and death of Terri Schiavo was a catalyst for action, Olson said.

"I thought it was so inappropriate," he said. "There is a lot of libertarian in all of us. Government is really getting into areas where it doesn't belong."

In some ways, it comes down to religion, Adelstein says.

"I think (the group) will give a voice for centrists and moderates of both parties that has been absent," he said. "Many of us don't like the idea of putting specific religious beliefs into state law."

Darrel Smith, president of the South Dakota Family Policy Council board, questions the mission.

"There has been a concerted effort the past several decades to remove God from the public square," Smith said. "What we need is not hostility to religion but a recognition of the Judeo-Christian principles upon which our state and country were founded."

But Frederick said his tent is open to all voices.

"This is what I talk about," he said. "We don't want to form groups and leave the party, but everyone has a right to voice an opinion. If you are afraid to listen to someone's message, maybe you can't defend what you are doing."

Olson says the senators have no intention of bolting from the party.

"We have been treated very well by party leadership and have no reason to be disenchanted with the Republican Party or our governor," he said. "But it is our strong belief that we need to get back to a place where people of more moderate persuasion feel more comfortable."

Eventually, the group, funded with the help of a grant from Northwestern Engineering, will have a lay board without state legislators, Olson said.

Daschle award

Former Sen. Tom Daschle recently was honored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force for his role in beating back the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Thune speech

Sen. John Thune was on the road again last weekend, this time speaking at the GOP Statesmen's Dinner in Tennessee on Saturday.

David Kranz has covered South Dakota politics for more than three decades. His column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Write to him at the Argus Leader, Box 5034, Sioux Falls, SD 57117-5034.

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LOAD-DATE: June 24, 2005



Posted on Sat, Jun. 18, 2005

Nation: Daschle receives award

Former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., was recently honored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

The group recognized Daschle for what it called his "fight to defeat the Federal Marriage Amendment in the U.S. Senate." Daschle, an Aberdeen native, received the honor at an event last week in New York City. Last year, he was defeated in his reelection bid by Republican John Thune



MARRIAGE DIGEST: Daschle honored by homosexual group; Spain & Canada set to legalize 'gay marriage' sometime this year

By Michael Foust
Jun 17, 2005

Updated June 17, 10:03 a.m. Eastern

NEW YORK (BP)--Seven months after suffering a surprising defeat at the ballot, former Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle was given a leadership award June 13 by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force for his role in defeating the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Daschle, a Democrat from the conservative state of South Dakota, appeared at a leadership awards ceremony in New York City alongside Sen. Charles Schumer (D.-N.Y.), the featured speaker.

Last summer Daschle successfully led Democrats in blocking the marriage amendment from receiving a vote. Needing 60 votes to prevent a filibuster, it got 48.

Although Daschle said at the time he opposed "gay marriage," his views no longer are so clear. According to the Dakota Voice newspaper, Daschle told the ceremony attendees that "politics should be about hope and unifying people" and that "we're on the right side of history."

Here also compared the struggle to legalize "gay marriage" to the struggles to end slavery and overturn bans on interracial marriage.

"Slaves were told they were two-thirds of a person and there was a time when people of different races couldn't get married," Daschle said, according to the Gay City News.

Homosexual activists praised Daschle's leadership.

"Senator Daschle led the successful fight to defeat the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) in the U.S. Senate," the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force stated on its website. "In doing so, he put his 25-year career in Congress on the line to help wage one of the crucial battles in the history of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community."

Daschle lost his re-election bid to John Thune, who made Daschle's opposition to the marriage amendment and President Bush's judicial nominees central themes.

Daschle said last summer he believed the issue of "gay marriage" should be left to the states.

"There is no argument, in my view ... about whether marriage ought to be between a man and a woman," Daschle said in July during floor debate. "It ought to. The real question is whether we ought to amend the United States Constitution."

But since then the landscape has changed significantly. Fourteen states have passed constitutional marriage amendments within the past year, showing that opposition to "gay marriage" is widespread on the state level.

Yet those amendments apparently are vulnerable in federal court. In May a federal judge overturned Nebraska's marriage amendment, saying it discriminates against homosexuals. That ruling was enough to convince Democratic Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska to support a marriage amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

"His position has always been that he thinks marriage should be regulated by the states, and that he would support a federal effort to amend the Constitution only if a federal court overruled a state law," Nelson spokesman David DiMartino told Baptist Press. "And that has now happened."

SPAIN, CANADA TO LEGALIZE 'GAY MARRIAGE' -- The number of countries that recognize "gay marriage" likely will double by year's end -- if not by summer's end -- with Canada and Spain joining the list.

Currently Belgium and the Netherlands are the only countries with legalized "gay marriage." Canada and Spain would give homosexual activists their biggest victories yet.

A bill legalizing "gay marriage" passed a Spanish senate committee June 14, sending it to the full senate, the Associated Press reported. It already has passed the lower house of parliament. The senate version has a conservative-backed amendment that allows civil officials who object to "gay marriage" to refuse to perform the ceremonies.

In Canada, a bill that would legalize "gay marriage" is on a fast track and has the support of Prime Minister Paul Martin. Thanks to a series of court rulings, "gay marriage" already is legal in seven of 10 provinces and one of three territories.

'GAY WEDDING' ON MILITARY BASE -- Canada recently had its first "gay wedding" on a military base, further highlighting a deep cultural divide between the U.S. and its northern neighbor.

The two men -- one a sergeant, the other a warrant officer -- were "married" in a military chapel on a base in Nova Scotia, where "gay marriage" is legal, Canadian Press reported.

Homosexuals can serve openly in Canada's military. The U.S. has a "don't ask, don't tell" policy that prohibits homosexuals from disclosing their sexual preference.

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For more information about the national debate over "gay marriage," visit <http://www.bpnews.net/samesexmarriage>

San Jose Mercury News (California)

June 20, 2005 Monday MO1 EDITION

Bathrooms' ambiguity is deliberate at Saturn Cafe

By Ken McLaughlin; Mercury News

The young and hip in Santa Cruz may think they've experienced all the weirdness the city has to offer. Then, they head to the bathroom at the Saturn Cafe.

Suddenly, decisions must be made.

Door No. 1 has a huge photograph of Elvis -- wait, that's an Elvis impersonator, possibly male, possibly female. Door No. 2 features a photo of two women -- wait, is that two men in drag?

So, which door to enter?

Either, say employees of the Saturn Cafe.

