



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

August 27 to September 14, 2005

Roberta Sklar, Director of Communications

Quote of the Week:

Windy City Times: On Rehnquist

First out of the gate was the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Executive Director Matt Foreman expressed condolences to the [Rehnquist] family, but then went for the gut, “Chief Justice Rehnquist’s record has been consistent—consistently reactionary and consistently hostile to individual freedoms and equal justice, across the board. His record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights has been beyond regrettable; it has been dismal.”

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Windy City Times

REHNQUIST DEAD, ROBERTS TAPPED

by Bob Roehr
2005-09-07

William H. Rehnquist, the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, succumbed to thyroid cancer on Sept. 3 at the age of 80. He had served on the Court for 33 years, first as a Justice and then as Chief Justice. It was one of the longest tenures in the Court's history.

President George W. Bush wasted no time in announcing Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts as the successor to Rehnquist, on the morning of Sept. 5. Twenty-five years ago Roberts served as a law clerk to the elder jurist.

Rehnquist was a conservative and he certainly helped to move the Court in that direction, but there was no wholesale rolling back of precedents with which he disagreed. His greatest influence on jurisprudence was in the areas of restricting the power of Congress to enact legislation and the immunity of state governments from federal law.

Despite his long tenure, his name was associated with few groundbreaking precedents, in fact, he often was in the minority on the most noteworthy cases decided over those years. His strongest legacy is his commitment to the courts as an institution and his efforts to strengthen their administration.

The GLBT community had little reason to mourn his passing as Rehnquist's vote consistently fell in opposition to equal treatment of gays under the law. He joined with the majority in the 1986 Hardwick decision that endorsed the state of Georgia's right to enact and enforce antigay sodomy laws.

He was in the dissenting minority when the Court saw fit to protect gay Americans in the Romer case by striking down Colorado's Amendment 2, in 1996, and when it overturned Hardwick with the Lawrence decision in 2003.

And yet, while he had ample opportunity to pen either the majority decision or a dissent on these cases, Rehnquist chose not to do so, leaving that task to others. It suggests that antigay animus was not a driving factor in his life.

The late Chief Justice's body lay in repose for public viewing at the Court on Tuesday. Burial at Arlington National Cemetery, beside his wife Natalie who died of cancer in 1991, is scheduled for Wednesday.

The ambivalence over Rehnquist was reflected in the response of the national GLBT organizations. While his death did occur over a holiday weekend, none of those organizations issued releases on his passing until two days after it was announced.

First out of the gate was the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Executive Director Matt Foreman expressed condolences to the family, but then went for the gut, "Chief Justice Rehnquist's record has been consistent—consistently reactionary and

consistently hostile to individual freedoms and equal justice, across the board. His record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights has been beyond regrettable; it has been dismal.”

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-NY, a member of the Judiciary Committee who voted against Roberts' confirmation to the D.C. circuit Court of Appeals two years ago, called for the Committee to delay the confirmation hearing on Roberts "to mourn Justice Rehnquist," when he appeared on a Sunday talk show.

But with the announcement that Roberts is being put forward to succeed Rehnquist, there is little likelihood that those hearings will be delayed more than a few days, though that is still in flux. The most likely scenario at this writing is that the Wednesday hearing will be postponed or abbreviated so that Senators can attend Rehnquist's burial.

Most political observers believed that Roberts was virtually assured of confirmation to the Court. His nomination to be Chief Justice has, if anything, enhanced those odds. He will be succeeding one of the most conservative members of the Court, not Sandra Day O'Connor, who has been more of a swing vote on issues of concern to liberals.

Those who have opposed Roberts' confirmation often have tried to frame it as a "replacement" for O'Connor. Now they will be deprived of that rhetoric.

O'Connor is likely to be sitting on the bench when the Court convenes for its new session on the first Monday in October. In a clause in her very brief letter of resignation, which was little noted at the time, she said it becomes effective "upon the nomination and confirmation of my successor."

Speculation is rife as to who the President will nominate to the Court. It centers around the same names raised earlier this year, though there is a heightened sense that the nominee will not be another white male.

Whoever is nominated, the investigation and confirmation process will take several months. The earliest that a successor Justice is likely to be sworn in is for the second half of the session, which begins in January. Controversy over a nominee could push that back farther.



September 4, 2005 Sunday

SECTION: INTERNATIONAL NEWS

DISTRIBUTION: Europe; Britain; Scandinavia; Middle East; Africa; India; Asia; England

Despite political solidarity, gender gap persists between lesbians and gay men

BYLINE: DAVID CRARY; AP National Writer

DATELINE: SAN FRANCISCO

BODY:

Although they campaign arm-in-arm for gay rights, lesbians and gay men don't always march in step. With bemusement and at times frustration, they acknowledge a lingering gender gap in how they live, socialize and perceive each other.

The two groups each grapple with real differences, and with stereotypes of themselves and the other sex: that gay men are the party-goers, flashy and promiscuous; that lesbians are the relatively dull homebodies - "soccer moms," in the words of one activist.

In San Francisco and New York, nightclubs in the main gay districts tend to be virtually all-male, while many lesbians have settled in quieter, less expensive neighborhoods. Some lesbians question whether gay men, whom they supported fervently during the peak of the AIDS crisis, are reciprocating now with appropriate empathy for lesbian health problems.

"It never ceases to amaze me how much sexism there is among gay men, given that they're the main victims of sexism," said Kate Kendell, executive director of the San Francisco-based National Center for Lesbian Rights.

National gay rights leaders - men and women - say the gender gap has narrowed dramatically from the 1960s and '70s, when lesbian feminists openly rebelled at what they considered to be patronizing male domination of the movement. Now, political solidarity is strong, but other differences remain.

In Chicago, for example, a gay men's group at the Broadway United Methodist Church recently invited two lesbians to one of its weekly meetings to discuss gender issues. The men and women each brought along a list of stereotypes they subscribed to - for example, that lesbians craved to be phys-ed coaches, and gay men to be interior decorators - and found the discussion refreshing.

"It felt so novel and unique," said Cathy Knight, one of the participants. "It's stuff you'd think we could talk about, but we don't."

The group leader, librarian Arlie Sims, said he gained insight about how lesbians view gay men. "It's not hard to see the ways in which being a white male carries with it privilege - even if you're a gay white male," he said. "There's a sense that everything is about the boys."

Knight suggested that even if some stereotypes are accurate, they shouldn't serve to divide a community that needs unity.

"More lesbians are coupled, homebodies, they don't go to bars as much, and men are more sexually active," she said. "My response is, 'So what?' If that's what they choose, it doesn't have anything to do with having less moral values. It's about expressing yourself."

