



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

August 4 - 14, 2005

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quotes of the Week:

"Part of the reason I'm doing the fundraising for the Task Force is because Matt Foreman is a good leader. He is like one of us. He'll pitch in to help. He doesn't have the air that he's above us. Some non-profit directors -- I won't name names -- have that air. To be a director of a non-profit, you need to be liked, not looked upon as a deity."

– Noi Chudnoff, *donor*

"We have sanitized and intellectualized our cause to the point of abstraction. Our argument is always about -- you know, you get a better dental plan if you're married. Stuff like that. But marriage is just a code word. The fight is really: Are we equal humans in society or not? The right wing goes for the gut and we respond in this completely sterile way, talking about academic issues like the 1,038 rights that are denied us. It's kind of like John Kerry in the presidential race."

– Matt Foreman

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Saturday, August 13, 2005

Saturday Chat: Matt Foreman, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director

By [CLAUDIA ROWE](#)

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

Sometime in the next six months, gay rights advocates expect a decision from the state Supreme Court that would, in effect, decide whether same-sex marriage is legal in Washington.

If the justices decide in favor of gay unions, Washington would join Massachusetts as the only states to grant legal standing to homosexual marriage, though lawsuits aiming for the same result are pending in New York, New Jersey and California.

Conservative backlash, however, has been strengthening. At least 10 states plan to include anti-gay marriage initiatives on their ballots in the 2006 election, said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, who spends much of his time jetting around the country, lobbying for gay rights in places such as Topeka, Kan., and Kalamazoo, Mich.

On Friday, he visited Seattle, likely the next flashpoint for a national gay rights battle.

Does the court case in Washington have any particular significance in your fight? How does this state fit into the national picture?

"Washington is going to be a pivotal state for our movement over the next year. This is a place where our community is on the offensive, and if there is a win here, there will be a huge reaction. The right wing will definitely rally their forces to try and push it back. And if it's a Vermont-style civil-unions decision, the challenge will be getting the Legislature to do the right thing and give people full equal rights, not just a shadow version of that. Any way the court decides here, the fight's not going to be over."

There was such a burst of momentum a year ago, with gay marriages being performed in Portland, San Francisco and New York. Do you see a cooling off now, a retrenchment in the face of all the subsequent prohibitions?

"The history of gay rights and marriage equity has always been two steps forward, one step back. Right now, there's forward momentum in Washington state, in New Jersey, California and New York. But at the same time, we're under increased attack. There is a tremendous amount of anti-gay organizing going on, and in some states we're not going to be able to put up much of a fight."

You often fault the gay community for talking about same-sex marriage as an equal rights issue. What bothers you so much about that?

"We have sanitized and intellectualized our cause to the point of abstraction. Our argument is always about -- you know, you get a better dental plan if you're married. Stuff like that. But marriage is just a code word. The fight is really: Are we equal humans in society or not? The right wing goes for the gut and we respond in this completely sterile way, talking about academic issues like the 1,038 rights that are denied us. It's kind of like John Kerry in the presidential race."

Are you saying that anyone uncomfortable with the idea of gay marriage is a bigot?

"No, I completely understand. People are raised -- especially women -- with the idea of 'This is my special day,' 'my Prince Charming.' Even among women 35 to 50, who have always been among our strongest supporters, their numbers

fall on the gay marriage issue. ... But I do a lot of door-to-door lobbying and I've found that if you can speak to someone honestly about this for 90 seconds, they get past that visceral reaction. Most people, actually, are hungry to talk about it. It's not like they're slamming the door in your face."

Washington is perceived, rightly or wrongly, as a liberal stronghold, so if the court decision here goes against gay marriage, would that be sort of a punch in the gut?

"I think it will bring much more disappointment than if that decision occurred in 35 other states, particularly because this court has a reputation for being fair. So yes, I think it will hurt a lot."



Black and gay in Atlanta: Growing community leaves a mark

The Associated Press - ATLANTA

Once or twice a week, the women's drum circle gathers to practice. Drum Sista's members pound and caress the skins, bonding through the rhythm in an atmosphere of like-minded women _ activists and artists, all African-American, all lesbian.

It is no accident that they found one another in Atlanta.

The city and its suburbs have, in recent years, become a mecca for black gays and lesbians. The region now is home to the biggest concentration of black same-sex couples in the South, with nearly as many as the Chicago area, which has more than four times as many blacks.

Many make their homes in Atlanta for the same reasons that tens of thousands of other blacks have relocated to such states as Georgia, Florida and the Carolinas: a moderate cost of living and the familiar culture of the South, where most black Americans have family roots.

Though Atlanta's blacks generally reflect African-Americans nationally _ many are religious, socially conservative and critical of homosexuality _ lesbians and gays in town are courted by elected officials and they have access to some of the nation's best HIV-fighting resources geared toward African-Americans. Each year, the city hosts what organizers say is the biggest black, gay festival in the world.

"I had never seen that many black gay folks in my life, and I was blown away," said Duncan Teague of his first visit, a two-week vacation from Kansas City in 1985. "I was out of the closet, but not as out as I was down here. I could be whoever Duncan decided to be. And I was."

He cashed in his return plane ticket, he said, and has lived there ever since.

"This is our home," said Mary Anne Adams, a social worker and chair of Zami, an advocacy group for black lesbians that organized the drum circle. "This is the place that needs us the most and that we need the most."

Census data on same sex couples show that the metro areas of New York, Washington-Baltimore and Chicago have more gays than Atlanta. But local residents and experts say the booming southern city is growing as a destination.

Two years ago, about 15,000 attended Atlanta's annual black gay festival over Labor Day weekend. A year later, that number had doubled, said Michael Slaughter, co-chair of In the Life Atlanta, which organizes the event.

"In Atlanta, you can stand out on Peach Tree in front of a gay bar and very rarely is someone going to say something to you," he said. "It's just not the same" in other cities.

Several of the nation's most vocal black leaders supporting gay rights are based in Georgia, including Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin and Coretta Scott King.

And though advocates say more help is needed, a significant portion of the city's AIDS resources are focused on the black community. For example, the Ponce Center serves 7,000, most uninsured and black, who are battling AIDS, the top killer of young black men.

David Malebranche, a physician who teaches at Emory University and works at the Ponce Center, said many black lesbians and gays settle in Atlanta because they "feel ostracized from the white gay community because of racism. People will migrate to a city where there is a lot of black people in general, and then within that you find your niche."

Indeed, many agree that Atlanta's gay community remains largely racially separated. "This is still the South. We have that kind of mind-set," said LaMont "Montee" Evans, an advocate and health outreach worker.

"And then we have mega-churches and mega-preachers," he said, referring to tensions between black gays and some black churches.

In December, Bishop Eddie Long, whose New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta reports 25,000 members and counsels gays to become heterosexual, led thousands in a march against gay marriage. Another local black minister last year called gay marriage "a threat to who we are and what we stand for."

Bishop Wellington Boone of The Father's House church in Atlanta said in an e-mail interview that he does not hate homosexuals but feels morally bound to speak "strongly against the lifestyle."

Of Atlanta's black gays and heterosexuals, he wrote: "Other than geographically, the two populations do not coexist. There is a gay lobby, a gay culture, and gay clubs. Then there is the Church."

Tensions have surfaced elsewhere, too. In 2002 at Atlanta's Morehouse College, the nation's only all-male black university, a student suffered a fractured skull after being beaten with a baseball bat by another student who suspected he was gay.

Such incidents help explain "why so many influential African-Americans (in Georgia) who are gays and lesbians have not come out," said Chuck Bowen, executive director of Georgia Equality, a statewide advocacy group that lobbied unsuccessfully against a new state law reserving marriage for heterosexuals.

Outside Atlanta, he said, Georgia's generally conservative politics make gay advocacy tough.

But even so, two small Georgia cities _ Macon and Albany _ have some of the nation's largest proportions of black gay couples relative to all gay couples, according to a study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Advocates say the community must now begin to flex its political muscle more effectively. "In Atlanta, we have a large gay population that votes," said Adams of Zami, which awards national scholarships for black gays and lesbians. "There are bread and butter issues that the black gay community cares about. We're doing better at leveraging that."



August 5, 2005

Roberts assisted gays in landmark case New documents may hint at nominee's position on gay issues

By LOU CHIBBARO JR. and EARTHA JANE MELZER

Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts Jr. provided significant help to gay activists in a 1996 landmark Supreme Court case protecting gays from discrimination based upon their sexual orientation, the Los Angeles Times reported Thursday.

At the time, Roberts was a lawyer specializing in appellate work for Hogan & Hartson, a large D.C.-based law firm. Walter A. Smith Jr., then head of the pro bono department of the firm, told the paper that Roberts didn't hesitate. "He said, 'Let's do it.' And it's illustrative of his open-mindedness, his fair-mindedness. He did a brilliant job."