From Starbucks to gas stations, unisex bathrooms are becoming ubiquitous. But the idea is, one sex at a time. At the Saturn Cafe, owners have taken the concept of "gender neutrality" to new heights -- some say out of this world. The idea at the Saturn is, any and all sexes at any time.

The Saturn -- a gay-friendly vegan/vegetarian eatery that has been a Santa Cruz institution for a quarter-century -- is not just the place to go for the quintessential Santa Cruz dining experience. The Laurel Street restaurant is at the heart of a small but growing movement aimed at making transgender and "intersex" people -- those born with genitalia that aren't typically male or female -- feel more comfortable using public facilities.

"This is the new wave -- to really look at bathrooms," said Deborah Abbott, director of the Lionel Cantù Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex Resource Center at the University of California-Santa Cruz.

A "new wave" in bathrooms may seem like something that could happen only in Santa Cruz, but the issue is being taken seriously by the mainstream gay and lesbian community. At its huge annual conferences, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force now replaces the "men" and "women" signs with "gender-free" or "unisex" signs.

Many people who are transgender -- an umbrella term that includes transsexuals, cross-dressers and people who consider themselves androgynous -- say they often feel threatened in traditional restrooms. "People stare, and the message transgender people get is that they don't belong there," said Bryan Burgess, coordinator of the Safe Bathroom Access Campaign at the Transgender Law Center in San Francisco.

Sometimes, things get uglier. In a 2002 survey conducted by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, nearly half of all transgender respondents reported having been harassed or assaulted in public restrooms.

"Single-sex toilets give bigots another excuse to hit people," Ian Ayres, a Yale Law School professor, argued in a recent commentary published by the online magazine Slate.

A year and a half ago, the Transgender Law Center joined the efforts of a grass-roots group in San Francisco called People in Search of Safe Restrooms. Their goal is to push for unisex restrooms -- be they single-toilet or multi-stall. They say the unisex facilities would also meet the needs of disabled people and, often, parents who don't want to send children alone into single-sex restrooms.

The movement scored a big success when the New College of California in San Francisco last summer decided to eliminate the last two "gender-specific" bathrooms on campus. The signs now simply read: "Your Bathroom."

On its Web site, People in Search of Safe Restrooms praises the Saturn Café for eliminating the traditional figures in dresses and pants -- and opening both bathrooms to all. The 26-year-old eatery has long had unisex restrooms, but they each had only one toilet. Not until the Saturn moved downtown in 1999 did it have a multi-stall restroom.

"I like it," Vanessa Gomez, 20, a Cabrillo College student who lives in Santa Cruz, said of the attempt to present gender as a spectrum, not an either-or. "It makes you think."

But conservative groups have condemned multi-stall unisex toilets as unnecessary and perverse. Some feminist groups side with the conservatives, arguing that many women don't feel safe sharing a public restroom with men. Some call it an open invitation to peeping Toms with camera phones.

Vincent Sandoval, 22, of Modesto, isn't thrilled about the idea, either. Unlike his friends gathered at a Saturn table earlier this month, Sandoval had to go to the bathroom. He peered at the cross-dressers on the doors and couldn't decide which one to open.

"This isn't right," he said in frustration. "Which is the men's room? Damn. They don't have stuff like this in Modesto."

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LOAD-DATE: June 20, 2005

The New York Times

ON THE WEB

June 19, 2005 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

What's Their Real Problem With Gay Marriage? It's the Gay Part

BYLINE: By Russell Shorto.

The small but grandiose building at the corner of Eighth and G Streets NW in Washington, tucked directly behind the National Portrait Gallery, holds its own in a city packed with monumental architecture. You step into the lobby and automatically look around for a plaque, figuring that with its dark wood paneling and marble columns, this must be the onetime home of Rutherford B. Hayes or some other historical personage heavy with Victorian-era dignity. As it turns out, the structure, with its architectural signals of tradition and power, was built in 1996 for its tenant: the Family Research Council, the conservative public policy center.

In the gift shop just off the lobby -- where you can buy research-council thermoses and paperweights and the latest titles by Peggy Noonan, Alan Keyes, John Ashcroft and Pat Buchanan -- sits one of Washington's most unusual museum displays. Moms and dads who are planning to take the kids to the nation's capital this summer for an infusion of American history might want to add it to their itinerary, since it carries the lesson up to the present and right into their own living rooms. Beneath a large wall-mounted plaque emblazoned with the group's slogan -- Defending Family, Faith and Freedom - - and flanking a rather ferocious-looking American eagle statue are two large, museum-quality glass cases. The one on the left contains a complete groom's outfit -- tux, tie, fluffy shirt -- and the one on the right holds a bridal gown and all the trimmings, right down to the dried bouquet. Color snapshots of happy wedding parties festoon both display cases, and the back wall of the bridal unit features verses from the book of Genesis, King James version: And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . .

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

This shrine to marriage as a heterosexual, Judeo-Christian institution is a totem of conservative Christianity's mighty political wing and a flag marking its territorial gains in what its leaders see as a decisive battle in the culture war. In May 2003 the heads of 26 conservative organizations, including the Family Research Council, formed an entity, which they called the Arlington Group, to pool resources and come up with a combined strategy for fighting the forces of secularism. They thought it would be an amorphous battle, with many fronts. But just a month later the United States Supreme Court struck down a Texas law that had declared consenting homosexual sex illegal. Gay rights groups saw the Lawrence v. Texas ruling as a watershed: an endorsement, at the federal level, of homosexuality itself. So did the

conservative leaders. Then in November of that year came the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling that gave same-sex couples in the state the right to marry.

The effect of this one-two punch, which was heightened by the mayor of San Francisco's granting of same-sex marriage licenses the following February, was galvanizing for the Arlington Group members. The nebulous culture war instantly focused into a single issue. Since the ultimate goal of Arlington's member organizations is an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would define marriage as a heterosexual union, they formed another entity, the Marriage Amendment Project, to spearhead this mission. The Family Research Council offered space in its building for the project, and as an expression of the enthusiasm of the research-council staff for the initiative, the manager of the gift shop came up with the idea of the shrine to marriage, which comprises real-life wedding memorabilia donated by employees.

The exhibit itself could very likely serve as a cultural litmus test. Perhaps half the population would see the disembodied wedding outfits preserved in glass cases and guarded by a wooden eagle as bizarre, even lurid, while for the other half the display would trip different signifiers: sanctity, defiance, determination. On so many fronts that is where we are as a nation these days: divided, clearly and seemingly unbridgeably, in sensibility, values, foundations, even sense of humor.