Evidence suggests that lesbians are indeed more drawn to monogamy than gay men - two-thirds of the same-sex couples who have married in Massachusetts or entered civil unions in Vermont are women. But prominent lesbians balk at using such statistics to question the multi-partner dating preferences of many gay men.

"I don't have any judgment about how they order their lives," Kendell said. "Lifestyle choices that are damaging and self-destructive - that's the problem, not gay men having more partners."

While gay men, as a group, have a higher incidence of drug abuse and sexually transmitted disease, activist Cheryl Jacques said lesbians shouldn't generalize or view the men as impeding political progress.

"I've met too many monogamous male couples and promiscuous, drug-using women I wouldn't want around my children," she said.

Jacques - former president of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest national gay-rights group - said she has met numerous activists who distrust the other gender.

"One of the best messages you can convey as a leader, is, 'Hey, the enemy is over there,'" Jacques said. "We are a family. We may have differences within our four walls. But we all share the enemy that wants to strip us of our common humanity."

Never was the common bond more evident than in the worst of the AIDS crisis in 1980s, when lesbians doubled as caregivers and lobbyists on behalf of stricken gay men who were not getting all-out support from the political and health establishments.

"It was as if we were siblings, and you found out your brother is gravely ill and your parents pay no attention," Kendell said. "It was a life or death situation, and whatever the social differences were became totally irrelevant."

The National Center for Lesbian Rights is a rarity among major gay-rights groups in retaining a gender-specific name, even though it advocates on behalf of men, too, in pushing for same-sex marriage and other goals.

"That part of our name conveys a feminist philosophy and recognizes that sexism is the universal oppressor - of gay men as well as lesbians," Kendell said.

At times, the discussion of gender can be lighthearted. Kendell, for example, joked that lesbians "don't have a social life - it's just being soccer moms."

Paris Poirier, a lesbian filmmaker from Santa Monica, California, tackled gender stereotypes with a mostly light touch in a 1997 documentary, "Pride Divide" - interviewing dozens of gay men and lesbians about differences in dating habits, humor, tastes in pornography. Among the stereotypes debated: that gay men were more witty in their conversation, more predatory in their sex lives, less serious in their relationships.

"I don't think lesbians are as whiny as they used to be," Poirier said in an interview. "There's a lot more freedom to talk about gender issues."

Shum Preston, a political consultant in San Francisco, said he and his partner of 13 years have been thrust into lesbian culture since they became co-parents of children with two lesbian couples.

"The friendship structure seems a lot stronger than in the gay male community," he said. "We're the longest surviving male couple I know, but in the lesbian culture we're just two more peas in the pod."

Bevan Dufty, who represents the heavily gay Castro district on San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, said the boom in gay parenting is forging a powerful new bond between lesbians and gay men raising children as they share advice and lobby for family-oriented services.

But the Castro's nightlife remains male-dominated, Dufty said, and the lesbians and gay men in his coed track club often divide by gender when dispersing for lunch after running together.

"I've had women say they don't feel welcome in parts of the community," Dufty said.

Matt Foreman, New York-based executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said the degree of interaction between lesbians and gay men varies by locality.

"Where there's not much interaction, the stereotypes, the jokes and the myths persist," he said. "I've been to places like Topeka, Kansas, where gay men and lesbians socialize together and have a good time, while in New York - with the exception of some political and charitable events - there's virtually no interaction."

Foreman also said gay-rights groups should place more focus on breast cancer and other women's health issues.

"I understand the frustrations of lesbians," he said. "They did so much to respond to the AIDS crisis and don't see a lot of reciprocity."

Amber Hollibaugh, senior strategist with Foreman's task force, said the gay community should strive for candor in addressing gender issues.

"We need to talk about this, and not think it's dangerous," she said. "There are real differences. ... and a lot of times, in order to achieve solidarity, people try to hide them."

LOAD-DATE: September 5, 2005



Schwarzenegger's Promised Gay Marriage Veto Gets Lukewarm Response

Sunday, September 11, 2005

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

FOX NEWS

WASHINGTON — California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has promised to veto a bill by the Assembly that would permit gay marriage because he says it goes against the will of the state's people.

But some groups aren't happy to hear that while many Republicans have been arguing that justices around the country have been engaging in judicial activism as they interpret the Constitution in ways that allow gay marriage, the governor prefers that the courts handle the issue.

"It's not an issue for the courts — he's inviting judicial activism and that's what we're opposed to," said Rich Ackerman, spokesman for the Pro-Family Legal Center, which is fighting gay marriage efforts in California.

"I've never heard of any Republican who's actually looking to the courts to decide," said Peter LaBarbera, head of Protect Marriage Illinois, which is trying to get a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage in Illinois. He said he was disappointed with Schwarzenegger's comments. "That's sort of a naïve view, or just passing the buck," he added.

When the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled in 2003 that the state constitution permits **same-sex marriage**, opponents lamented that the court, not the Legislature, was able to decide the issue for Massachusetts residents. It was this ruling that led some conservatives to charge that courts have become too activist and socially liberal for the good of the country.

Some see Schwarzenegger's position as ironic.

"Now Governor Schwarzenegger is complaining and saying that the issue of same-sex marriage should be settled by the courts and not by legislation," said Roberta Sklar, spokeswoman for the [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#). **"The reality is, political games are being played with peoples' lives."**

In 2000, California voters approved by 61 percent [Proposition 22](#), which created a state statute that recognizes marriage as only between a man and a woman. The statute is now being debated in California's lower courts.

Margita Thompson, Schwarzenegger's spokeswoman, has said that the governor views Proposition 22 as the will of the people, and believes that the courts need to settle that issue without the Legislature's intervention. On Wednesday, his office officially announced that he would veto the pro-gay marriage bill passed by the Assembly on Tuesday.

"We cannot have a system where the people vote and the Legislature derails that vote," said Thompson, who added that the governor is a strong supporter of California's current domestic partnership protections. "Out of respect for the will of the people, the governor will veto."

In an earlier statement, Thompson said Proposition 22 was approved, went to the courts, "and the governor believes that is where it should be decided. It's an issue for the people and the courts."

Randy Thomasson, president of the [Campaign for Children and Families](#), which is heading an effort to get a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages on the California state ballot in 2006, said the governor was "half right" in his comments.

It should be left up to the people, "it should not be left up to the courts," said Thomasson, who added that since a majority of Californians passed Proposition 22, they will pass a constitutional amendment, too.

"I believe so because Californians are fed up with politicians and judges attacking their wishes, attacking their vote," he said.

Bill Whalen, a Hoover Institution scholar and former advisor to California Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, noted that this issue will likely end up in the courts.