Roberts did not write the legal briefs or argue the case before the Supreme Court, but he was instrumental in reviewing filings and preparing oral arguments, according to several lawyers intimately involved in the case, reported the Los Angeles Times.

Jean Dubofsky, the lead lawyer for the gay rights activists in the case that Roberts assisted, *Romer vs. Evans*, told the Los Angeles Times that Roberts gave her advice in two areas that were "absolutely critical."

In that decision, the court overturned a Colorado law that banned cities and towns within the state from adopting ordinances banning discrimination against gays in employment, housing and other areas.

"He said you have to be able to count and know where your votes are coming from. And the other was that you absolutely have to be on top of why and where and how the state court had ruled in this case," Dubofsky said.

Art Leonard, an openly gay law professor at New York Law School and frequent commentator on gay legal issues, told this publication, "I think it is possible for a political conservative such as Roberts to have deemed it worth his time to help prepare the argument in *Romer* because the concept of Amendment 2 was offensive to him on general grounds.

"There is certainly a difference between striking down laws that impose second-class citizenship on a class of people and supporting more affirmative rights for such people, and I don't think a judge's position on one necessary predicts his position on the other."

Leonard said, "To sum up, I find today's news report comforting to the extent it indicates that Roberts is not reflexively anti-gay and probably holds views on gay issues more like those of Justice Kennedy than Chief Justice Rehnquist."

Gay advocacy groups have reacted unenthusiastically to the revelation of Roberts' assistance in *Romer vs. Evans*.

Matt Foreman, the executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force told this publication, "All that that shows is that he is a good lawyer, it has nothing to do with his conservative ideology."

Kevin Cathcart, the executive director of Lambda Legal Education & Defense Fund, a gay legal advocacy group, stated in a news release Thursday, "Lawyers in firms are often called on to play roles to support their firm's work; the work is routine and as here, often goes without notice.

"This information, along with his much more extensive advocacy of positions that we oppose continues to raise significant questions for us."

But in an interview Thursday afternoon on National Public Radio, Smith said that Roberts was under no obligation to assist on the gay rights case and could have easily declined the matter.

Lambda Legal's director of education and public affairs, Michael Adams, told this publication that the story in the Los Angeles Times was the first that Lambda had heard about Roberts' involvement in *Romer vs. Evans*.

Joe Solomnese, the president of the Human Rights Campaign, a gay advocacy group, also remains skeptical of Roberts.

"Judge Roberts' involvement in the case is noteworthy, but his participation adds little to our understanding of how he would vote on the court," said Solomnese in a news release. "The stakes are too high for guessing games over Judge Roberts' stance."

New documents may indicate Roberts' views on privacy

Documents released this week by the National Archives show that Judge John G. Roberts Jr., President Bush's nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, expressed strong objections to the extent that the high court has recognized a citizen's fundamental right to privacy.

According to the Washington Post, the documents show that Roberts drafted an article for then Attorney General William French Smith in 1981, which revealed Roberts' skepticism of the Constitution's so-called "right to privacy" doctrine. The court has invoked this doctrine in a number of landmark cases, including the 2003 decision in *Lawrence vs. Texas*, which overturned state sodomy laws.

"[T]he broad range of rights which are now alleged to be 'fundamental' by litigants, with only the most tenuous connection to the constitution, bears ample witness to the dangers of this doctrine," Roberts wrote in the draft article, according to the Post.

Roberts added a quote to the draft from a dissenting opinion by former Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black in a 1965 decision, in which Black criticized the majority on the court for overturning a Connecticut law banning the use of contraceptives, the Post reported. The majority opinion overturning the law used "a loose, flexible, uncontrolled standard for holding laws unconstitutional," Roberts approvingly quoted Black as saying.

The newly emerging information on Roberts' judicial views is being analyzed by gay rights attorneys, who have expressed concern about Roberts' possible handling of a number of gay rights cases that could come before the Supreme Court in the next several years.

If confirmed by the Senate in the fall, a gay-related military case would be one of the first cases Roberts is likely to consider as a new Supreme Court justice. The case, *Fair vs. Rumsfeld*, came to the high court when the Bush administration appealed a ruling last year by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals overturning the Solomon Amendment, a federal law calling for cutting off federal funds to universities that deny military recruiters access to campus facilities.

In the 1990s, a number of the nation's elite universities barred military recruiters from their campuses on grounds that their presence would violate university policies of shunning employers that engage in discrimination, including sexual orientation discrimination.

The universities cited the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy of prohibiting gays from serving in the military unless they conceal their sexual orientation as the reason for their bans on military recruiters.

The universities backed down from this practice following Congress' approval of the Solomon Amendment, out of fear that they would lose millions of dollars in federal funds. A consortium of universities challenged the constitutionality of the Solomon Amendment in a joint lawsuit in federal court. The Third Circuit's decision to overturn the law is considered an important victory for gay activists, who hope to eventually overturn the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy through litigation.

Challenges to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" are among the next set of gay-related cases that could come before the Supreme Court in the near future. At least two lawsuits seeking to overturn the policy are pending, one filed by the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network in the First Circuit Court of Appeals and another by the national gay group Log Cabin Republicans in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Ninth Circuit has already rejected a previous challenge to the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

If the appeals courts overturn the policy, the Bush administration is expected to file an immediate appeal to the Supreme Court.

Roberts to enforce 'settled law'

Some activists predict a challenge to one or more state laws banning gay marriage could also find its way to the Supreme Court's docket. A suit challenging the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which denies federal benefits to married same-sex couples, could also come before the high court, gay rights attorneys have said.

Roberts was in his 20s at the time he expressed his critical views on constitutional privacy rights. He was an assistant to French Smith in the early years of the Reagan administration.

Some legal observers have questioned whether Roberts' views have since moderated, more than 20 years later. In recent years, in his role as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, Roberts has said he would respect and enforce "settled law," including the 1973 decision of *Roe vs. Wade*, which legalized abortion.

Legal experts point out that the court used *Roe* and other privacy rights cases as a foundation for the *Lawrence* decision in 2003. *Lawrence* is considered one of the most important decisions in favor of gay civil rights. Written by Justice Anthony Kennedy and approved by a 6-3 margin, it recognizes that gay people have a fundamental right to privacy that can't be denied by the government.

Gay rights attorneys have expressed concern that a decision by the high court to overturn *Roe* could lead to the eventual overturning of *Lawrence*.

Chai Feldblum, a Georgetown University Law School professor and gay rights attorney, said the emerging documents on Roberts' work in the Reagan administration, and the administration of President George H.W. Bush, shed light on a judicial philosophy he is likely to apply to issues expected to come before the court in the future.

"What we see from the memos he wrote is his vision that the privacy provision in the Constitution should be limited," said Feldblum. "He doesn't strike me as someone who will have an expansive vision on privacy rights."

"What is not clear is how this will play out in gay rights cases," Feldblum said. "If he is conservative in not wanting to upset the existing appellate, he may not want to overturn *Lawrence*. But how he would apply *Lawrence* to something else - that is an unknown."

Feldblum said the information that has emerged so far on Roberts' record and views should no longer be dismissed as "tea leaves" that can't be predictive of his current views.

"They represent his vision of the Constitution that I doubt would change over time," she said. "They are core beliefs. He clearly believes these privacy rights guarantees should be given a narrow scope."

The C-38: a new step

Written by Elodie Boussonnière Monday, 08 August 2005



After the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain, Canada officially became the fourth country in the world to give full rights to same-sex couples on July the 20th. The legislation concerns civil weddings performed in public places such as city halls. No religious groups can be enforced to consecrate same-sex marriages if they don't want to. The Canadian vote was welcomed by the estimated 34,000 gay and lesbian couples living in Canada, above all because it is the first country to recognize same-sex marriage in North America.

Its official name is *The Civil Marriage Act* and was introduced by Mr. Paul Martin, current Prime Minister of Canada and Liberal, on the 1st of February 2005 as the "Bill C-38". Before the Bill was passed, same-sex marriage was already legal in seven Canadian provinces but as Mr. Martin stated *"This vote is a necessary step for human rights. We are a nation of minorities and in a nation of minorities, it is important that you don't cherry-pick rights"*.

After the vote, several members of the Liberal party invoked former Liberal and most famous Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau for his important contribution. Indeed, Mr. Trudeau was the first politician who talked about equal rights for Gays and Lesbians in the 70' and whose Charter of Rights and Freedoms changed the common definition of marriage.

Most members of the Liberal, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP (the New Democratic Party of Canada) supported the Bill while, as expected the conservatives and religious parties were opposed to it. However, Joe Comuzzi, a member of Mr. Martin's cabinet and minister responsible for Northern Ontario resigned so he could vote against the bill. Mr. Comuzzi explained his decision stating that *"In 2004, during the election, I promised faithfully to the people of Thunder Bay-Superior north, that I would defend the definition of marriage"*.