As hot-button issues go, however, gay marriage probably isn't a classic divide. For one thing, the country is fairly decisively opposed to it. The vote last November -- all 11 states that had anti-gay-marriage amendments to their state constitutions on the ballot saw those amendments pass -- made clear that most people are not comfortable with the idea of extending the marriage franchise to same-sex pairings. And polls on the issue reinforce the point. Only about a quarter of voters surveyed in the national exit poll following the election favored same-sex marriage, and interestingly enough, only about half of gay and bisexual voters did.

People have given pollsters many different reasons for their opposition to gay marriage. Some base their feelings on what you might call linguistic grounds: a belief that the definition of the word "marriage" necessarily involves one person from each sex. Others say that it would be bad for children or that the purpose of marriage is to procreate or that they just don't agree with the idea. Then there is the compromise position. In April, Connecticut passed a law recognizing same-sex civil unions, which have been legal in Vermont for five years. The fact that civil unions, as well as efforts to extend specific rights and benefits to gay couples, receive significant support in polls suggests that many who object to gay marriage nevertheless see an underlying civil rights issue.

But as I learned spending time among the cultural conservatives who are leading the anti-gay-marriage charge, they have their own reasons for doing so, which are based on their reading of the Bible, their views about both homosexuality and the institution of marriage and the political force behind the issue. In the words of Gary Bauer, president of American Values -- one of what is now a total of 61 organizations under the Arlington Group banner, with a combined membership of 60 million -- gay marriage is "the new abortion." He meant that, as with abortion, conservatives see gay marriage as a culture-altering change being implemented by judicial fiat. But gay marriage is also the new abortion in that it is for groups like Bauer's a base-energizing and fund-raising issue of tremendous power.

During last year's election campaign, at the same time that he was calling for a federal constitutional amendment to outlaw gay marriage, President Bush was giving a moderate sheen to the position of the conservative Christians with whom he is closely allied. As he said in his final debate with John Kerry, responding to a question about homosexuality: "I do know that we have a choice to make in America and that is to treat people with tolerance and respect and dignity. It's important that we do that. And I also know in a free society, consenting adults can live the way they want to live. And that's to be honored."

But for the anti-gay-marriage activists, homosexuality is something to be fought, not tolerated or respected. I found no one among the people on the ground who are leading the anti-gay-marriage cause who said in essence: "I have nothing against homosexuality. I just don't believe gays should be allowed to

marry." Rather, their passion comes from their conviction that homosexuality is a sin, is immoral, harms children and spreads disease. Not only that, but they see homosexuality itself as a kind of disease, one that afflicts not only individuals but also society at large and that shares one of the prominent features of a disease: it seeks to spread itself.

You could make an argument that the center of the opposition to gay marriage is not in Washington but 40 miles away, in a ranch house in Catonsville, Md., a suburb of Baltimore. Laura and Dave Clark live there with their four children. The house is tucked cozily into the back of a cul-de-sac in a 1970's housing development. Inside, it is wall-to-wall carpeting and hand-me-down furnishings. Snapshots of the kids cover the refrigerator door. The couple's wedding album is prominently displayed on a table in the living room. Dave works for the federal government. Laura home-schools the 7-year-old twins, Grace and Cole, while also looking after 5-year-old Kayla and 3-year-old Jacob.

In mid-May, on one of the first really warm days of the year in the East, I sat on the screened-in back porch with the Clarks. The lawn we looked out on had plenty of room to play, but all four kids preferred to be on the porch, riding tricycles and training-wheeled bicycles in a tight circle around the adults, bashing into one another, performing for their parents and the visitor. Family trips, home-schooling, Bible school, gymnastics classes: the conversation was decidedly kid-centric. "At the stage of life we're in, it's all about family," Dave said.

It was because of Laura that I had first come to know the Clarks a couple of months earlier. She is 33 and was born and raised in the area. After high school she went to nearby Towson State to study accounting. She dropped out before getting her degree, but not before finding Christ through the college youth ministry. She met Dave at around that time, and they married when she was 20.

Laura tends to wear a plain and determined expression, eyes heavy-lidded but face wide, giving an effect that could be bewilderment, outrage or concentration. The more time I spent with her, the more apparent it became that her quiet matter-of-factness is rooted in the deep satisfaction she says she feels in her roles as mother and housewife and in the clarity of her worldview. She describes herself as an introvert, and while she has long held a well of Christian convictions, she said, "for most of my life, until about two years ago, I was wishy-washy, a people pleaser." Around that time, the pastor of her nondenominational evangelical church began a series of pulpit seminars, which had a profound impact on her. "One was the Kingdom Assignment," she said. "You volunteer to do it. The church gives each person who signs up \$100 to invest. The challenge is to do something God-honoring with it. Then you come back and give a presentation in front of the church and tell people what you did and what you learned."

Laura chose to buy copies of the Christian inspirational book "Traveling Light for Mothers" and give them to mothers she met. "I never liked public speaking," she said, "so the whole thing was a challenge for me." The other event was a series of sermons based on the best-selling Christian book "The Purpose-Driven Life." "It really helped me to clarify things," she said. "I learned that God has a purpose for me. I used to see things as separate. But everything is connected: my life, my family, society. Before, I didn't want to rock the boat. Now I don't mind rocking the boat, as long as it's based on truth."

Not long after this period in which she came to feel a new sense of purpose, Laura read about the pro-gay-marriage action in Massachusetts, and she found herself e-mailing news articles about it to friends. She looked at the development not as an effort by members of a minority to win rights that others have long enjoyed but as an attack on society's most basic institution by forces bent on creating an amoral, anything-goes culture. "The gay activists are trying to redefine what marriage has been basically since the beginning of time and on every continent," she said. "My concern is for the children -- for the future."

She believed that what happened in Massachusetts could happen in Maryland. "My first reaction was frustration," she said, "knowing that this is a legislative issue and the court in Massachusetts had overstepped their bounds." Laura had never been an activist before, but now she wanted to get involved, so she contacted the national headquarters of the Family Research Council, and they put her in touch with a local group called the Family Protection Lobby, which has monitored state legislation from a

conservative Christian perspective since 1980. She talked with Doug Stiegler, a retired plumbing contractor turned Christian missionary, who has been head of the Family Protection Lobby since 1993. Stiegler began to initiate her into the ways of the state government.