Letting the courts decide "is not the sort of language the activists might like, but the governor is not the end game here, the ballot initiative is," he said.

"If it [constitutional amendment] passes, yeah, it will go into court in two seconds," Whalen added.

Meanwhile, gay marriage advocates are disappointed with Schwarzenegger's promise to veto what they say is the first legislative victory for gay marriage the history of the country. The Vermont and Connecticut state legislatures passed **civil union** ([search](#)), not marriage, laws in 2000 and 2005, respectively.

"He decided to side with the cynical view of politics instead of the right side of history," said Brad Luna, spokesman for the [Human Rights Campaign](#).

Currently, 18 states have constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriages, and several more are poised to bring such amendments to their voters in 2005 and 2006. So far, a federal marriage amendment has failed to get off the ground, but many believe the gay marriage question will eventually land in the lap of the U.S Supreme Court, which makes the urgency surrounding the two current vacancies on that court more dramatic.

"The disaster would be a national, **Roe v. Wade** ([search](#)) decision on this issue," said LaBarbera, referring to the 1973 U.S Supreme Court ruling that made abortion legal despite state bans on the procedure.

Getting a more conservative court would be advantageous to those who opposes gay marriage, Whalen said. If the case were to decide whether states had the right to ban or allow gay marriages or civil unions, a more conservative court might choose not to review it, citing states' rights, he added.

"There are surprises that occur, and it would depend on how the case is presented before the court," said Whalen, noting that one must consider the individual justice and his or her views, as well as the issue.

However, groups on both sides are already getting involved in the nomination of **John Roberts** ([search](#)) to be chief justice of the U.S Supreme Court.

"Judge Roberts as chief justice threatens decades of a federal court system tipped against equality," Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in a recent statement.

Gay-rights groups believe conservatives will not see gay marriage as a federal civil rights issue.

Conservatives and opponents of gay marriage, on the other hand — underscoring their desires to see such issues stay out of the courts — believe Roberts to be a strict constructionist who will take a federalist, states' rights position when needed.

"Our children and grandchildren will be impacted for good if the president appoints constitutionalists to the court who respect the Constitution and our legal system," the [Traditional Values Coalition](#), which is battling gay marriage in the states, said in a statement when Roberts was first nominated in July. "We will no longer be dominated by a liberal 5-4 majority on the court who impose their own political views on all of us."

NATIONAL NEWS | washingtonblade.com

Gay groups deny 'grand plan' to derail Roberts Opposition based on principle, not 'liberal' strategy, officials say

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.
Sep. 02, 2005

The four national gay rights organizations that announced their opposition last week to the nomination of Judge John G. Roberts Jr. to the United States Supreme Court will urge the Senate to reject Roberts on grounds that he would work against rights for minorities, including gays, spokespersons for the groups said.

Officials with the Human Rights Campaign, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays dispute claims by Roberts' supporters that they timed their announcement last week to help liberal "special interest groups" create an illusion that momentum was building against Roberts.

"We are aware that a number of groups are looking at when to take a stand on this," said Ron Schlittler, PFLAG's deputy executive director. "But we don't have this grand, national plan on which shoes are going to drop first."

Eldie Acheson, director of public policy and governmental affairs for NGLTF, said the group has been part of a coalition of gay and non-gay civil rights organizations that have conferred over the Roberts nomination. But Acheson said each of the groups within the coalition has made an independent decision on how to respond to the nomination, with some coming out against Roberts while others have chosen not to take a position.

"There was no coordination from a movement sense," she said.

Stonewall Dems oppose Roberts

In a related development, the National Stonewall Democrats, which represents 90 gay Democratic Party clubs throughout the nation, voted to oppose the Roberts nomination at its national convention in San Diego last weekend, according to Eric Stern, the group's executive director.

As with the other four groups, Stern said the Stonewall Democrats' opposition to Roberts is based on the nominee's writings in the 1980s, when he worked as a legal adviser in the Reagan administration. Among other positions, Roberts at that time expressed strong opposition to the concept of constitutional rights to privacy, equal protection and due process.

Democratic Party leaders, including Democratic senators, reportedly are divided over the Roberts nomination, in part because Roberts has not publicly articulated his views on many of the important issues likely to come before the Supreme Court since his Reagan administration days, when he was in his 20s.

His record as a highly successful attorney in private practice for nearly 20 years, and his role as a federal appeals court judge in D.C. for the past two years, has prompted the American Bar Association to rate him as qualified to serve on the Supreme Court.

This has discouraged some senators to come out against him solely on ideological grounds, or because the Bush White House has refused to release documents showing Roberts' position on key legal issues during Roberts' tenure in the Justice Department under President George H. W. Bush.

During the period of the Reagan administration's first term, Roberts expressed opposition to the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, known as *Roe vs. Wade*, a development that has prompted women's rights groups to take a lead role in opposing his nomination. Others have noted that Roberts has since stated he would not challenge what he called "settled law," which some legal observers interpret as a sign that Roberts might not vote to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*.

Early Roberts memos cited

The gay rights groups opposing him have cited his 1980s era statements deriding the high court's previous rulings — including *Roe vs. Wade* — that expanded the concept of a constitutional right to privacy. The Supreme Court cited the earlier privacy decisions in its landmark 2003 decision in *Lawrence vs. Texas*, which overturned state sodomy laws.

"HRC opposes John Roberts' nomination based on a rigorous review of his record," said Christopher Labonte, HRC's legislative director. "We will ask the Senate to vote no on his nomination unless something drastic surfaces in his confirmation hearings."

Labonte was referring to hearings on the Roberts nomination by the Senate Judiciary Committee set to begin Sept. 6.

Some Democratic Party leaders have expressed concern that coming out against Roberts before the hearings could subject Democratic senators to criticism that they are not giving Roberts a fair chance to defend his record. Coming across to voters as "knee-jerk" opponents to any nominee put forward by President Bush could hurt the re-election chances of some Senate Democrats, party strategists have said.

Political pundits have speculated that the timing of the gay groups' announcement of their opposition to Roberts last week could be part of a concerted effort by liberal, progressive groups to pressure Senate Democrats against "caving in" on the Roberts nomination.

The liberal advocacy group People for the American Way announced its opposition to Roberts one day before the four gay groups issued their announcement. Another liberal-progressive advocacy group, the Alliance for Justice, announced its opposition to Roberts this week.

No reason to 'hold fire'

Officials with HRC, NGLTF, PFLAG, and the National Center for Lesbian Rights said they have participated in strategy sessions with various liberal-progressive groups, such as People for the American Way, the Alliance for Justice, and the National Organization for Women. NOW was among the first women's rights groups to opposition the Roberts nomination.