An obvious contrast

Gays and Lesbians still have to face fierce oppositions among conservatives, religious factions and groups. The Catholic Church led by the pope has even expressed his disapproval and anger against same-sex marriage which should, according to him *"be strictly limited to a man and a woman"*. Various religious groups such as the "Canada Christian College" or the "Defend Marriage Canada" declared this vote was the *"the beginning of the formal fight against the redefinition of marriage"*.

In contrast to Canadian open-minded legislation on gay marriage, American citizens are still strongly opposed to the idea of same-sex unions in their society. President George W. Bush asked Congress to support a constitutional amendment which would ban same-sex marriages. Massachusetts is the only state that allows gay marriages while Vermont and Connecticut have approved same-sex civil unions. However, when the Canadian Bill was passed, hundreds of American went to Canada to seek civil marriages, although their unions will not be recognized back home. Some are even planning to settle down in Canada for they believe *"living in Canada as a Gay is much easier than in the States"*.

Canada has already celebrated hundreds of gay marriages especially in Ontario. A majority of Canadians support the right for gays to marry while in the US, 11 states have, to this date, banned same-sex marriage. **As this American spokeswoman from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force pointed out *"We know that it has been somewhat contentious in Canada, but at the same time the Canadians have largely approached this issue in a rational and democratic way and are providing a very positive model for the rest of the world"*. She now hopes Canada will have an influence over her country but seems rather skeptical.**

Elodie Boussonnière
Nantes (France)

METROWEEKLY

Washington DC's Gay & Lesbian Magazine

Mama's Mission

Noi Chudnoff dedicates dollars for social justice

by Will O'Bryan

Photography by Todd Franson

Published on [08/11/2005](#)

If you drive by too quickly, the sign above the door might look more like "Go Mango!" warns Noi Chudnoff. The name of her shop, at 1809 14th Street NW, is actually Go Mama Go! Inside, Chudnoff, born and raised in Bangkok, stocks gifts, artwork and *tchotchkes* from around the world.

The name, she says, stems from a transition in her life at the start of the millennium. She was in her mid-50s, her son had gone off to college, and she decided it was time to hang up her apron. The name of the shop is her advice to herself. Since then, she's relocated to Washington from suburban Maryland, renting an apartment above Home Rule, the store next door to hers. While her husband, Jonathan, keeps the home fires burning in Maryland, he sometimes makes an appearance behind the counter, or in the Go Mama Go! contingent in the Capital Pride parade.

Last weekend, there was plenty of action in front of both shops -- and many others -- celebrating the Dog Days of August with sidewalk sales. Chudnoff dedicated her frontage to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, with a fundraising event called "Beefcake and Bunz!" Chudnoff supplied the burgers, the Task Force supplied the labor, and Chudnoff's many friends and acquaintances were drafted to supply bake-sale wares. (Disclosure: This writer felt obligated to donate a couple batches of Rice Krispies treats.)

"She knows virtually everyone who comes into her store. She has no hesitancy about asking anyone to help," says Matt Foreman, executive director of the Task Force, for whom Chudnoff harbors particular admiration.

While her profits have in large part translated to donations to Whitman-Walker Clinic, Concerned Black Men, the N Street Village women's shelter, and the National Youth Advocacy Coalition, among others, Chudnoff has pledged \$100,000 to the Task Force. "I've met with a lot of donors over the years," says Foreman, "and it's an exceptional day when a donor offers to give money before you ask."

Despite her philanthropy, Chudnoff is the first to insist -- repeatedly -- "I am not a saint." Spend some time with her, and you'll likely agree. After all, she's not one to mince words. She can be demanding. Don't let her slight frame fool you -- she does not suffer fools.

METRO WEEKLY: *Is all this fundraising fun for you? Is it a hobby?*

NOI CHUDNOFF: It's fun because my focus is that when we make money, we give back to the community. It doesn't matter if it's gay or straight. **When I came out to say we would pledge \$100,000 to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a lot of non-profits came out and said, "How come you didn't give it to us?"** Honey, if I haven't seen you in a year, why am I going to be thinking about you?

Part of the reason I'm doing the fundraising for the Task Force is because Matt Foreman is a good leader. He is like one of us. He'll pitch in to help. He doesn't have the air that he's above us. Some non-profit directors -- I won't name names -- have that air. To be a director of a non-profit, you need to be liked, not looked upon as a deity.

I talked to Jim [Bennett] and Deacon [Maccubbin] of Lambda Rising, and I said I would like to have lunch with Matt Foreman. I said that if I got the right answers, I would donate \$25,000. We had lunch the next day. I had a sense that I'd found a leader, but I wanted to make sure. I did some research and asked everybody what they thought of the Task Force. How good are they? How effective? What do they really do? I'm not gay, so I really don't know gay politics. I'm a newcomer, but I wanted to help a gay non-profit organization.

Later I went up to Matt [at the Task Force gala in April] and said, "I have one question to ask you, only one. You need to think really fast." I said, "Will you marry me?" He said, "Yes. And my boyfriend, too." I said, "Okay,

\$100,000." He has the ability to figure out where people are coming from. Go Mama Go! is about creativity. We are in your face. We can be nice or we can be terrible. Mostly we're nice. My question was, can you think really fast? And he can. He didn't get bent out of shape. He knew that I knew he's gay, that he has a boyfriend, but he understood what I was saying.

MW: *Where did you get your interest in philanthropy?*

CHUDNOFF: I came from a background of money and education. If you have education, you can rise to a certain social, economic level. Without education, you're never going to get that. My family knew money could get you places. And if you're not corrupt, money can be a good tool to equalize society. When I opened this store, I realized I'm not going to live forever. I'm a Buddhist. Whatever money I make, I am going to give it away. For [my family], wealth is not something you brag about because there are so many poor people. They will resent you. What we do is give out what we make, in education, in social service. I always knew this was very important.

MW: *What do you remember from your childhood?*

CHUDNOFF: [We were] well-to-do. We never lacked anything. But I think my turning point was when I was going to Europe to visit friends. We had to stop in India to change planes. I was maybe 15. I saw a girl picking a banana peel out of the trash, then scraping it for food.

Here I am, just flying to visit friends. And here's this other person. [The] chances of where we were born divided us into have and have-not. But for the grace of God, I could be that girl. Before that, I never thought about it, because all my friends had money. What were we to know?

MW: *How did you come from Thailand to America?*

CHUDNOFF: I did really well in school. I would have graduated [high school] first in the country, except for the fact that I threw a Coke bottle at a boy. He said, "Your brain, your intelligence, is wasted on a woman." So I said, "You dickhead!" I didn't graduate first, but I had my satisfaction.

I had a scholarship to go to a medical school, but I told my father I would never be a good doctor because you cannot negotiate with God. If this man is to die, he will die. That's fate. But to me, it would be like I failed. I could never live with myself if I had that doubt. It's not a good thing to be a doctor and always wonder if you did enough.

And why would I want to be a lawyer? I don't want to make a lot of money. I didn't want either one.

My father said to just go to medical school. I said no. So he said -- which was good -- "Then you are not my child." And I said, "Oh, so I'm free? Then I can leave?" He thought I was kidding. I came to this country and studied philosophy. I was 17. I was a clever girl. I forged his signature and took what I needed. I never went back. My parents never talked to me. It was a total break.

MW: *Was that too heavy a price to pay for freedom?*

CHUDNOFF: It was worth it. Like I told my father, I could run his business, I could do anything. He said nobody would listen to me because I'm a girl. He wasn't going to let me run the business, so I thought, "Why should I hang around?" If society wouldn't accept that women were the same as men, what's the point?

MW: *When did you arrive in America?*

CHUDNOFF: In the late '60s. I had a scholarship. It wasn't a problem. I'm good at finding resources. My first job was scrubbing floors in a nursing home [in Seattle]. That only lasted three weeks. I decided that I should get a better job. I knew that I would have to do anything and everything to get myself educated. I wasn't afraid. If you are healthy and you can speak English, you can get a job. I had a work visa because I had a bank guarantee from forging my father's signature. I know, terrible. [Laughs.]



I didn't like cleaning, but it was an easy job to get. Once I got that job and a few paychecks, I got a job in a bookstore. Much better.

MW: *And you married?*

CHUDNOFF: First I moved to Wisconsin for graduate school. That's where I met my husband. He decided to go to law school at American University, so we moved here.

MW: *Did he appreciate your independence?*

CHUDNOFF: Not really, but it's okay. The first thing I said to him -- he's Jewish -- I said, "Don't say Jews are the chosen people. Don't say that in this household. I don't believe in that. The moment you say that, I'm going to leave you." It's important that everyone's the same.