"We had bills in our State Legislature last year to protect marriage," Laura said. "I didn't understand why they didn't go through, especially when polls show people in this state and in the country overwhelmingly support traditional marriage." With Stiegler's encouragement, Laura got in her car one day and drove to Annapolis, where there was a bill before the Legislature that would give domestic partners in Maryland the right to make medical decisions for each other. She saw it as a back-door attempt to get government authorization of gay unions, and with the help of an aide to a conservative state legislator, she found herself testifying against it. "I didn't realize you could testify as a citizen," she said. "I thought you had to be an expert. So I gave several reasons why I opposed this legislation: as a taxpayer, as a citizen, as a mom and as a person of faith."

A few months later, the whole matter became more immediate and pressing when she read that nine same-sex couples, assisted by the American Civil Liberties Union and a statewide gay rights group, Equality Maryland, had filed a lawsuit against the state, asking that a 1973 law defining marriage as between a man and a woman be declared unconstitutional. Laura told Stiegler she wanted to do more, and they worked out a volunteer position for her at the Family Protection Lobby that is an extension of the e-mail alerts she had sent to friends. Her job for the organization is to troll the Internet for news articles and developments, nationally and in the state, that have to do with same-sex marriage and other issues of concern to the group, like abortion, and then compile them into a newsletter that is e-mailed to members. Her main sources include the Web sites of The Washington Times and the Family Research Council, as well as the Drudge Report. "It works out really great because I can do it from home, while I'm with the kids," she said.

I say that Laura Clark could be considered a power center for the opposition to gay marriage because the energy, zeal and legwork on that side come from people like her. The conservative leaders may have as an ultimate goal an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but the fact that the Marriage Amendment Project in Washington has a staff of two shows that they don't put much stock in that coming to pass anytime soon. Instead, the game is being played out at the state level, so that it is actually a series of games, each with its own dynamic. The various conservative Christian groups leading the anti-gay-marriage charge cooperate in many ways. Local groups with ties to one of the big national organizations may meet as events are heating up in their state. "Sometimes we have coordinated attacks," said Michael Bowman, the director of state legislative relations for Concerned Women for America, a public policy organization based on biblical principles that was founded by Beverly LaHaye, who is married to the best-selling Christian writer Tim LaHaye. "Our local person will be in touch with the Catholic Conference person or with Focus on the Family. They'll create e-mail loops, decide when to hit the pavement." Gay marriage is providing unparalleled momentum for this kind of linkage, Bowman added: "The marriage issue is waking up alliances that never existed. Abortion was never like this."

On April 5, Kansas became the 18th state to vote to amend its constitution to forbid same-sex marriage. Texas will have the issue up for popular referendum this year, and it will be on the ballot in many other states in 2006, when Americans will go to the polls to vote in, among other things, the midterm Congressional elections. There are grass-roots battles going on now in Pennsylvania, Maryland, California, Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, South Dakota, Arizona, Washington, Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota. In May, conservative groups in California and Arizona announced petition drives that would force a referendum in those states.

I could have gone to any of these places to learn how the people who are most deeply opposed to gay marriage think. But Maryland is an interesting combination: it is traditionally a blue state, but it has a strong core of social conservatism. There is a Republican governor and a Democratic-controlled State Legislature. And the A.C.L.U.-backed lawsuits filed by gay couples have fanned the flames of activism and outrage.

Those at the center of the opposition are, almost to a person, motivated by their brand of Christian beliefs. That was apparent in conversations I had with activists around Maryland and in several other states, and it was much in evidence at a dinner that Laura Clark arranged for my benefit, to which she had invited six friends who were active in the cause, all of whom were eager to explain what drives them. Most were born and raised in Maryland, and all but one -- who is registered as an Independent -- are Republicans. We made our way around the buffet Laura laid out on the dining-room table -- sliced lunch meats, hamburger buns, tomato and onion slices, bowls of pretzels and chips, cookies and several two-quart plastic bottles of soda -- then sat down to chat.

Meredith Fuller, who is 37 and works as a comptroller for her church, said that it was in talking with Laura that she came to realize the dimensions of the issue. "I used to feel that as a Christian my job was to deal with political issues from a prayerful standpoint," she said. "Now I think this is the defining issue of my generation, and I want to take a stand."

Bryan Simonaire works for a contractor that supports the U.S. Air Force. He and his wife, who was not present, have seven children. He is planning to run for the State Senate in 2006, and he said that the gay-marriage issue was one important reason. He put it in historical terms: "I remember talking to my parents about Roe v. Wade. And I asked them, 'Where were you while it was happening?' They didn't think they could do anything about it, and really they couldn't because it was done by the courts. I want to be able to tell my children that when people were battling this issue, I was on the front line."

Brian Racer is pastor to Laura and Dave Clark and a local opinion shaper on social issues. He is a tall, rangy 43-year-old man with a big mustache and a conversational style that is casual but enormously self-confident. Racer has a vigorous Christianity-in-society approach, which is illustrated by a recent move he made. When Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" came out in February 2004, he, like many ministers around the country, booked a whole theater in the local multiplex to accommodate the members of his church. But the venue itself -- comfortable seats, good acoustics, convenient location -- clicked for him. He worked out a rental arrangement with the manager of the theater. So now the Clarks and their fellow congregants worship at the Open Door Bible Church in Theater 24 in the Muvico multiplex at the Arundel Mills Mall. "The teens think it's pretty cool," he said. "After service they can go have lunch at the food court, then come back to the theater and see a movie."

I found what Racer had to say on the subject of homosexuality a clear and direct summation of the views of the others Laura had invited over that night and of the other anti-gay-marriage activists with whom I spoke. "The Hebrew words for male and female are actually the words for the male and female genital parts," he told me. "The male is the piercer; the female is the pierced. That is the way God designed it. It's unfortunate that homosexuals have taken the moniker 'gay,' because their lifestyle and its consequences are anything but. Look what has happened in the decades since the sexual revolution and acceptance of the gay lifestyle as normal. Viruses have mutated. S.T.D.'s have spread. It shows that when we try to change the natural course of things, what comes out of that is not joy or gayness."

The others in Laura Clark's living room, sitting with paper plates balanced on their laps, nodded and added supporting sentiments. Explaining how homosexuality resembles an insidious disease, Racer said, "If you have a same-gendered union, you have no natural, biological way to propagate your philosophy." So, he explained, it seeks to spread itself by other means, including popular culture. Bryan Simonaire added: "We have to recognize that they have a strategy to propagate their lifestyle. Think back 10 or 20 years ago, when you had the first openly homosexual person on TV. It was shocking to a lot of people. Now it's the norm on television, so you don't have the shock factor. Then they had two men with a passionate kiss on TV. That's the road they're heading down. They have a strategy."