"It was a matter of coordinating with other groups so we would not appear to be stepping on peoples' toes," said Kate Kendell, executive director of NCLR. "I was told there were some conversations with other groups to make sure the timing was best," Kendell said.

Acheson said NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman approached a number of national gay groups with the proposal that they issue a joint statement opposing Roberts. After the three other gay groups agreed to join NGLTF in announcing their opposition to Roberts, Foreman contacted some of the non-gay groups to make sure the gay groups' announcement would not occur on the same day as a similar announcement by other groups, Acheson said.

Acheson and Kendell said the interaction with the non-gay groups did not play a role in the decision by the gay groups to oppose Roberts' nomination.

Kendell said NCLR disagrees with the suggestion by some Democratic Party leaders that Roberts' opponents should "hold their fire" for the next Bush Supreme Court nominee rather than expend their political capital in trying to defeat Roberts, who is expected to win Senate approval. The next nominee is likely to be far worse than Roberts, some party strategists have argued.

"If we remain silent because we feel Roberts is not the worst nominee we will get, that would be irresponsible," she said.

"If we feel a nominee does not share the values of broad civil rights protections and holds a very cramped view of the role of the Supreme Court, then we do our community a disservice by not making our views known," Kendell said.

Labonte said HRC is calling on Senate Democrats to ask Roberts detailed questions about his judicial philosophy on issues related to gay civil rights — especially issues related to constitutional privacy rights and due process rights.

He said HRC has yet to decide whether it will use senators' votes on the Roberts nomination to calculate its ratings of members of Congress for the 2006 elections. Labonte said HRC will submit written testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee articulating its reasons for opposing the Roberts nomination.

"We are part of a coalition of organizations that is working on judicial nominations," Labonte said, adding that the coalition consists of gay and non-gay groups. "The timing of this was based on our review of [Roberts'] record. When we looked at the evidence, our board decided that this was the time."

Acheson said NGLTF has conducted various forums and town hall meetings throughout the country to inform its constituents about Roberts' record prior to the group's decision to oppose his nomination. She said the Task Force would continue these activities, with the added role of encouraging its members and supporters to ask their senators to vote against the Roberts nomination.



Retirement homes for homosexuals more popular and needed

Thursday, September 1, 2005

By Rona Marech

San Francisco Chronicle

Virginia shares iced tea with neighbors at her low-income senior housing complex just outside Sonoma, Calif. Residents admire each other's roses or chat on their patios during the summer. But the socializing only goes so far. Virginia has not told a soul that she's a lesbian - and she doesn't plan to.

"I only came out in my 50s. I was fairly open and out. Now I'll be 75 in February, and I find myself going back in again, which is a little distressing," she said.

Even in the San Francisco Bay Area - one of the country's most liberal regions - gay, lesbian and transgender seniors frequently express similar worries about whether they will be able to age with dignity in a housing community that's respectful of their pasts, partners and stories.

Those concerns have long fueled dreams of building some place where the gay community could peacefully grow old. Now, after decades of snubs and false starts, the need and the market have happily collided, and gay elder communities have quietly begun to spring up internationally and around the country, in states from Florida to Arizona and beyond.

"The field is reaching a critical mass," said Gerard Koskovich of the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network, a constituent group of the American Society on Aging. "There's been more sophisticated market research and probably just a change in attitude."

He counted at least four gay senior developments in the United States, three more that are under construction and 18 others that are in some state of pre-development. The housing in question runs the gamut from glitzy "resort retirement communities" for active seniors to mobile home parks to nonprofit outfits that offer affordable housing and health services.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates - very roughly - that there are more than 3 million gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans over 65, a figure that they say will grow by a million in the next 25 years.

The boom is partly explained by a maturation in the community, said Marcy Adelman, a psychiatrist who has studied aging in the gay population.

"We were a young community," she said. "We weren't thinking of ourselves as intergenerational."

To demonstrate the need for gay senior housing in the Bay Area, Adelman and Brian DeVries, a professor at San Francisco State University, conducted a study of 1,300 gay seniors. The results show that gays and their straight counterparts have similar average retirement incomes: 42 percent of study participants 60 or older had annual incomes less than \$39,000; 19 percent had less than \$26,000.

Gays and lesbians are more likely to be childless and single and to live alone than heterosexuals, the study also found, factors that increase their vulnerability as they age.

Some facilities do not allow same-sex couples to live together, and even when such arrangements are permitted, many gay couples worry they will be mistreated by staff and peers if they openly acknowledge their relationships.

Though gay acceptance is rising and baby boomers are more likely to be openly gay in old age, the desire for gay senior housing won't disappear, Adelman said. Seniors tend to cluster with like-minded people - most senior housing in this country is faith-based - and gay men and lesbians are no different, she said.

Even if all of the many projects that are under way are completed, they can accommodate only a tiny fraction of the gay senior population. The larger if less glamorous issue is how to make all senior facilities sensitive to their gay residents.

In the meantime, gay seniors tap their feet expectantly and the waiting lists grow ever longer - in some cases before the first shovel hits the ground.



Rehnquist leaves behind anti-gay legacy

Bush nominates John G. Roberts as new Chief Justice

By Lisa Keen

Originally printed 9/8/2005 (Issue 1336 - Between The Lines News)

WASHINGTON - No justice has voted against the interests of gays more times than Chief Justice William Rehnquist. And yet, under no Chief Justice have gays seen more significant gains than Rehnquist. The paradox was a product of the length and timing of his tenure on the U.S. Supreme Court. Rehnquist's 33 years on the court began less than three years after the Stonewall Rebellion and ended Saturday night when Rehnquist died at his home in northern Virginia after a long struggle against cancer.

Rehnquist was beloved by conservatives and those who seek a fundamentalist interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, yet Rehnquist found implicit rights to justify rulings that enabled discrimination based on sexual orientation. What Rehnquist did not do, however, was to give voice - as some justices have - to any personal dislike he may have harbored against gay people. His darts against gay people were constructed strictly from points of law.

With the passing of Rehnquist, President Bush moved swiftly to nominate a former Rehnquist clerk, federal appeals court Judge John G. Roberts Jr., to take his place as chief justice.

Bush originally nominated Roberts in July to replace retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor; but, at 8 a.m. on Monday, he announced that he was withdrawing Roberts' nomination to that position and submitting it instead for the office of chief justice. O'Connor agreed later that morning to stay on the bench until the president can have another nominee confirmed to take her place. Thus, when the Supreme Court opens its 2005-06 session on Oct. 3, it is likely to be sporting but one change: at the top.