MW: *Before opening Go Mama Go!, you were living in suburban Maryland?*

CHUDNOFF: I worked for somebody else for 10 years as the manager of a clothing store. I learned what to do and what not to do.

MW: *And then your son went to college.*

CHUDNOFF: [And I decided] to quit, because I did not have to be a mother or a wife. I told my husband, "I'm going to concentrate on this business. Maybe this is a good place for us to get a divorce, because I will never cook or clean again." It's true. I have an apartment above Home Rule. I spend my time here.

MW: *And you don't cook or clean up there?*

CHUDNOFF: I go out to eat. [Laughs.] I clean a little bit. I started out here with \$2,000. You can tell how much I make if I could give Matt Foreman \$100,000. I'm good. I did [a stand at] Eastern Market for one year, then looked for a place. I looked at Capitol Hill, but the demography was wrong. It was all straight families, no disposable income. I came here and realized this would be the place. It's mostly gay, disposable income, high income.

[Go Mama Go! opened] six weeks before 9/11. After that, nobody came out to shop. Even I didn't go out to Whole Foods. I was so depressed. I had no money to pay rent. I talked to [Home Rule co-owner] Link, and I told him my landlord wouldn't keep me if I couldn't pay rent. Link told all his friends. I think the neighborhood wanted to save me. Everybody came out to shop so I could pay rent. I always say, "Thank God for the gay community."

MW: *Before that, did you have much of an impression of the GLBT community?*

CHUDNOFF: I've always had gay friends. My best friend in Thailand was a gay boy. Without him, I probably wouldn't be sitting here. He couldn't come out as a gay person to his parents. They were well-to-do. We decided to kill ourselves, but then we talked each other out of it. We were crazy. In Eastern Buddhism, if you save a life, that life belongs to you. We belong to each other. I will always look out for his gay brothers and sisters.

You struggle to come out as a gay man. I struggled to come out as a person. I think that we had a bond because we both had to accept who we are. He had to accept the fact that he's gay, and tell his parents. He now lives in France. His parents could take him being gay once he moved far away. His parents wanted him to be a successful straight man and have children. He was the only child. That's big pressure. And my parents couldn't take that I wasn't going to listen to anybody. My friends and I hung out together because we were about who we were, what we wanted out of life. We could not be what our parents wanted us to be.

MW: *Are you still in touch with this friend in France?*

CHUDNOFF: We decided not to keep in touch because it's too hard. I told him I would marry him if I was a gay man. He said the same thing. It's too hard. Here's a perfect person, but he's gay. Here's a perfect person, but I'm a woman. It's not good. We always think, what if?

MW: *Reincarnation is central to some Buddhists' beliefs. Do you think you may have ever lived as a gay person, or you may live as a gay person in the future?*

CHUDNOFF: Maybe. I'm closer to a gay man than a straight woman. Honest to God. But I don't clean. I'm not so neat. [Laughs.]

MW: *You've joked that you wished your son were gay, that if he were gay he'd be better at keeping in touch with his mother.*

CHUDNOFF: Yes. I think it's hard for a straight boy. I'm such a strong person, and my husband is not. My husband is the good cop, and I'm the bad cop.

MW: *How strict were you as a parent?*

CHUDNOFF: I demanded that he did his best in school. One of my gripes is that he quit college to work in San Francisco making a lot of money in computers. I said, "Can you give money to some organization? I don't care which, just give some." He never did.

Of all the things in life, this is what disappointed me the most -- the inability to give. He had so much money. He bought a fancy computer, went out to eat, but nothing to charity. I thought, "My God, I gave birth to this child?" It's not like you can give [philanthropy] in a gene. You have to reach that point yourself. But I think he's reaching that point. I told him I'm giving \$100,000 to the Task Force. He said that's good. He understands. I think he's reached the point that he can give, but maybe not to a gay organization. He doesn't have any gay friends.

MW: *What sorts of causes do you think you'll be giving to in the future?*

CHUDNOFF: I told Matt Foreman the Task Force needs \$1 million in California. I have a lot of rich, straight friends in California. I will go and charm them. I will try to get a house party for the Task Force. And because Randy Fiser, who is a Victory Fund [Gay & Lesbian Leadership Institute] board member, helped me, I will help him raise money. But my first loyalty is the Task Force.

I think people know that I'm sincere. I don't do this just to kiss ass. I don't need that. You do good things because it's a good thing to do. You don't do it to be Donald Trump. It's good that not everybody knows, or they would all come and ask me for money.





Triangle Foundation tapped for NGLTF capacity building project

Originally printed 8/11/2005 (Issue 1332 - Between The Lines News)

WASHINGTON -- On Aug. 4, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force announced that Michigan's Triangle Foundation is one of three LGBT advocacy organizations to be selected as partners in an ongoing capacity building project.

The new partners, which include PROMO in Missouri and Equal Rights Washington, will join Kentucky Fairness Alliance and Equality Maryland, which were selected in the first phase of the project in December 2004.

The capacity building project, a program of the Task Force's Movement Building department and funded by the Gill Foundation and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, provides intensive assessment, technical assistance, leadership support and funding over a two-year period to help build the infrastructure of the LGBT rights movement nationwide. The goal is to support organizations in moving to the "next level" more quickly than might otherwise be possible. A total of \$500,000 is expected to be distributed in annual grants of up to \$50,000 to the partner organizations to help them tackle the most pressing needs they have identified. The Task Force has no role in directing what steps or priorities a partner organization will take to build its capacity.

"This partnership will be an important boost, and help propel us on our trajectory to greater growth and effectiveness," said Jeffrey Montgomery, executive director of the Triangle Foundation.

"The 2004 election was a potent reminder that our communities are under siege and that grassroots strength is the key to prevailing over the long term," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the NGLTF.

"The capacity building project is a response to the specific needs of our movement. Our goal is to partner with statewide groups so that together we can turn the tide away from hate and anti-gay public policy," said Russell Roybal, the Task Force's director of Movement Building. "We want to help build a movement infrastructure that survives and thrives far into the future."



SHe Said Aug. 11, 2005

Originally printed 8/11/2005 (Issue 1332 - Between The Lines News)

"I think when people see someone in drag they recognize the sense of self and the personal freedom in it. I sometimes like to go to Borders Books or the supermarket in drag. It's wonderful. Drag cuts through the bullshit about who's on your side and who's not. And I'm always pleasantly surprised by the response. Usually it's a smile because they recognize me, a request for a makeup tip, or some guy thinks I'm a tranny hooker and asks for my phone number."

- *Coco Peru as quoted in the July 19, 2005 issue of The Advocate.*

"As for 'family values,' the Democrats can become the truly pro-family party by supporting parents in doing the most important and difficult job in America: raising children.... Rather than fighting over gay marriage, the Democrats must show that it is indeed possible to be 'pro-family' and in favor of gay civil rights at the same time."

- *Jim Wallis in an Aug. 4, 2005 New York Times Op-Ed.*

"If there are studies that show there are bad outcomes for these kids, we could not find them, and we looked, we looked really hard."

- *Dr. Joseph Hagan, a Vermont pediatrician who chaired the committee that oversaw a 2002 report by the American Academy of Pediatrics supporting adoption by same-sex couples, as quoted in the Boston Globe July 31, 2005.*

"We're not going to make any movement in this fight until we make it a truly moral issue. Basic fairness and moral values require that straight people start taking a stand for us with the same force and energy as they would if it was another minority under attack."

- *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman as quoted in the July 19, 2005 issue of The Advocate.*

"Under our view of the law, it is not enough to say that blacks and women have been historically discriminated against as groups and are therefore entitled to special preferences."

- *Bush Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts on Affirmative Action in 1981 as reported by The New York Times July, 28 2005.*

"These are the churches for whom BushCo tried to codify homophobia in the U.S. Constitution and for whom he appoints countless right-wing misogynist lower-court judges and nominates a neoconservative Supreme Court justice who is so white and so male and so gleamingly, blindingly conservative he might as well be Dick Cheney and Antonin Scalia's immaculate love child."

- *SF Gate Columnist Mark Morford on the booming "mega-church" business, Aug. 3, 2005.*



Time to register for Creating Change

Originally printed 8/11/2005 (Issue 1332 - Between The Lines News)

WASHINGTON -- Registration is now under way for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 18th Annual Creating Change Conference, which will be held in Oakland, Calif. from Nov. 9-13. LGBT activists and allies are encouraged to attend.

The Creating Change Conference, sponsored and hosted by NGLTF, is the LGBT rights movement's annual skills-building conference which is attended by thousands of human-rights activists nationwide. The program educates, challenges and supports LGBT activists and has a special focus on assisting community organizations to build a more racially representative movement.