The other main avenue by which homosexuality tries to propagate itself, in this view, is by indoctrinating children via the education system. Conservative Christian groups in many states -- including, currently, Maryland -- have protested efforts to introduce sexual orientation as a topic in school curriculums. A few days after the dinner at the Clarks' house, I spoke with Don Dwyer, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates and a leading anti-gay-rights figure in the state. "They are attempting

through the public-school system to teach not only that homosexuality is O.K. but that it's normal," he said. "And now they are going as far as teaching children how to engage in the act. I find that appalling and absolutely unacceptable." State officials deny that the proposed changes would teach children how to engage in homosexual sex. The difference of opinion stems from the value-neutral approach that the state has proposed. To the conservative Christian activists, homosexuality is anything but value-neutral.

I asked Laura Clark if her feelings about homosexuality had evolved over time. "No," she said, "because basically I've been a Christian my whole adult life, and I've known that the Bible makes clear that it's wrong." Her pastor, however, opened up in answer to the same question and told me that his early encounters with homosexuality had actually influenced his approach to the ministry. When he was 14, he said, his father worked as a route salesman for The Baltimore Sun, and he sometimes went with him on predawn deliveries. "In West Baltimore, I saw transvestites for the first time," he said. "It creeped me out. I had been taught in Bible school that there is an extended level of depravity, and this was it." Later, Racer was working for a greenhouse and got to know a lot of florists. "You'd be amazed how many people in the floral industry are homosexuals," he said. "And that's where I became curious. How do you put it together, that they've chosen to do something that I have such an aversion to, yet I'm finding I can see them as real people? As a Christian, that was a welcome development. Around the same time, a close friend told me he was struggling because he was attracted to men. Over the next two years, I had two other people confide the same thing to me. For some reason, God was putting it in my path. I took a psychology course, and ever since I've seen it as part of my ministry to counsel these people. I tell them that is part of God's challenge to them, and those temptations have to be fought off with spiritual weapons."

Of course, this view of homosexuality -- seeing it as a disorder to be cured -- is not new. It was cutting-edge thinking circa 1905. While most of society -- including the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Education Association, the World Health Organization and many other such groups -- eventually came around to the idea that homosexuality is normal, some segments refused to go along. And what was once a fairly fringe portion of the population has swelled in recent years, as has its influence.

Gay rights leaders say that gay marriage has become useful for their counterparts on the religious right in part because it allows them to tap into an antipathy toward homosexuality. Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said that the emergence of gay marriage last year was not the doing of groups like his. "We didn't want this fight," he said. "It is being driven by a certain brand of evangelicals and fundamentalists as part of their agenda and because they sense an opening. I don't think their leaders care about gay people. And I don't think people as a whole understand how deep-seated the loathing is." In this calculation, gay marriage serves as a vessel for containing opinions that many social conservatives have but which in the past they might have felt were socially unacceptable to voice.

Robert Knight, the director of the Culture and Family Institute of Concerned Women for America, conceded as much. "People feel liberated," he said. "They feel like we don't have to go along with this stuff anymore, the idea that we're repressed backwater religious zealots just for wanting a decent society in which our children can thrive. It's O.K. today to say that marriage is between a man and a woman. Saying so does not make you a hater or bigot."

Indeed, a constant refrain among the anti-gay-marriage forces is that they are motivated not by hate but by love. Most of the activists I spoke with say that they know gay people -- several said they have relatives who are gay -- and that they have approached them, with love, to try to get them to change. Rick Bowers, a pastor of a nondenominational church in Columbia, Md., is the head of Defend Maryland Marriage, another activist group, which works with Focus on the Family. "There are those extremists who say that if a gay person were on fire you would burn in hell if you spit on them to put out the fire," he told me. "But we're not like that. We love the human being. It's the lifestyle we disagree with."

"Lifestyle" is a buzzword in conservative Christian circles. It's a signal of the belief, and the policy position, that homosexuality is not an innate condition but a hedonistic way of living, one devoted to partying, drugs and wanton sex that ends, often, in illness and early death. In 2004 the Family Research Council put out a book called "Getting It Straight: What the Research Shows About Homosexuality," which purports to explode the myth that homosexuality is natural or genetic and puts forth an alternative theory that it springs from childhood abuse or other developmental factors. Chapter 4, "Is Homosexuality a Health Risk?" lines up studies and statistics to link homosexuality with cancer, alcoholism, mental illness, suicide and reduced life span, in addition to H.I.V./AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The activists opposing gay marriage echo these points. "My concern is the health issue," said Evalena Gray, an activist in southern Maryland. "I want to get these people away from AIDS, out of that unhealthy lifestyle."

The solution to the problem of the gay lifestyle in this view is, of course, Christ. The reparative therapy or "ex-gay" movement has been repudiated by major health and mental health organizations for its assumption that homosexuality is a defect to be repaired -- indeed, in May members of the American Psychiatric Association recommended that the organization support gay marriage in the interest of promoting mental health. But for both the national leaders on the anti-gay-marriage front and Christian community activists, "ex-gay" and "gay marriage" are closely connected, the first being the antidote to the second. Shannon Royce, the executive director of the Marriage Amendment Project, advised me explicitly: "The ex-gay movement is a very important part of the story." Racer spelled it out clearly as well. "I've had quite a few opportunities to counsel people who were in a homosexual lifestyle," he said. "They have generally found themselves in a desperate place. They know that Christ promises an abundant life, but that promise was made with some restrictions. These people have tried to find fulfillment in ways that are against God's principles. So you don't want to further the error by allowing gay marriage. Most of these folks have had an abusive situation that goes back to childhood. You want to heal that. You want to hold back the tide and not let such a high impact issue harm the whole society."