Given that Roberts' conservative leanings will be replacing those of Rehnquist, the makeup of the court will be essentially the same for at least the first few weeks of the next session. However, by the time the first gay-related case is argued - in November, concerning federal funding for universities that bar military recruiters - it will likely teeter heavily upon a sole swing vote: that of Justice Anthony Kennedy. But while Roberts will, no doubt, anchor the conservative wing of the high court, it is unlikely he will amass a record of voting against equal rights for gays that could rival that of Rehnquist.

After being nominated to the Supreme Court by President Richard Nixon, Rehnquist took his seat in January 1972, less than three years after the volatile riots in Greenwich Village inspired a surge in the gay movement's drive toward equal rights.

Rehnquist was almost certainly voting with the majority on the court when it refused to hear several gay-related cases between 1972 and 1977, but his first discernible vote against gays came in 1977. In *Singer v. U.S. Civil Service Commission*, Rehnquist and two other justices dissented from the Supreme Court majority's decision to vacate a ruling against a gay man, John Singer. Singer had been employed - as irony would have it - by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Seattle, when he was fired for having "flaunted his homosexuality." He kissed a man outside his office, married his lover (though the marriage was not legally recognized), and dressed in a manner which suggested he was gay. Singer

sued, and the Supreme Court majority vacated the lower court rulings against him, noting that the agency had improperly fired him for "immoral conduct," which was no longer grounds for firing. Rehnquist dissented without comment on that occasion.

The following year, he dissented again, this time from the court's refusal to take an appeal by the University of Missouri, which sought to deny recognition to a gay student group. But this time, Rehnquist wrote a lengthy explanation for his position that the court should have taken the case and, presumably, allowed the university to deny recognition to the group. Rehnquist said the university was simply refusing recognition to a group "whose activities were found to be likely to incite a violation of a valid state criminal statute."

Through the rest of his tenure, he voted against the interests of equal rights for gays every chance he got. That included votes against a gay man seeking immigration in *Longstaff v. INS* in 1984, against a bisexual teacher in *Rowland v. Mad River* in 1985, and against a gay activist harassed by police in *Hill v. Houston* in 1987. He voted twice to uphold laws prohibiting sexual activity between consenting same-sex adults - in 1986 with *Bowers v. Hardwick* and in 2003 with *Lawrence v. Texas*.

In 1986, President Reagan nominated Rehnquist to the Chief Justice position, but the promotion did not elevate his commitment to all Americans, including gays. He voted to allow the U.S. Olympic Committee to bar Gay Games from being called the Gay Olympics, in the 1987 decision *San Francisco Arts & Athletics v. USOC*. He voted to allow St. Patrick's Day parade organizers in Boston to exclude gay contingents, in 1995's *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay Group*. And he voted to allow the Boy Scouts of America to ban gays in 2000's *Boy Scouts v. Dale*.

Sometimes, as with *Hurley*, he was joined by every member of the court. Most times, he was joined by only one or two other justices, such as 1996's *Romer v. Evans* decision striking down laws based on animus to gay people. In that dissent, and many others, Rehnquist was part of a seemingly unbreakable triumvirate with Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas.

In the last gay-related case in which Rehnquist wrote an opinion, he led a 5 to 4 majority decision to allow the Boy Scouts of America to ban gay scouts and leaders. He said a state law in New Jersey which banned discrimination based on sexual orientation violated the Boy Scout organization's First Amendment right of expressive association. He said that the First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion, speech, press, and "peaceably to assemble" includes an "implicit" right "to associate with others in pursuit of a wide variety of political, social, economic, educational, religious, and cultural ends." And in a twist of logic seen more frequently from Scalia, he added that this implied right was "crucial in preventing the majority from imposing its views on groups that would rather express other, perhaps unpopular, ideas." From gay quarters, there was no attempt to gloss over Rehnquist's record in paying respect to his public service.

"Chief Justice Rehnquist's record has been consistent - consistently reactionary and consistently hostile to individual freedoms and equal justice, across the board," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "His record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights has been beyond regrettable; it has been dismal."

NEW ENGLAND'S LARGEST GAY & LESBIAN NEWSPAPER



Issue: 9/1/05

Personal vs. political

By Ethan Jacobs

The ex-gay movement holds its first major conference in Boston Oct. 29, but ex-gays have a longer history in the Bay State.

At many of the most crucial moments in the recent political life of the LGBT community, ex-gays were on hand working with anti-gay activists. In May 2000 when Parents Rights Coalition (PRC) held a press conference at the State House to protest a sexually explicit workshop held at that year's Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conference, Anthony Falzarano, a former Bostonian and a nationally recognized ex-gay activist, spoke in support of PRC. On April 28, 2003 Alan Chambers, executive director of Exodus International, the largest Christian ex-gay referral and information ministry in the world, testified before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary in favor of an amendment to ban same-sex marriage. In October of that year at a Wayland summit to support the amendment Stephen Bennett, who operates an ex-gay ministry out of Huntington, Conn., spoke alongside high profile same-sex marriage opponents such as Catholic Archbishop Sean O'Malley and representatives from the Massachusetts Family Institute (MFI). Later that month when the Judiciary Committee held its first hearing on a same-sex marriage bill, Somerville ex-gay Larry Huston joined MFI in testifying against it.

Brian Camenker, president of PRC and Article 8 Alliance, another anti-gay group, said the ex-gay movement has been invaluable to their cause. "We believe that the ex-gay movement is a very important part of this whole debate," explained Camenker. "It's a lot like the Alcoholics Anonymous movement was at the turn of the 20th century when everyone believed people were born drunk and you couldn't change and the idea of going through this 12-step process to become an ex-drunk was considered ridiculous."

Yet the advocacy efforts of many within the ex-gay movement are often at odds with the image that ex-gay leaders present of their work. The public face of the ex-gay movement is not of a lobbying powerhouse but of a therapeutic movement that provides relief to individuals tormented by their homosexuality. Chambers himself, who will be one of the featured speakers at Love Won Out, October's ex-gay confab, tried to downplay the link between his work as an advocate and his mission as head of an ex-gay ministry. He argued that the ex-gay movement was a voluntary effort, not a coercive movement.

"Noting that some of us are involved in advocacy issues or public policy issues, I think that those two things [ex-gay ministry and advocacy] are very different from each other," said Chambers. "I believe Exodus is here for people who want it, for men and women who want something different from what culture wants to offer them."

Chambers' testimony before the Judiciary in favor of MFI's amendment suggests that the last thing he wants is to offer LGBT people an alternative; calling a vote against the amendment "a bullet fired at the family," he urged lawmakers to support an amendment that would deny same-sex couples the right to any legal recognition of their relationship. To strengthen his (and MFI's) case he drew upon his own perspective as an ex-gay.