The 2005 schedule boasts accomplished plenary speakers including bisexual activist Loraine Hutchins, Juba Kalamka (a.k.a. Pointfivefag), a founding member of the "homohop" group Deep Dickcollective and Urvashi Vaid, an attorney, writer activist and former NGLTF executive director.

In addition, the conference program is full of sessions, panel discussions, roundtables, film screenings, caucuses and networking sessions that deliver the skills needed for activist leaders to create change in their communities. For details, visit www.creatingchange.org. The early bird registration rate is available until Aug. 31. Attendees 16 and under and 65 and over will be admitted for free.



South Wire: **Gay leaders seek to bridge racial divide**

By DIONNE WALKER
Associated Press Writer

August 13 2005

RICHMOND, Va. -- Each year, Equality Virginia director Dyana Mason kicks off the summer with two road trips: One to Washington's black gay pride celebration in May, and a second to its predominantly white June counterpart, Capital Pride.

Through the fall, similar celebrations will unfold in major cities across the nation, underscoring a racial rift some say splinters gay America when a united front is needed most.

National gay and lesbian groups are responding with marketing campaigns and old-fashioned schmoozing to win over minority gays _ who argue white activists want their votes on national issues, but rarely include poverty, racism and other minority concerns on their agendas.

"We have this rainbow of unity--'We're all in it together,' " said Earl Fowlkes, president of the International Federation of Black Prides. "Truth be told, it's not that way."

His group represents over 23 annual black pride celebrations drawing thousands of black gays to cities such as New York, Chicago and Atlanta. Such culture-specific celebrations are on the rise as the face of gay America shifts from the white male stereotype.

Roughly 4 million gay or lesbian adults live in the United states, according to the Gay and Lesbian Atlas, compiled by the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. Among them are large groups of Hispanics and blacks; in Los Angeles, for example, the atlas found Hispanics lead 32 percent of all same-sex households.

Black gays are primarily in the South, heading more than one quarter of gay households in New Orleans and all of Mississippi, at least statistically.

The numbers say minorities are just as prevalent as whites. So why then, do their faces number so few at national gay rights events?

In 2000, the Human Rights Campaign set out to answer that question. Officials surveyed leaders in several communities of color across the country. The results were sobering.

"Their perceptions of us were rich, white male elitist organization with low investment in issues facing the multicultural community," recalled Donna Payne, senior diversity organizer with the D.C. group, the nation's largest gay rights advocacy organization.

In addition to creating Payne's position, leaders responded by showcasing work by black, gay filmmakers in their Washington D.C. store, establishing a gospel social and an outreach program to mentor gay youth at historically black colleges.

Perhaps most importantly, top HRC brass began frequenting black pride parades and parties. "Overall, we understand that we have to be able to have room under the umbrella for everyone," Payne said.

Despite the changes, frustrations linger. For one, Latinos shrink from organizations that think translating documents into Spanish is enough, said Noemi Perez, a Virginia gay rights advocate. She called for more Hispanic hires from the community _ not hand-picked people whose main qualification is a Spanish surname.

"You can't just transplant an individual who is Latino," she said. "That is a big piece of the puzzle as to why it's hard for these organizations to bring the communities to the table."

Hispanics and blacks say they feel distanced from a national gay rights agenda focused on same-sex marriage. Fowlkes and Perez named "existence issues" such as poverty, discrimination and job stability as primary for minority gays--not wedding bells.

"If I don't have the money I need to have food in my refrigerator or to get on a bus to get to work, the whole issue of the right to marry, that's secondary," Perez said. "The lives of the folks on 'Will and Grace' are not necessarily reflective of the lives of gay Latinos."

With anti-gay measures gaining ground nationwide, the argument for uniting across racial lines is strong.

Last fall saw gay marriage bans approved in all 11 states that held referendums, including Georgia, Mississippi, Arkansas and Kentucky.

Anti-gay forces are seeing an increasingly ripe target in minority communities, said Rodney McKenzie, project director with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"We are seeing even more so how the other folks are using people of color's voices and positions against the gay movement," McKenzie said, pointing to an increase of homophobic rhetoric among black pastors that culminated with anti-gay marriage rallies in Atlanta and around the country.

Fowlkes said the sudden, vocal campaigns have left many of the nation's largest gay groups scrambling to respond and build bridges with black leaders.

With black and Hispanic populations booming across the country, Fowlkes said such disconnects will become increasingly costly at the polls. He cited the 2004 presidential election and precincts where he believes Republicans won by margins as slim as 200 votes.

"There's enough black gay folk in those places to make a difference," he said.

In Richmond, Va., Mason's staff is taking baby steps to diversify. In April, the flagship Virginia gay rights group hosted an awards dinner with NAACP Chairman Julian Bond.

Still, Mason lists a concern of many white gay leaders: In areas where minority gay communities aren't well-organized, reaching across racial lines is nearly impossible.

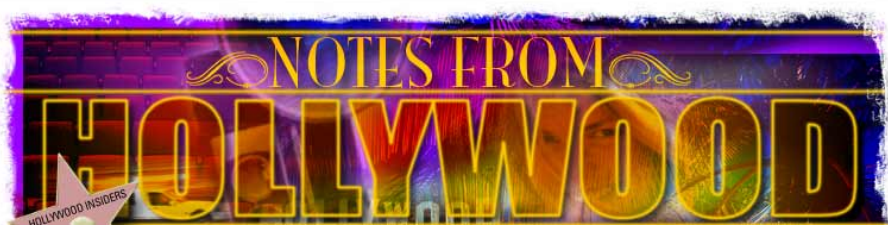
"We don't have a Richmond black gay pride, for example," she said. "We don't have that type of opportunity for us to really find who these folks are."

But the responsibility for reaching out is not all on whites, argued Rick Rosendall, vice president for political affairs with the Gay and Lesbian Activist Alliance.

Rosendall said he and other whites feel slighted by minorities who too often criticize their efforts to help, or worse, ignore them.

"Even if everybody who was ever born white deserves to be drowned in the river," he said, "many of us have worked very hard to move discussions."

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In Memory of Jean O'Leary

"Champion Human Rights Warrior

By Nicholas Snow

Permission is granted to any media outlet to reprint this story at no charge in tribute to Jean O'Leary. High resolution photos are linked from the bottom of this page.

I was in denial about the death of Jean O'Leary, one of history's great civil rights pioneers, until faced with the deadline for this story. I first met Jean in 1988 when I had the honor and privilege of serving on staff of the first ever National Coming Out Day (NCOD), a project spearheaded by O'Leary in her role as Executive Director of National Gay Rights Advocates (NGRA), and by the late Rob Eichberg, another civil rights pioneer who co-founded The Experience Weekend—a seminar that had changed my life earlier that year.

"Take your next step" was (and still is) the slogan for NCOD some seventeen years ago yet, while chanting it then, O'Leary was, in the spirit of this metaphor, already a marathon runner who hadn't slowed her pace for decades. In fact, O'Leary never stopped living for the highest good of all concerned, and while she lost her life to cancer June 4th, Jean's life force endures forever.

What does an activist do? They answer the call from a Higher Power which, at the very least, is their own conscience, and with the circuitry of their soul, transform the lives of others, creating one magnificent current of change. The people who created, presented, attended, or were in any way involved with Jean's memorial service are some of the most significant agents of social justice the world has seen over the last century, and have collectively changed the world forever. As evidenced by this turnout, and the official announcement of her death, O'Leary was the consummate agent of change.

Lesbian activist, former nun and Democratic party leader Jean O'Leary died June 4 at the San Clemente, California home of Lisa Phelps, her partner of 12 years, and surrounded by her family and close friends. O'Leary, who had been battling lung cancer for two years, was 57.

Feminist leader Gloria Steinem said, "Jean O'Leary was a link of kindness and humanity and inclusive politics who helped the women's movement to recognize the universal cost of homophobia, and the gay movement to see that marginalizing the voices of lesbians would only diminish its power."

Born March 4, 1948, in Kingston, New York, Jean Marie O'Leary grew up mostly in Ohio. She entered Sisters of the Holy Humility convent in 1966, and said in a 1984 anthology, "Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence," that she joined the convent because "there was no anti-war movement, no women's movement, no gay movement in Ohio in 1966" and that she "wanted to do something special, to have an impact on the world."

She graduated from Cleveland State University with a degree in psychology in 1970, left the convent and became the drummer for a girl band, "The Satin Dolls." Soon thereafter, she packed up her drums and moved to New York to pursue doctoral studies in organizational development at Yeshiva University...

She founded or co-founded many community organizations, including the National Gay Rights Advocates (NGRA), which became one of the first advocacy organizations to focus on the legal and civil liberties ramifications of the AIDS epidemic. She also founded National Coming Out Day with psychologist Rob Eichberg in 1987, noting that "... coming out is critically important to our community and to our movement. Our invisibility is the essence of our oppression. And until we eliminate that invisibility, people are going to be able to perpetuate the lies and myths about gay people." In recent years, O'Leary, with her business partner, Palm Springs City Council member Ginny Foat, ran a consulting firm specializing in voter contact and candidate consulting.