It may have been March, but the Christmas lights were still up. "The grandchildren like them," Evalena Gray said. She and her husband, Jim, both semiretired opticians, had invited me to their home in Charlotte Hall, a town in the region of southern Maryland that once made its money from tobacco and oysters but now relies on tourism and high-tech industry. The Grays have converted their basement -- paneled, wall-to-wall-carpeted, decorated with Jim Gray's Confederate memorabilia (a portrait of Jeb Stuart, framed currency) and the twinkling lights -- into an office. They each have a desk here, stacked with brochures and books and buttons. Evalena is Maryland's grass-roots director for Concerned Women for America; she and her husband devote all of their spare hours to convincing fellow citizens of the danger that the institution of marriage is facing. As I visited, they were organizing buses to transport people to an anti-gay-marriage rally that was to be held in the state capital two days later. "The threat to traditional marriage will affect our society more than any other issue that's come up," Evalena said. "We're just fighting with everything we have."

As the Grays will tell you, "gay" is only one-half of the gay marriage issue. If homosexuality is a heavily laden notion for conservative Christians, so, too, is marriage. Evalena Gray handed me a copy of "Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle," a small, pithy volume written by Dr. James Dobson, the influential leader of Focus on the Family, whose radio commentaries are heard by 200 million people a day worldwide. "Marriage Under Fire" has been available at Focus on the Family events since it was published last year. Dobson begins his book by rooting marriage in the same biblical passage that graces the marriage shrine at the Family Research Council headquarters -- "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" -- and then goes on to add, "With those 22 words, God announced the ordination of the family, long before He established the two other great human institutions, the church and the government."

To see marriage as in any way a secular or legal union of two individuals is to miss utterly the point and conviction of the Christian forces lined up against gay marriage. As Dobson states in his book: "To put it succinctly, the institution of marriage represents the very foundation of human social order. Everything of value sits on that base. Institutions, governments, religious fervor and the welfare of children are all dependent on its stability." Every activist on the ground I spoke with said something similar. "Marriage as

defined thousands of years ago and has served us well," said Rebecca Denning, a retired secretary in southern Maryland who volunteers alongside Evalena Gray. "I think marriage is about procreation and families. And I think we're getting into something that we don't truly understand what the ramifications will be."

Some on the other side of the issue -- notably Andrew Sullivan -- make the argument that extending the marriage franchise into the gay community will have positive results for everyone: it will encourage gays and lesbians to settle down into stable families, and given that about 40 percent of marriages end in divorce, it will bring new devotees to an ailing institution. The anti-gay-marriage people readily acknowledge that marriage is in a state of crisis, but they counter that the solution isn't to dilute the traditional meaning but to reinforce it. And that meaning, they say, is bound up in biology. "The homosexual community would have us believe that marriage is simply about loving one another," said Rick Bowers of Defend Maryland Marriage. "I say it's about two human beings who are wired completely differently, one with estrogen and one with testosterone, living together in love but with the purpose of procreation. It's a lot deeper than love. So I can't see how someone could look on a same-sex marriage as marriage at all."

At its essence, then, the Christian conservative thinking about gay marriage runs this way. Homosexuality is not an innate, biological condition but a disease in society. Marriage is the healthy root of society. To put the two together is thus willfully to introduce disease to that root. It is society willing self-destruction, which is itself a symptom of a wider societal disease, that of secularism.

What would be the result of this experiment? The activists opposed to gay marriage feel they know. We have, they say, pools of data to study in order to see the effects. Denmark and Sweden legalized same-sex civil unions in 1989 and 1994, respectively, and the Netherlands allowed civil unions in 1998 and then, in 2001, gay marriage. Cindy Moles, a grandmother and homemaker in San Diego who is a Southern California area director for Concerned Women for America, gave me her analysis of the data from those countries: "Look at the Netherlands, where same-sex marriage is legal. Those marriages last an average of 1.5 years, and during that time there are an average of eight outside partners. That's not a solid foundation for our country."

Family.org, a Web site that is sponsored by Focus on the Family, cites these same figures in a Q.-and-A. section on gay marriage, but it glosses over the fact that the study on which they were based looked not at gay marriages but at gay relationships and had nothing to do with the legalization of gay marriage. Several anti-gay-marriage activists drew my attention to a study showing that since gay civil unions became legal in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, the rate of out-of-wedlock births in those countries has increased. When I made the observation that, of all things to lay at the feet of homosexuals, the birth rate was surely not one of them, Laura Clark had an answer: "When marriage can mean anything, it means nothing. Why bother to get married at all?" And indeed, she is accurately reflecting the analysis of Stanley Kurtz, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution whose articles on the topic in *The Weekly Standard* make the rounds of the activists. Kurtz links rising rates of cohabitation and out-of-wedlock birth to the legalization of gay unions. He follows a British demographer in studying cohabitation rates in three groups of European countries: the Nordics, those roughly in the geographic middle and the southern tier.

"The Nordic countries are the leaders in cohabitation and out-of-wedlock births," he writes. "In the early 90's, gay marriage came to the Nordic countries, where the out-of-wedlock birthrate was already high. Ten years later, out-of-wedlock birth rates have risen significantly in the middle group of nations. Not coincidentally, nearly every country in that middle group has recently either legalized some form of gay marriage or is seriously considering doing so. Only in the group with low out-of-wedlock birthrates has the gay marriage movement achieved relatively little success." (This was written before Spain's Parliament passed a bill legalizing gay marriage in April.) Kurtz's conclusion is that "instead of encouraging a society-wide return to marriage, Scandinavian gay marriage has driven home the message that marriage itself is outdated and that virtually any family form, including out-of-wedlock parenthood, is acceptable."

Kurtz's use of data from these countries has been disputed by the Log Cabin Republicans and countered by a study by Prof. M.V. Lee Badgett of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Badgett argues that marriage, divorce and out-of-wedlock birth rates in Scandinavia, Europe as a whole and the United States have all changed in complex ways over the past three decades and "those changes have occurred in all countries, regardless of whether or not they adopted same-sex partnership laws, and these trends were under way well before the passage of laws that gave same-sex couples rights." There are also reports from the Netherlands that conclude that after the initial hoopla surrounding the legalization of gay marriage, it settled into a humdrum nonissue, without much effect on gays, straights or family life. The results from these countries, then, are debatable, but Kurtz's papers continue to get wide circulation among religious conservatives, and for many, his theses have become facts. "You know the family has disappeared in those Scandinavian countries," Evalena Gray, the southern Maryland activist, told me.

"Polyamory" is a word I learned from the anti-gay-marriage activists. It's a broad term that means having more than one sexual partner at a time, but the activists use it as a synonym for group marriage. Here again, they are following the lead of Stanley Kurtz; Laura Clark e-mailed me his article on the topic that appeared in *The Weekly Standard*. Kurtz writes of the rise of this "souped-up version of polygamy" that involves "a bewildering variety of sexual combinations. There are triads of one woman and two men; heterosexual group marriages; groups in which some or all members are bisexual; lesbian groups, and so forth." Kurtz maintains that "the modern polyamory movement took off in the mid-90's -- partly because of the growth of the Internet (with its confidentiality) but also in parallel to, and inspired by, the rising gay-marriage movement."