"Having grown up with a homosexual orientation, having lived as an openly gay man, I once dreamed of living in a monogamous same-sex marriage relationship," Chambers said. "Today, having experienced

sexual reorientation, now living a heterosexual lifestyle for the past 11 years and enjoying the bonds of heterosexual marriage for over 5 years, I can attest firsthand to the fact that same-sex marriage is not needed. I can also attest to the fact that same-sex marriage is not what those seeking it are ultimately after."

Jason Cianciotto, research director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Policy Institute, said across the country ex-gays are more than allies of anti-gay activists; in many cases they provide opponents of gay rights with their most potent rhetorical ammunition.

"They know that if they can continue to convince Americans that being gay is a choice, they can frame gay and lesbian rights as special rights," said Cianciotto.

Research by NGLTF suggests the ex-gay movement has done its job well. NGLTF conducted election-eve polling last November, just before voters in 11 states passed constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage, and found that the single greatest indicator of support for an amendment was if the voter felt that homosexuality was a choice.

Arline Isaacson, co-chair of the Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Political Caucus, said that ex-gays in general, and Huston in particular, have been effective advocates against same-sex marriage. While she could not say for certain how many votes Huston's testimony and lobbying may have swayed to support MFI's amendment, his personal appeal as a "former homosexual" has had an impact.

"I have to give them credit; Larry Huston, he has been very effective, unfortunately," said Isaacson. "His interactions with legislators have made it harder for us to persuade legislators to see things our way, and that's been a genuine problem."

Yet it would be a mistake to think of the ex-gays as simply a PR tool of anti-gay advocates. While reparative therapy, the cornerstone of most ex-gay ministries and programs, has been discredited by the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association, many within the movement genuinely see it as apolitical and therapeutic.

Ben Perkins, who currently heads AIDS Action Committee's MALE Center, spent five years during the early '90s in reparative therapy groups in the Los Angeles area, including private and group counseling sessions with Joseph Nicolosi, president of the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality and author of several books on reparative therapy. Perkins said the therapists, Nicolosi included, shunned politics.

"When I was involved with it they prided themselves on being apolitical," remembers Perkins. "There were some who were vehemently opposed - most were as far as I know - to doing things that were overtly political."

He said many felt so much shame about being gay that the last thing they wanted was to become ex-homosexual poster children.

Yet over the years things have undoubtedly changed. Nicolosi joins Chambers as one of the featured speakers at Love Won Out, which is sponsored by Focus on the Family, a right-wing Christian organization that has lobbied aggressively against LGBT rights. Love Won Out is the conference coming to Boston in October. Nicolosi also sells his books, CDs, cassettes, and brochures about preventing homosexuality on the retail section of the Focus Web site.

Perkins, who said he has not maintained contact with anyone from the ex-gay world since leaving it behind, said he is not surprised that some of the leading figures in the movement have taken to politics, but he still believes many rank-and-file practitioners probably steer clear of politics.

"I would be surprised if most were oriented toward that activist bent," said Perkins.

The tension between politics and therapy has occasionally boiled over. One year before coming to Boston to denounce the GLSEN conference, Falzarano was fired from his job as national director of Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays (PFOX), allegedly for his criticism of the religious Right's failure to support ex-gays. He held a press conference in Sept. 1999, one month after his firing, where he complained that far right groups used ex-gays as advocacy tools while failing to adequately support their therapeutic work.

At the time he told Bay Windows, "Our complaint is that the religious Right claims it wants to help homosexuals heal, but the entire ex-gay movement has about a \$2 million budget, and we have ministries closing their doors because they can't afford to help because the Right is not putting forth their money."

And even those within the movement with a clear political bent try to downplay their advocacy work. Bennett, who spoke in favor of a constitutional amendment at the aforementioned rally in Wayland, told Bay Windows that he is "not a political activist by any means, but his résumé on his own Web site casts doubt on that statement. The site lists his work as "special issues editor on homosexuality and the 'gay' agenda" for the Christian right American Family Association as well as his speaking engagements on behalf of another conservative right group, Concerned Women for America. He also advertises his services as a talking head for TV and radio programs to advocate the "pro-family view" in debates on LGBT issues.

Bennett said when he spoke in Wayland, he was not advocating for the amendment; he was merely there to offer his personal testimony.

"It was for understanding the truth on the issues revolving around homosexuality because for many people, I guess the big question is, are people born gay and can people change?" said Bennett. He admits his presence was clearly intended to benefit the amendment's proponents, and given his ties to so many opponents of LGBT rights, his claim that he is apolitical seems disingenuous.

PFOX has also claimed political neutrality, although it waged a legal battle against a gay-inclusive sex education curriculum in Montgomery County, Maryland, earlier this year. In May a U.S. District Court judge ruled in PFOX's favor, arguing that the curriculum unfairly discriminated against ex-gays by teaching that it was thought to be impossible to change one's sexual orientation. The parties settled out of court and school officials voted to scrap the old curriculum and create a new one, this time with a member of PFOX on the advisory board that will scrutinize the new curriculum.

"We're not looking at this as a political thing," said PFOX Board President Richard Cohen. "Our perspective is that we want our kids to know the diverse views of homosexuality... People can be gay, people can be ex-gay, period."

Cianciotto and Isaacson argue that the main thrust of ex-gay advocacy is not peaceful coexistence between gays and ex-gays but rather their opposition to LGBT-rights legislation. Isaacson said when Chambers, Huston, Bennett and other ex-gays lobby in the Bay State, they describe homosexuality as a pathology rather than as a valid choice.

"They tend to focus on the negative myths and stereotypes about gay people, that we live profligate lives, that we care only about sex, that we are incapable of bonding in long-term committed relationships, so they try and undermine the image of stability that we know to be the case with so many gay folks," said Isaacson.

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Privatizing Social Security Hurts LGBTs

Washington — According to a new report from the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) Americans will be disproportionately harmed by President Bush's plan to privatize a portion of Social Security accounts. The plan, which has not gotten "political traction" among Americans generally, carves out a percentage of Social Security taxes for each person to invest in the stock market. It relies on estimates of a better than average return, increased deficits, and reduced benefits, the report finds.

Selling Us Short: How Social Security Privatization Will Affect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Americans documents that lgbt Americans, on average, have lower incomes than their heterosexual counterparts, which translates into lower Social Security benefits when we retire. In addition, same-sex couples are not eligible for Social Security's spousal and survivor benefits, 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," said Sean Cahill, director of the Task Force's Policy Institute. "In fact, gay and bisexual men earn anywhere from 13 percent to 32 percent less than heterosexual men."