In addition to her life partner Lisa Phelps, and their daughter Victoria, she is survived by their son David De Maria, his life partner James Springer, and their son Aiden DeMaria. She is also survived by her brothers, Jim O'Leary and Ken O'Leary, sister Diane Urig, and nieces and nephews.

Phelps said, "I am proud to have been with Jean during the last 12 years of her life, and I am proud of Jean's political accomplishments. She set an example of community involvement for our 15 year old daughter Victoria and instilled in her the importance of political activism..."

When I learned in the weeks after her death that a memorial service would take place for Jean in Los Angeles, I questioned whether or not I would be able to attend, imagining that perhaps there wouldn't be a venue large enough to accommodate such a service and that only family and invited guests would be able to attend. As was her life, Jean's memorial service was open to the public, and took place Sunday, July 24th at The Village at Ed Gould Plaza, part of the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, and dignitaries were out in force.

When facing the possibility of her death, O'Leary said "I don't want to live simply for more experiences, but somehow I'd like them all to flow together and have my life's work be the emergent meaning of the stream." The stream emerged as an ocean at O'Leary's memorial service.

In opening the service, Palm Springs City Council member Ginny Foat explained, "Those of us that are members or friends of the GLBT community have learned over and over again to deal with the early death of our friends and lovers—be it through HIV/AIDS in the men's community or cancer in the women's community, it never gets easier. This experience of speaking at memorials is always filled with the pain of recollection, loss and a terrible void."

"Today we are gathered to celebrate the life of a magnificent woman who changed life for so many—those she knew and those she did not. Know that she is here with us today and she is proud of all that are gathered to pay tribute. Thank you all so much for being here to honor her," Foat continued. "Today you will hear about the incredible political and life accomplishments of my friend of 27 years, Jean O'Leary."

In honoring O'Leary's influence on her own political successes, Foat explained, "Jean was diagnosed with cancer in the summer of 2003. I had just filed to run for Palm Springs City Council when she gave me the news. I told her that I couldn't possibly run. What would happen to our business? Who would be there to help her? She looked at me and said, 'Ginny, you have always wanted to do this. I need you to do this. I need you to win. I want to be at your victory party.' And so she was, just like a proud mother smiling and cheering as we got the election results—just as she has for so many of the elected officials here today."

Following Foat's remarks, Linda Gerard sang a powerful rendition of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" and then Rabbi Denise Eger of the Congregation Kol Ami in West Hollywood stepped to the podium and asked, seemingly for many in attendance, "...Why is the Rabi at a former nun's Celebration of Life ceremony?" The truth is that Jean was intimately involved in planning every aspect of her own memorial, including the selection of the music and the speakers. "...Jean tapped an inner source of strength that I'm sure brought her comfort," explained Rabbi Eger. "...We give thanks for her life and the incredible example she set for all of us..."

Sean Strub, founder of POZ magazine, shared that beginning in their early friendship days in the 1980's, he and Jean had a 24/7 policy and throughout their friendship would speak up to six times a day on the phone. When working in person together on campaigns or simply socializing, the duo would often fall asleep together.

O'Leary intentionally spent her last years in the Palm Springs, fighting her cancer and organizing her archives, her life's work. "Jean's world became smaller" as her death neared, Strub explained, but she was comforted by the many friends and loved ones who called, even if she could not speak with them directly. "She was at peace," Strub explained.

Strub also read this touching letter from another civil rights pioneer:

It's happening too often in my life that I find myself trying to think of words that could possibly pay tribute to the life of a unique and irreplaceable friend -- but it feels especially wrong when the friend is younger than I and should have been with us for so much longer.

I was more part of Jean's eastcoast years, so I had missed seeing her in recent times, but we worked together more than long enough for me to treasure and count on her innate kindness, her good judgment, her humor and her strength.

She was what we need in this world -- a balance of head and heart, someone who could bring people together because each one trusted her.

I devoutly wish we could have given her the gift of a world in which everyone matters; she worked for that; she deserved that. But I'm sure she knew that the forcefulness of the current backlash was also a tribute to the depth of the victories she helped to win.

The only possible way I can pay tribute to Jean is not with words but with acts. I will do my best -- and I will think of her and thank her and tell Jean stories to keep her spirit alive for people who weren't lucky enough to know her.

Maybe if we all do that, we can give her more of the years that she deserved to have -- and that we deserve to spend with her.

With love and gratitude to all whose love sustained her to the end,

Gloria Steinem

In a not so peaceful time, during an AIDS demonstration at the White House in 1987 in which Strub, O'Leary and others were being arrested, they chanted to the police who were wearing bright yellow plastic gloves, "Your gloves don't match your shoes. You'll see it on the news!"

Another distinguished memorial speaker was Roz Wyman, member of the Democratic National Committee, officially representing U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein. Wyman expressed to us that O'Leary had "the courage, vision and guts of pioneers."

Wyman shared that the Democratic National Committee Executive Committee passed a resolution honoring Jean's life—which included spearheading the first ever meeting of gays and lesbians at the White House, March 26th, 1977, with the support of Midge Costanza who at the time was the Assistant to President Jimmy Carter. Wyman also shared that Senator Feinstein had read a tribute to O'Leary into the Congressional Record. Among the official remarks, "Mr. President..." stated Senator Feinstein, "Jean O'Leary was a light, a remarkable voice..."

Next up was Eric Bauman, Chair of the Los Angeles Democratic Party, who honored Jean for her mentorship, describing her as one of his handful of true friends—someone he could always relay upon to tell him the truth. "It is amazing to me to be here today," Bauman expressed, in awe of the caliber of those gathered in honor of O'Leary.

Torie Osborn, Executive Director of the Liberty Hill Foundation, brought with her condolences and love from Rev. Troy Perry and Rev. Nancy Wilson who serve at the helm of the International Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches; and from activist Eric Rolfes; and from California State Senator Sheila Kuehl. In a lighter moment, Osborn explained that Kuehl couldn't be there because she was teaching a course in Amsterdam, but that in honor of O'Leary, Kuehl was coveting actress Lena Olin who happened to be staying in the same building.

O'Leary was a longtime inspiration to Osborn, who recalled that Jean "literally put the lesbian in NGLTF," championing the transition for the National Gay Task Force into the National Gay and Lesbian Task force as its new lesbian co-director at a pivotal time in GLBT history. Later in the service, current NLGTF Executive Director Matt Foreman explained, "Jean was singularly responsible for bringing gay men and lesbians together at a critical time in our history," reminding us that still, "we must indeed speak truth to power..."

Osborn talked about seeing Jean through some of her most volatile political times when O'Leary became the target of "horizontal hostility" that can sometimes plague communities. O'Leary would go on to support Osborn through similar crises. "Those are the times that forge the solidarity of the soul," Osborn explained.

Setting the tone for another speaker, Osborn shared how O'Leary had been excited, years ago, about an upcoming politician who Osborn also believed in. The duo discussed forming a group, "Irish Lesbians for Antonio," as in Villaraigosa. It turns out that Osborn will be doing some work with L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's administration and pledges that, in O'Leary's honor, "L.A. City Hall will feel some of Jean's fierce Irish passion."

United States Congresswoman Maxine Waters humbly stepped to the podium next and said, "Jean O'Leary was one of my very dearest friends," reminiscing about their shared early days of activism and lifelong political association. Before

the news broke nationally in recent weeks, Congresswoman Waters shared that Jane Fonda could no longer keep silent about the war on Iraq and would be launching an anti-war campaign.

"I have known some of the greatest, most courageous women in the world..." stated Congresswoman Waters. "...We didn't have the courage of Jean," she explained. "She fought and fought and fought...she was a gentle woman...she treated everyone with respect..."

"I am living in a very different time now...I almost have contempt for some of my colleagues..." Congresswoman Waters expressed about the caliber of today's politicians. "I want you to know that, in the spirit of Jean O'Leary, I'm going back out there with Jane Fonda..." "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything..." the Congresswoman reminded us.

In a poignant illustration of O'Leary's impact on the world, Congresswoman Waters described a recent account in which she observed two young women "hugging and kissing and loving each other" on a busy Washington D.C. street. "I know they don't know what sacrifices women have made for them," Congresswoman Waters said about the duo.