It is the conviction of the grass-roots activists that gay marriage will open the door to other novel unions. "I bet a dollar against a doughnut that if they get gay marriage, one day a bisexual is going to show up who says, 'I want to marry a man and a woman,'" Jim Gray, Evalena's husband, said. "It's going to open the door to polygamy." Once the definition of marriage is altered, in this view, you will have this group of people declaring they want to marry that group; middle-aged men will exchange vows with children or with Doberman pinschers. As the landscape of fear fills in, the picture comes into view. It is Hieronymus Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," a phantasmagoria of sin and a complete breakdown of the social order. As Bryan Simonaire, Laura Clark's friend, put it: "Once you start this, you could have a 45-year-old man wanting to marry a 9-year-old boy. That could be O.K. in 20 years. That's what you get with relative moral truth. Whereas with absolute moral truth, what was O.K. 50 years ago will still be O.K. 20 years from now."

Protesters in Maryland are lucky in that their state has one of the more elegant capitals in the nation. A cluster of nicely tended Victorian and Georgian houses occupies the center of Annapolis; steeples and masts and gulls crowd the skyline along the harbor. On a chilly day in early March, a few hundred people gathered before the state Capitol to urge their legislators to approve an anti-gay-marriage constitutional-amendment referendum. The Lawyers' Mall, with a statue of Thurgood Marshall as its centerpiece, is the logical place for such rallies, so you have to put it down to coincidence that the crowd was grouped around a figure of the Supreme Court justice most identified with the extension of rights to minorities. The national conservative evangelical leaders realize that the gay-marriage issue is an opportunity to peel off layers of the traditional Democratic coalition, and the lineup of speakers in Annapolis was prominent with Latinos and African-Americans, who asserted over and over that gay marriage has nothing to do with civil rights. "Because we live in a society today that is so sensitive, we use words like diversity and inclusion to hide behind, so that we can promote our own agenda," Bishop Larry Lee Thomas, president of the United Black Clergy of Anne Arundel County, told the crowd. One spark for the rally -- which also sparked Laura Clark's activism -- was the lawsuit that the A.C.L.U. had filed against the state on behalf of gay couples. Before attending the rally, I stopped in at the Baltimore home of the lead plaintiffs, Lisa Polyak and Gita Deane, a lesbian couple who have been together for more than 20 years and have two daughters. (Polyak and Deane each became pregnant via artificial insemination, with sperm from a cryolab.) Their quaint house is white-painted brick with a picket fence. The hardwood floors are covered with Oriental rugs; the living-room bookshelf is crammed with kids' books and photo albums. Both women are in their early 40's. Deane works part time as a learning specialist at Goucher College, and Polyak is an environmental engineer for the U.S. Army. As with Laura and Dave Clark and their children, church is

important in their family. If the Clarks are a picture-perfect suburban family, this one is, in many ways, the urban equivalent. The difference, of course, is that Polyak and Deane are both women.

Polyak and Deane didn't set out to be activists anymore than Clark did. They have faced numerous difficulties as a nonstandard family, ranging from health insurance troubles to their children's growing awareness that they may be treated differently because they have two mothers. "We were never politically active," Polyak told me, "except that we belonged to a local support group, Families With Pride. They helped us get a physician." They never considered marriage until last year when, in the wake of gay-marriage rulings in Massachusetts and San Francisco, they were approached by Equality Maryland and asked to think about filing a lawsuit against the state. They balked at the public attention it would bring to their family, but then decided that as a relatively upscale, stable family, they could serve as a positive role model: a poster family for gay marriage.

If you are one of the many millions of people who are vaguely opposed to gay marriage -- who perhaps have no problem with homosexuality but also think marriage is simply a uniquely male-female enterprise -- sitting in Polyak and Deane's living room might put that notion to the test. Watching their kids play, listening to stories of how, for their family, small things like taking a child to the pediatrician can become huge headaches, you might come around to thinking that this is, after all, a matter of giving a particular minority certain basic rights and along with them legitimacy and stability.

But, of course, the Christian activists aren't vague in their opposition. For them, the issue isn't one of civil rights, because the term implies something inherent in the individual -- being black, say, or a woman -- and they deny that homosexuality is inherent. It can't be, because that would mean God had created some people who are damned from birth, morally blackened. This really is the inescapable root of the whole issue, the key to understanding those working against gay marriage as well as the engine driving their vehicle in the larger culture war: the commitment, on the part of a growing number of people, to a variety of religious belief that is so thoroughgoing it permeates every facet of life and thought, that rejects the secular, pluralistic grounding of society and that answers all questions internally.

The speakers at the rally in Annapolis made it plain they were committed to squelching not just gay marriage but civil unions and the extension of specific rights to same-sex couples. A few weeks later, however, when the State Legislature ended its session, it included some modest victories for the gay rights forces. A bill passed allowing unmarried partners -- gay or straight -- to make medical decisions for one another in the event of an emergency. So did another that would add sexual orientation to a list of punishable "hate crimes." And the central goal of the conservative activists, a state constitutional amendment, was tabled for the year.

When I talked with Laura Clark afterward, she was undeterred. "The purpose of the hate-crime legislation seems to be just to silence those of us who oppose homosexuality," she said. As to the medical-decision-making bill, she added, "We know it's a back-door way for the homosexual activists to get gay marriage." She said that she was taking part in petition drives that would force referendums on both issues. "I'm collecting signatures from everyone I know," she said.

A few days later, the Republican governor, Bob Ehrlich, vetoed the medical-decision-making bill on the grounds that it created a new term -- "life partner" -- that "could lead to the erosion of the sanctity of traditional marriage." But some members of the Legislature said they had enough votes to override his veto in the future, and the governor declined to veto the hate-crime bill, so the conservatives' petition drives are going forward.

When I last spoke with Lisa Polyak, she said she was pleased that the Legislature had shown courage in addressing the civil rights of gay couples but sickened that conservative activists and the state's governor wanted to deny them those rights. Oddly enough, though, Polyak, who once thought of this whole issue as essentially about civil rights, says that she is now in it for something more profound: she doesn't want her children to grow up with a stigma. "I want to lift the psychic burden on my family," she said.