Selling Us Short 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 and Hispanic same-sex couples earn roughly from \$1,000 to \$9,000 less in median annual household income than black and Hispanic married opposite-sex couples.

"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," explained Cahill. "Not only do we earn less, we are less able to keep what we earn."

Mandy Hu, author of the report, added, "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." Hu Cited the Defense of Marriage Act as the source of discriminatory policies.

Amber Hollibaugh, NGLTF's senior strategist and specialist on lgbt elders, explained that lgbt people "are more likely to age alone and less likely to have children than their heterosexual counterparts." This fact, along with lower earnings, makes us more likely to be in need of Social Security.

Selling Us Short finds that lgbt elders could be negatively affected by privatization. President Bush's privatization plan (now called "personal accounts") was characterized as a "gamble," by NGLTF executive director Matt Foreman. "Social Security privatization is a gamble with the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender elders. It is a gamble our community simply cannot afford."

Volume 75, Number 36 | **September 8 - 14, 2005**

POLITICS



In a matter of weeks, Judge John G. Roberts has risen from a prospective associate justice to the man who could lead the Supreme Court for decades to come.

Gay Groups Step Up Anti-Roberts Efforts

HRC, Task Force troubled that Bush nominee could now lead Supreme Court for decades

By ANDY HUMM

National gay rights organizations, united in their opposition to President George W. Bush's nomination of John G. Roberts to replace Sandra Day O'Connor on the U.S. Supreme Court, have intensified that opposition now that Roberts has been picked to instead replace William Rehnquist and become the 17th chief justice of the United States.

Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said, "Judge Roberts as chief justice threatens decades of a federal court system tipped against equality. By deciding who authors majority opinions, he would be responsible for setting the tone and tenor of the judgments behind some of our nation's greatest debates. He would wield significant authority over the entire federal judiciary."

Solmonese called on Bush to select a "consensus" nominee with the Senate to replace the more moderate O'Connor who has agreed to stay on the court until a replacement is confirmed.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said Roberts "is not suitable for any seat on the court, particularly chief justice, because he has denigrated the nature and scope of the constitutional rights to privacy, equal protection and due process, as well as the federal government's role in confronting injustice."

Writing in the Advocate, Karel Charles Bouley, a gay radio talk show host in San Francisco, said that while he is “glad” that the national groups oppose Roberts, they should “sit down and refocus” on other projects because his confirmation is a “slam dunk.”

Roberta Sklar, spokesperson for the Task Force, said, “We will be asking people to put pressure on the Senate to conduct an intense query into not only Roberts’ record, but his ideology.” She added that it is critical that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered leaders be allowed to testify at his confirmation hearings.

“It’s the first time in the history of the United States that issues of concern to LGBT citizens are openly issues of concern as a nominee’s hearings are conducted,” Sklar said. Our issues have moved from the margins to the center.”

Gay City News contributor Doug Ireland wrote at Direland.com that Senate Democrats “had already thrown in the towel on confirming Roberts as an associate justice” and that his approval as chief “will be fairly easy sailing,” because Democrats want “to get this issue out of the way and resume beating up Bush on Katrina.”

Ireland lamented that Roberts’ ascendancy and an additional right winger to replace O’Connor will have a more “lasting impact on the country” than the hurricane, establishing “a conservative lock on the Supreme Court for decades.”

Once “liberties and protections against theocracy are gone,” Ireland wrote, “we won’t get them back.”

New York Senator Charles Schumer, a Democrat, told Reuters, “This nomination certainly raises the stakes.”

Massachusetts Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy said the Senate now needs to know even more about Roberts, and “whom the president intends to propose to nominate as a replacement” for O’Connor.

Schumer and Kennedy have been among the Democrats speaking out most forcefully that additional files from Roberts’ work in the administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush be released, particularly those from the nominee’s days as deputy to Solicitor General Kenneth Starr during the elder Bush’s term. The solicitor general’s office represents the U.S. government in legal proceedings, and among Roberts’ duties in that office was his friend of the court briefs in support of protesters seeking the right to picket abortion clinics.

Joining gay leaders in bidding a less-than-fond farewell to Rehnquist, albeit in an extremely coarser fashion, was the infamous Rev. Fred Phelps of God Hates Fags Ministries in Topeka.

“We rejoice that Rehnquist is dead and in Hell,” a Phelps flier calling for a picket of his funeral said. “It is a sin NOT to rejoice when God executes His wrath and vengeance upon a sorry, faggypass judge.

Phelps believes that “the judges gave America to the fags.”

For more information on the Roberts record and the LGBT campaign against his confirmation, go to hrc.org and thetaskforce.org.

gious rhetoric by those who advanced homophobic amendments and legislation.

"If it's just LGBT people talking and organizing, then we lose," says Alan Van Capelle, executive director of Empire State Pride Agenda. "The most important thing we could do was find nontraditional allies to organize around our issues."

The religious leaders in the program reject the use of religious rhetoric toward homophobic ends, the biblical literalism of certain antigay religious leaders, and the idea that being gay is a sin. They are challenging the efforts to paint people and politicians who speak for LGBT rights as somehow ungodly, and they are taking pains to show the face of a very different religious world, one in which we are all, to paraphrase these clergymen and women, God's children.

Clunn was pleased to be approached by Pride in the Pulpit. There is a sense of relief both on the part of the clergy members who have long desired to have a say in the use of religious rhetoric and a chance to reject the homophobia used in the name of religion and on the part of LGBT activists.

Clunn's changed views regarding gay men and lesbians came when he entered the seminary in 1985. He saw gay friends who were active in the church but forced to stay in the closet. It enraged him. Clunn ended up leading a group of students working to change the doctrines of the United Methodist Church.

Today, he pastors at a "reconciling" congregation—one that consciously appeals to LGBT parishioners. It is akin to "reconciling" congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and "welcoming" Presbyterian churches affiliated with that denomination's More Light movement.

Having such religious leaders speak out in support of gay men and lesbians is crucial in the current political climate, says Pride Agenda's Van Capelle. For example, if an antigay state lawmaker "gathers religious leaders to denounce homosexuality and gay marriage...we now have our rapid response team from within the Pride in the Pulpit team that is able to stand as religious leaders and say, 'No, there are many religious leaders in New York that are against discrimination, including discrimination against gays and lesbians.'"

NGLTF's roundtable and HRC's Religion and Faith Program try to do this on a national level.

"Some try to make the claim that LGBT equality is not related to civil rights. I think that's bogus," says the Reverend Cedric A. Harmon, a Baptist minister and member of the NGLTF roundtable who describes himself as a "same-gender-loving" man.