In his remarks, California State Treasurer Phil Angelides said about O'Leary, "I was awed by the magnitude of what she had done," referring to Jean's successful campaign to create one thousand fundraising house parties in a single year before the use of the internet was widespread. "She was such a rare model for so many of us," and Angelides vowed to continue to "fight a fight of passion and belief" in her honor. "I'll never forget you and I hope that I'll never let you down," he said to O'Leary.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said, "You can't help to feel lucky to have known Jean... The struggles that Jean has been involved with over the years are important to all of us." Crediting O'Leary for some of his own success, Mayor Villaraigosa said, "It was people like Jean who pushed people like me who were in public life... Today, we celebrate her life. We laugh. We cry. We are inspired by her." "We love you," he said to Jean. "We remember you. We will continue to work to make the dream live."

Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said, "We celebrate a life today of a woman who fought for gay and lesbian rights...it was a fight against those who would tell us how to live..." Adding that, "the commitment that she made to issues that were important to her were more universal than readily apparent..."

In citing a verse in the Old Testament which states, "A woman of valor is more valuable than rubies," Supervisor Yaroslavsky explained that the origin of the word "valor" is related to "soldier" or "warrior," attributing this to Jean. "She wasn't some general sitting up in a corporate office... Jean's life was embodied in the phrase 'Good courage.'"

Then longtime O'Leary friend Suze Lanier sang a song she had written for Jean in the 1980's, "Angel in the Night," after which Midge Costanza stepped up to the podium.

Costanza worked as the Assistant to President Jimmy Carter during his administration. The first significant phone call Costanza received as the Special Assistant to President Jimmy Carter was from Jean O'Leary, stating that it was time for gays and lesbians to have a meeting at the White House. "Okay. That was it. You couldn't say no to Jean," said Costanza. That meeting took place.

O'Leary spent years creating strategic alliances with politicians and powerbrokers. About O'Leary's networking tactics, Costanza explained, "When she couldn't get an appointment with an elected official, she went out with their wives. I'm the only one alive who knows who they were," she concluded, regarding the wives.

In one of the most poignant moments of the service, Costanza stepped to the edge of the stage and spoke to those seated in the front rows. "She chose all of you, every single one of you, individually, to be here today." "I have accomplished things in my life because of Jean..." added Costanza. "For me, personally, I will never, ever..." (she stopped to hold back tears) "I will never have a friend like Jean. There was no one like her in the world. She will be in my heart forever."

As the almost-three hour service came to a close, filmmaker Gretchen Goldsmith shared how she thought a tribute film to Jean could last a few minutes, but then met her and ultimately recorded hours and hours of interviews with her.

Bob Hattoy, who came out as HIV positive during a speech at the Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden at the invitation of Bill Clinton, explained, "Jean was my friend and my mentor... I learned a lot about life, about

politics, about power... Jean always made me look at the big picture..." Right before his speech, Hattoy looked down and saw Jean smiling and laughing, saying "you can do it!" "She blazed a trail that made me feel comfortable at that moment... Jean O'Leary taught me how to change the world..."

Democratic National Committee Member John Perez said, "I see that in death, like in life, Jean has served to bring so many of us together," and he talked about observing the first National Coming Out Day festivities as a closeted student at UC Berkeley. "She understood how important it was to have an inclusive agenda," said Perez about Jean. "I hope to rededicate myself to the broader battle," he said, also expressing that he will remember Jean "with awe, respect and gratitude..."

Dr. James R. Waisman, Jean's Oncologist, expressed, "Jean was amazing... I saw so much of the humanity in her... She became one of my truly great teachers..."

Finally, Jean's brother, Jim O'Leary stepped to the podium, describing his sister as a "Champion human rights warrior." He introduced a recording of the ballad, "I Hope You Dance," which was a special request of Jean's sister, Dianne Urig, and then we listened to a recording of drum medley in tribute to Jean's early years as a drummer.

In his remarks, Jim explained that since history's early beginnings, "it's the drummer" who alerts people, who communicates with people the great issues of the day, and he described the O'Leary family values. "We were all initially motivated to do something that could help others."

In childhood, Jim and Jean shared an experience where they hiked upstream from a lake, put little logs in the stream to symbolize their dreams, and followed their "dreams" to the back to the lake, prodding them on if when they got caught in the rocks. "We'd like to empower each of you today to go forward," explained Jim. "Listen to the call of the drums and their growing cadence....be visible...throw your stick in the water...remember Jean and go forth."

In death, O'Leary's life's work is not only "the emergent meaning of the stream." Her continuing life force is the stream, carrying our dreams.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Social Insecurity

By PAUL SCHINDLER

Pres. George W. Bush's hopes of radically reshaping Social Security through a vaguely outlined proposal to allow American workers to shift a portion of their system contributions into private accounts may have little political chance of advancing in its current conception, but the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has nonetheless performed a valuable service in issuing a research critique of the plan, "Selling Us Short."

The Task Force effort is to be lauded on several counts.

First, and most significantly, the group has weighed in on a political question of utmost importance in the lives of all Americans and provided a sophisticated analysis of how changes to the nation's insurance plan for senior citizens might be expected to impact the lives of gay men, lesbians and transgendered individuals. The immediate threat of changing the system will likely languish given the lack of popular and congressional appetite for the basic sales pitch the president has made.

But, the Task Force report chronicles the evolution in thinking about Social Security within the Republican Party—and it is clear that there is a strong constituency among conservatives for some overhaul of this program in the direction of privatization. Emerging political problems for Bush may doom his dreams for reform, but the issue will not necessarily go away for good.

Like other communities of like interests in the U.S., the LGBT community needs to look beyond our obvious political goals—anti-discrimination protections, hate crimes penalties and marriage equality—and explore other aspects of social and economic policy to determine where our best interests lie. The Task Force report is a model for engaging that effort.

Mandy Hu, the principal author of the study, has done an impressive job of distilling a wide range of economic and fiscal data in presenting the Task Force's perspective. She relies on a diverse range of experts from policy groups opposed to the president's plan to the comptroller general of the General Accountability Office, Congress' investigatory agency, and a Republican-appointed trustee of the Social Security trust fund. The report comes to conclusions that echo those of many economists who have looked at the Bush plan, though to be sure there are other economists out there who would find considerably more virtue in the president's proposal.

As has been widely documented elsewhere, the Task Force report notes that the Bush plan first of all involves considerably more federal debt in a fiscal climate in which deficits are already at record levels. Hu also makes clear that in addition to assuming that individuals will invest their private accounts with better net yields than the trust fund would—a questionable assumption—the Bush plan is also predicated on a lower level of benefits paid by the trust fund going forward. The report is refreshingly clear on the point that the president proposes to base future benefit increases on the rate of inflation, rather than the rise in wage levels, which traditionally grow faster. As a result, future retirees would have to expect that their Social Security checks would not go as far as those of their parents and grandparents.

With specific reference to the LGBT community, the Task Force reports that gay and lesbian wage earners make less money over their lifetime than their straight counterparts, including married women, so they are more reliant on Social Security for their retirement security and less likely to gamble that future on uncertain private returns and benefit levels that don't grow as much as they would have otherwise. More affluent members of the community might be less than enthusiastic about embracing this argument, and like many of their straight peers could also find considerable appeal in gaining the right to control the investment of a greater share of their retirement funds.

The Task Force also notes that with a lower frequency of child-rearing, gay and lesbian Americans might also find themselves more dependent than straight parents on institutional living arrangements when independent housekeeping

becomes unmanageable. Given strong evidence the Task Force documented about the indifference and even hostility of institutional retirement housing toward gay and lesbian residents, aging members of the LGBT community might be particularly alert to the risk that their Social Security money might not afford them the greatest degree of choice available in their very old age.

Other LGBT groups, most notably the Log Cabin Republicans, have given support to the president's plan, in part based on a philosophical predisposition toward free market solutions and also premised on the hope that a thorough-going reform of Social Security might invite the chance that the program's spousal benefits might be opened up to gay and lesbian couples—or at least that a surviving partner could inherit funds from the deceased's private account.

It is worth having a debate about these issues in the community, and the LCR would do well to analyze the Task Force report and offer its assessment. In any event, as the Task Force makes clear, discussions about the equity of Social Security vis-à-vis gay and lesbian couples also can and should be engaged separately from any discussion of privatization.

For those interested in learning more about the Task Force findings, visit the group's homepage at thetaskforce.org and click on "Selling Us Short" under Features at the top right.

NEW ENGLAND'S LARGEST GAY & LESBIAN NEWSPAPER



Issue: 8/11/05

NGLTF says social security private accounts dangerous to LGBT community

By Ethan Jacobs

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) released a report Aug. 9 arguing that President Bush's efforts to divert a portion of Social Security taxes into private investment accounts would disproportionately harm the LGBT community. The report argues that the president's Social Security reform efforts would decrease benefits to all retirees and that LGBT rely on those benefits to a greater degree than their straight peers.