That means changing hearts. How difficult that will be was illustrated by a single vignette. When I met Polyak, she told me how, when she first testified before a legislative committee, an anti-gay-marriage activist, a woman, confronted her with bitter language, asking her why she was "doing this" to the woman's children and grandchildren. Polyak said the encounter left her shaken. A few days later, as I sat in Evalena Gray's Christmas-lighted basement office, she told me a story of how during the same testimony she approached a blond lesbian and talked to her about the effect that gay marriage would have on her grandchildren. "Then I hugged her neck," she said, "and I said, 'We love you.' I was kind of consoling her to some extent, out of compassion."

I realized I was hearing about the same encounter from both sides. What was expressed as love was received as something close to hate. That's a hard gap to bridge.

blogACTIVE:

Real Truth, Direct Action Tools

Monday, June 20, 2005

NYT Exposes the Family Research Council...and (surprise!) fails to report on closet cases contributing to these groups.

cases contributing to these groups.

Those of you who regularly read PageOneQ, my lesbian and gay news website, know that the New York Times Magazine ran a huge piece on the ultra-homophobic Family Research Council. What's Their Real Problem With Gay Marriage? (It's the Gay Part) - [reg. required], an 8,000 word, eleven page article was quite interesting. It's amazing to see how an entire business, encompassing dozens of organizations on the national level, have made fortunes based on nothing more than hatred of gay people. The article, which covers the on-going culture war between gay people and right-wing Christian fundamentalists, broke a lot of barriers and cut to the core of the issue that has mushroomed onto the national stage as "gay marriage."

Matt Foreman, executive director of The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said, "I don't think their leaders care about gay people. And I don't think people as a whole understand how deep-seated the loathing is." Matt is 110% right and he's being proven right every day at NGLTF, where he's managing the fights against these wackos. If nothing else, this article should be proof enough that organizations like NGLTF need our help more than ever.

As usual, the Times omitted the many ways that the closet contributes to the oppression of gays and lesbians through these organizations:

Laura Clark, an anti-gay volunteer who "found herself testifying against" a "bill before the Legislature that would give domestic partners in Maryland the right to make medical decisions for each other," counts Matt Drudge's Drudge Report one of her three primary news sources. So, Laura...do you know that you get your news from a closet case?

"The purpose of the hate-crime legislation seems to be just to silence those of us who oppose homosexuality," Laura is quoted as saying. Actually, Laura, hate crimes legislation is more about stopping brutal beatings and murders of gay people – the kind which I have never heard your leaders decry. Unchallenged violence or "conversion therapy camps," with choices like that, who wants to make a choice?

Michael Bowman, the director of state legislative relations for Concerned Women for America (CWA) says, "Sometimes we have coordinated attacks.... (t)he marriage issue is waking up alliances that never existed." When they speak of "coordinated attacks," they leave very little to the imagination. Are we really supposed to believe these people are coming from a place of love? When they say they are "saving marriage" isn't it really just the more socially accepted talking meme they use to disguise their hatred of gay people?

And what does Lee LaHaye, the chief financial officer of the CWA have to say about these "coordinated attacks?" In addition to being a gay man who runs all of CWA's finances, Lee is the gay son of CWA founders Tim and Beverly LaHaye. Could anything be more pathetic than that, really?

Let there be no doubt about what these people seek, the eradication of homosexuality from society. Just one gay person on earth is too much for these bible thumpers. "[T]heir passion comes from their conviction that homosexuality is a sin, is immoral, harms children and spreads disease. Not only that, but they see homosexuality itself as a kind of disease, one that afflicts not only individuals but also society at

large and that shares one of the prominent features of a disease: it seeks to spread itself." Apply that logic and they want to get rid of every last one of us.

"[A]ll but one -- who is registered as an Independent -- are Republicans." What a shock?! The next time people tell me I am a partisan hack, I'll be sure to remind them that the reason there are some many more Republicans exposed on this site says more about the Republican Party than it does about blogACTIVE.com, right Ken Mehlman?

I thought the quote, "(F)or the anti-gay-marriage activists, homosexuality is something to be fought, not tolerated or respected," was one of the more telling lines in the story. You see, readers, these people are the enemy as they have zero interest in tolerance of any kind. What did gay people do to them? They claim we are intolerant, but is the left intolerant just because it won't tolerate intolerance? With twisted logic like this, these right wing groups make people believe that gays are the intolerant. In a world where gay men like Jeff Gannon are given direct access to the President (and just how DIRECT that access was still remains unanswered), is it any wonder these nutjobs think we are the intolerant ones?

You need to look no further than Don Dwyer, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates to learn why gay kids kill themselves much more often than straight kids: "They are attempting through the public-school system to teach not only that homosexuality is O.K. but that it's normal, " said the delegate. Is there blood on the hands of Don Dwyer? Ask Mary Griffith, a California mother whose gay son jumped off a bridge and killed himself in 1983. Her struggle to accept her role and the role of her church in driving her son to suicide are details in the book Prayers for Bobby.

With all of the news around marriage lately, it did come as a surprise to me that only about a half of gay and bisexual voters favored same-sex marriage, compared with a quarter of all voters. So, for every Will & Grace, there's a Jeff Gannon. While we cannot be expected to reach out and save every Jeff Gannon – some internalized homophobia issues are best left to mental health professionals – we can work to call out the individuals and institutions that work to bring harm to our community

The greatest battle of all is clearly one of messaging. How else can one explain that only one half of gays and lesbians support marriage rights for gays and lesbians? It's not that hard to understand in a country where upwards of 40 percent of adolescent suicides are lesbian and gay kids who feel are isolated and alone. I wonder, does the Family Research Council think these deaths are simply a case of a disease knocking itself out?

It's that same messaging battle that takes the truth and turns it on its end. Using biased research by Stanley Kurtz that was published in the ultra-conservative Weekly Standard, anti-gay activist Evalena Gray actually believes that "[T]he family has disappeared in those Scandinavian countries." Never mind, Evalena, that a University of Massachusetts study showed how legalizing gay unions in Scandinavian countries had no effect on overall rates of marriage.

"(B)ut Kurtz's papers continue to get wide circulation among religious conservatives, and for many, his theses have become facts."

The bottom line, readers is this...If you get people to believe things that aren't true, you can redefine what the truth is and get them to do anything. Just ask the Family Research Council, Lee LaHaye and Matt Drudge.