Harmon adds, "Liberation is for all, and as long as one person is not free, all of us are still in bondage. The roundtable is uniquely positioned and doing a good job of getting more religious voices out there so LGBT persons and persons of faith can communicate with each other in ways that have not happened in the past. We talk about what's going on nationally, and we find ways to respond to the religious right, who seem to have taken Christianity and religious thinking captive."

After the last roundtable in September 2004, a delegation of

Faith and marriage in Maryland

Not all religious groups oppose legalizing marriage for same-sex couples, and gay rights activists in Maryland are out to prove it. They held a meeting of pro-gay religious leaders on August 10 to rally support for a lawsuit challenging the state's ban on same-sex marriage.

"The religious community does not speak with one voice on this issue, much to contrary belief," said Meredith Curtis, public education director for the American Civil Liberties Union in Maryland, which helped

organize the event with the gay rights group Equality Maryland.

About 50 clergy and laypeople attended the meeting, held at the Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ in Frederick. Dan Furmansky, Equality Maryland's executive director, said similar events were planned for the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland to invite church leaders to join the fight. In February, 28 religious groups and 48 spiritual leaders from Maryland signed a document supporting same-sex marriage.

interdenominational clergy went to Capitol Hill to lobby legislators to oppose the antigay Federal Marriage Amendment. "Often they don't know that there are religious communities and religious leaders, pastors, and clergy who are supportive [of LGBT rights]," says Harmon.

There are hurdles to such programs, however. Progressives generally have an understandably great distaste for weakening the barriers between church and state.

"We have been very reluctant, I think, to talk about our individual faith journeys and what motivates many of us to be involved in the justice movement, because we didn't want to be disrespectful," says HRC's Religion and Faith Program director Harry Knox, an ordained Methodist minister from Georgia. "But what we have lost in that process has been important, and we need to recognize we have to reclaim it, which is the power of authenticity. What motivates us individually as advocates and activists? For many people, it is their faith."

HRC, NGLTF, and Freedom to Marry will hold a Washington, D.C., informational summit in September that will bring together leaders from the 25 states that have progressive clergy coalitions.

"What we are doing now is going to our colleagues around the country who have already been doing this work, like the LGBT affinity groups in various denominations," says Knox. "We are asking this question: What will the Religion and Faith Program look like if it is relevant to the communities you serve, enhancing of the work you are doing, without co-opting that work?"

Recently Clunn wrote a letter to his congregation in which he addressed the presence of God in all relationships, no matter what the couple's sexuality. "My marriage and family life and/or values aren't threatened in any way by two people of the same sex trying to live out what I've had the good fortune to find," he wrote. "Yes, I am personally in favor of marriage for same-sex couples, but it has so much more behind it than an extension of rights and privileges that I enjoy as a married person. I simply don't want anyone to be denied the ability to discover the same joy I've found in my marriage." ■

THE ADVOCATE Poll

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Can activism
by gay-friendly
straight clergy
neutralize the
impact of anti-
gay religious
leaders?

Sign on to
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before September 13 to
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Sewing the Quilt of Black Gay Pride

We must celebrate Black Gay Pride, and black gay spiritual pride to show we're not 'godless gays.'

By REV. CEDRIC HARMON

Sep. 02, 2005

THE BOOK OF Proverbs tells us that, "Pride goeth before a fall." In the case of Black Gay Pride celebrations, Pride will go on before the fall and throughout the fall, as thousands of African-American LGBT people come together in cities across the country to celebrate their lives from July through October.

The celebrations will allow black people to pull together the strands of their identities, to sew the patches of race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation into one beautiful quilt.

But there must be another piece for this glorious Quilt of Blackness to be complete. Throughout history, black people have found tremendous strength in communities of faith. And yet those communities of faith have sometimes been the first to reject their LGBT children.

And so, in addition to celebrating Black Gay Pride, we must also learn to celebrate black gay and spiritual pride. For the "Quilt of Blackness" to truly cover the feet of our community, it must be sewn together with the "Quilt of Faith."

I ATTENDED A conference in Chicago in June on black religious identity that gave me a foretaste of the kingdom (or kin-dom) to come, where the different strands of my identity as a black same-gender-loving man of faith could be brought together.

It represented the "already but not yet" of the coming time of justice and equality for my LGBT brothers and sisters.

Each attendee luxuriated in the richness of their religious and sexual experience, contributing texture, color, brilliance and the woven complexity of living authentic black gay and religious lives.

Pastors, elders, bishops, theologians, academics, musicologists and social activists all participated, shared and enriched the experience. This was in no way a reflection of stereotypes about queer communities as anathema to faith. This was not a group of "godless gays."

These were out and proud LGBT people of color fully engaged and embracing faith as foundational to their lives. This was liberation theology, womanist theology, social gospel, social justice, civil rights and inclusivity: "God is still speaking" in the flesh.

Bishop Yvette Flunder, founder and pastor of City of Refuge UCC in Oakland, exhorted us to embrace that “we have been called out of eternity into this time to do a specific work and to celebrate the prophetic call upon our lives.” She told us that an amazing opportunity is being realized in our presence.

THE GREAT SOCIAL movements of previous centuries changed society in amazing and unforeseen ways, and we are now involved in such a social movement for positive change. The benefits of this push toward greater justice are not always evident to us while we struggle, but there will be benefits.

Among these potential benefits for the LGBT community, and to black people as a whole, are stronger family structures, a healthier population, increasing economic equality, more children in loving homes, and people realizing their full creative potential without fear of rejection because of whom they love.

Maurice Charles, an Episcopal priest and doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago Divinity School, advised us to “live to resist.” Resist every force that seeks to dissuade us from voicing our desires and dissatisfactions.

Resist the urge to be silent. Resist the safety of living quietly in alcoves of apathy and complacency. Resist the labels foisted upon us by those opposing progress. Resist and re-imagine. Ours is a mandate to grow. While we are fully aware of the rich soil we grow out of, we must push our shoots out of the soil toward the warm sunlight of this new day.

Liberation is dissent. Celebrate the prophetic call. Live to resist. These were among the messages worked into the quilt of black gay and spiritual pride. But there are more pieces to be sewn in.

The beauty of a quilt is not to be found in monochromatic color, nor in homogeneity of material, but rather in the artful piecing together of various bits of cloth, each with its distinction and color.

So it is with the Quilt of Blackness and the Quilt of Faith: Distinctions abound, yet the skillful sewing of these two aspects will reveal our beauty in all of its fullness. Now is the time to pick up your needle and thread and begin the work.