"In developing this study we found that privatization is a raw deal for all Americans and in particular for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans," said the study's principal author, Mandy Hu. She said LGBT people are less likely to have children and more likely to depend on public programs in their old age than their straight peers. Hu also cited studies showing that gay men earn less than their straight peers and that lesbian couples earn less than straight couples; and she said same-sex couples face the additional burden of paying taxes on benefits like spousal health insurance that straight married couples get tax free. All of these factors, said Hu, mean that any cut in benefits paid out by Social Security are particularly harmful to LGBT people.

Prior to this report the most vocal voice among the LGBT organizations on Social Security had been Log Cabin Republicans, which supports a privatization plan introduced in Congress by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Sen. John Sununu (R-NH). Log Cabin partnered with Americans for Tax Reform, the organization led by prominent conservative strategist Grover Norquist, and 12 other conservative groups to lobby Congress in favor of the plan last March. According to Log Cabin, the plan would allow LGBT people to pass on the benefits in their privatized accounts to same-sex partners, which is not permitted under the current system.

In the months since Log Cabin's advocacy on this issue, Bush's efforts to push for privatization seem to have lost steam in Congress and with the general public, but NGLTF said it expects him to begin the push anew this fall. Hu said Bush's statements about what sort of plan he would support are sufficiently vague, that same-sex couples should not assume his plan will allow them to pass on benefits to each other. She also argued that regardless of what he chooses, it will result in a benefit cut.

"This doesn't need to come at the cost of all Americans, and there's no point in sharing from the larger... pie if the pie is going to be smaller for everyone," said Hu.

Log Cabin Political Director Christopher Barron disputed her findings, arguing that privatization was the only option that would guarantee Social Security's solvency. He also said the Ryan-Sununu plan, as well as other plans being batted around by conservatives, would allow LGBT to choose their partners as beneficiaries.

"The Ryan-Sununu plan specially has no restrictions on beneficiaries," said Barron. "We think that's a good thing, and we think that's the essence of personal savings accounts."

Ethan Jacobs is a staff writer at Bay Windows. His e-mail address is ejacobs@baywindows.com.

Comments, criticism or praise regarding this article or writer -- or just about any other subject of interest to the lesbian and gay community -- are always welcome.



August 9, 2005

Report: Social Security plan hurts gay elders Larry Buhl, PlanetOut Network

President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security, by letting workers put up to one-third of their benefits in private accounts similar to IRAs, would disproportionately hurt LGBT seniors, according to a report released Tuesday.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) report, entitled "Selling Us Short," showed that gay and lesbian seniors would be at risk to any form of Social Security privatization for three primary reasons:

Gays and lesbians have lower incomes than their heterosexual counterparts, which translates into lower Social Security benefits when they retire.

Same-sex couples are not eligible for Social Security's spousal and survivor benefits provisions.

Gays and lesbians are less likely to raise children who can support them in their later years, and are more likely to be alone.

These factors combined make LGBT seniors particularly reliant on Social Security and disproportionately vulnerable to the benefit cuts and the risks incurred by privatization, according to Sean Cahill, director of the Task Force's Policy Institute, which published the study.

"There is a widespread myth that gays and lesbians are well off, but the 2000 U.S. Census report shows the opposite," he said.

Cahill pointed to figures that show gay and bisexual men earn anywhere from 13 percent to 32 percent less than heterosexual men. Figures also show that, while single lesbians earn about the same as single heterosexual women, lesbian couples earn far less than heterosexual married couples.

"If we earn less, we receive a lower Social Security payment in retirement. Any proposals that cut retirement benefits will disproportionately hurt gay people," Cahill said.

The report puts the blame for economic disparity squarely on discriminatory government policies such as the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which creates an economic disadvantage for same-sex couples and increases the need to maintain the safety net Social Security is intended to provide.

"Even though LGBT Americans pay into the Social Security system at the same rate as everyone else, our families and children receive fewer benefits, often in times of crisis," said Mandy Hu, author of the report. "If Social Security is to be changed, it should be changed so that all families are treated fairly."

Although President Bush has taken a break from his assertive promotion of Social Security privatization, it remains a key priority of the administration. And Republican lawmakers have vowed to revisit the issue on Capitol Hill this fall.

Gay and lesbian senior citizens are estimated to number up to 8 million by 2030.

The idea that those elders would be hurt by the president's proposal, however, is disputed by Log Cabin Republicans, the only national LGBT group to favor Social Security privatization. Standing by their endorsement of a privatization proposal by Sen. John Sununu and Rep. Paul Ryan, the LCR believes that privatization would not only shore up Social Security but would also provide gay and lesbian seniors with benefits they can't get now.

Personal savings accounts would help achieve equality by letting gay or lesbian partners leave part of their savings to their partners, which they cannot do under today's Social Security rules," LCR spokesman Chris Barron told the PlanetOut Network.

NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman told PlanetOut that he "respectfully disagrees" with LCR's assertion that carving out private accounts would bring economic equality to gays and lesbians.

"Marriage equality -- which the Bush administration vehemently opposes -- would guarantee all Social Security benefits to all same-sex couples," he said. "We are unwilling to trade illusory benefits against the benefits and rights of other Americans."

Foreman added that there are no assurances that, under the new system, benefits would go to a designee tax-free, as they do to a spouse.

The one thing all LGBT groups and lawmakers agree on is the lack of specifics in the president's current proposal. And the proposal has been met with skepticism from a majority of the public, regardless of sexual orientation. In the most recent Associated Press/Ipsos poll, only 33 percent approve of how Bush is handling the Social Security issue.

"The data show that under any scenario you use, people are going to get more money from the current system than risking any of it in the [stock] market," Foreman said. "Fundamentally privatization is bad for gay people and straight people alike."

Report: Social Security Privatization Would Disproportionately Harm Gays

by Paul Johnson 365Gay.com Washington Bureau Chief

Posted: August 9, 2005 5:00 pm ET

(Washington) A report released Tuesday shows that LGBT Americans would be disproportionately affected by the President's plan to privatize Social Security.

The report, prepared for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, found that LGBT Americans, on average, have lower incomes than their heterosexual counterparts, which translates into lower Social Security benefits when they retire.

In addition, same-sex couples are not eligible for Social Security's spousal and survivor benefits provisions, making the LGBT community disproportionately vulnerable to the benefit cuts and risks inherent to the president's plan.

"There is a widespread myth that gay people are economically advantaged compared to heterosexuals. U.S. Census data and other national surveys indicate the opposite. In fact, gay and bisexual men earn anywhere from 13 percent to 32 percent less than heterosexual men," said Sean Cahill, director of the Task Force's Policy Institute.

"If we earn less, we receive a lower Social Security payment in retirement. Any proposals that cut retirement benefits will disproportionately hurt gay people."

The study, titled "Selling Us Short" also finds that LGBT people of color, in particular, face an income disadvantage that leads to lower Social Security benefits. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, black same-sex couples earn roughly \$2,000 to \$9,000 less in median annual household income than black married opposite-sex couples, and Hispanic same-sex couples earn roughly \$1,000 to \$4,000 less in median annual household income than Hispanic married opposite-sex couples.

Government policies, meanwhile, place all gay people in an even more economically disadvantaged position, increasing the critical need to maintain the economic safety net Social Security is intended to provide.

"Gay people have to report domestic partner health insurance as income to the IRS, but married spouses don't have to report their health coverage as income," said Cahill in a conference call with reporters on Wednesday.

"Gay people can't inherit their partner's pension plan, while a heterosexual widow or widower can be a beneficiary. Not only do we earn less, we are less able to keep what we earn. These are among the many inequities that make same-sex couples particularly vulnerable to cutbacks in Social Security benefits."

Mandy Hu, the author of the report, noted that: "The federal Defense of Marriage Act continues to deny same-sex couples access to more than 1,000 federal benefits and protections of marriage that opposite-sex married couples currently receive, including Social Security spousal and survivor benefits. Even though LGBT Americans pay in to the Social Security system at the same rate as everyone else, our families and children receive fewer benefits, often in times of crisis. If Social Security is to be changed, it should be changed so that all families are treated fairly."

The report also said that LGBT people are more likely to age alone and less likely to have children than their heterosexual counterparts.

"This, coupled with a lower rate of earning makes them particularly reliant on Social Security," said Amber Hollibaugh, the NGLTF specialist on aging

By 2030, the estimated population of LGBT seniors will range from two to eight million. LGBT elders may be especially dependent on public services for the elderly, including Social Security, because they may be without the same family support systems as heterosexual seniors.

Bush's Social Security proposal is stalled in Congress. It faces widespread opposition from Democrats who object to Bush's plan to divert a portion of Social Security tax revenues to set up private investment accounts for workers under the age of 55.

While congressional Republicans have expressed doubts about getting Social Security legislation approved, Treasury Secretary John Snow said Monday, "I remain optimistic that we will get something done there. ... I think in the fall you will see us heavily engaged on the Social Security issue."

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