

national news

Cabinet secretary speaks at gay-pride forum

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña and Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy issued separate anti-discrimination policy statements during the past two months aimed at protecting gay and lesbian workers at the two federal departments. Peña, formerly mayor of Denver, Colo., went further by agreeing to speak at a gay-pride forum in June sponsored by the Department of Transportation Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Employees. He was the first U.S. Cabinet secretary to speak at such an event.

Espy's statement, issued on April 15, insists on aggressive enforcement of existing nondiscrimination policies as well as an enthusiastic commitment to diversity within the Department of Agriculture.

Similar policy statements protecting sexual minority workers were produced during the Bush administration by officials of the General Services Administration and half of the 10 regional offices of the National Park Service. Gay and lesbian workers note, however, that the earlier statements were initiated by department or agency officials and did not reflect the views of the Bush White House, unlike the Clinton administration's friendlier and more forthcoming support.

Courts block discrimination

In a ruling announced July 19, the Colorado Supreme Court voted 6-1 to continue the injunction against enactment of Amendment 2. According to human rights advocates everywhere, this ruling is heralded as a tremendous victory. In making the ruling, the court said that there was a strong likelihood that Amendment 2 would be declared unconstitutional because a citizen's fundamental rights may not be submitted to a vote.

Lawrence Pacheco of Equality Colorado expressed the local feeling best when he exclaimed, "Obviously we are very excited about the Supreme Court's ruling that confirms what we have been saying all along, that Amendment 2 excludes lesbians, gay men and bisexuals from the United States political process." Some people in Colorado are protesting the court ruling by shouting, "Majority rules! What happened to majority rules?"

"It is wonderful to see that the court is actually ruling by the constitution to administer justice and not to be swayed by popular public opinion," continued Pacheco.

"I think that this ruling sets a persuasive precedent for people in other states who are going to be facing similar legislation in 1994," said Pacheco. "I hope it will help people out. It's important to note that despite this ruling, we need

to remain vigilant in our struggle for justice. We know that here in Colorado we are going to be facing another discriminatory initiative in 1994. The Colorado for Family Values organization has already started a million-dollar fundraising campaign."

The state of Colorado announced on July 20 that it was going to appeal the state Supreme Court's July 19 ruling. Colorado's attorney general is challenging the ruling to get it into the U.S. Supreme Court, where it is thought Amendment 2 may have a chance of surviving. This is a predictable strategy and one that the Oregon Citizens Alliance has failed to fulfill in Oregon.

"That's if the U.S. Supreme Court decides to take the case. It may not take it because Amendment 2 has not gone through a full trial," said Pacheco. Whether or not the U.S. Supreme Court takes the case won't be known until the end of the year. In the meantime, Colorado's attorney general has asked Judge Bailiff to postpone hearing the civil challenge to Amendment 2, which was scheduled to begin in October.

"We're not out of the water yet. We must remain vigilant," finished Pacheco.

"She needs to hit the ground running"

A former top health official in Oregon and Washington, as well as a professor of nursing and public health, Kristine Gebbie is now the nation's first federal AIDS czar. She was appointed to the post by President Bill Clinton after the job was turned down by other candidates, including Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., and New York health commissioner Margaret A. Hamburg.

In the White House Rose Garden, Gebbie at his side, the President stated his belief that the new AIDS czar "will bring to our administration years of experience in the AIDS field. She'll work hard to make sure our nation no longer ignores an epidemic that has already claimed so many of our brothers and sisters, our friends and our colleagues." Gebbie's job will include overseeing and coordinating the government's sometimes scattered campaign against the AIDS epidemic, as well as confronting complaints about what is seen by many as inadequate sex education on AIDS and delays in federal approval of drugs to fight the disease.

After leaving her job in Washington state in February, the 49-year-old Gebbie worked as chair of an AIDS advisory committee for the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. In 1987, despite her criticism of President Reagan's AIDS-testing policies, Gebbie was named to the Presidential Commission on AIDS. The agency was charged with studying the epidemic and promoting AIDS-prevention programs. When working in Oregon,

Gebbie formed an advisory committee that proposed and pushed enactment of standards providing for confidentiality and informed consent for persons who were tested for the AIDS virus.

"She's put in her time," says Mica Smith, executive director of Cascade AIDS Project in Portland. "She's not afraid to stand by her decisions." Former Governor Bob Straub, who hired Gebbie to the Oregon Health Division in 1979 from her job as a St. Louis hospital administrator, said that Gebbie was known for "ruffling feathers. She was very determined to increase our efforts to deal with the AIDS problem," he added. Some people were "annoyed" with what they perceived as Gebbie's excessive concern over an issue that Straub says at the time was not thought "serious." While in Oregon, Gebbie sought to improve AIDS-testing standards in the state and to prevent discrimination against those who tested HIV-positive, work considered pioneering at the time.

ACT UP/Seattle and ACT UP/Columbia don't see her in this light, however. Luke Sissyfag of ACT UP/Seattle stated recently, "Gebbie needs to hit the ground running." Activists are angered that, contrary to Clinton's promise, the appointment is not a Cabinet-level position. They charge that during Gebbie's 11-year tenure as administrator of the Oregon Health Division, she endorsed mandatory reporting of names of those who tested HIV-positive, and they pointed out that she introduced no new programs in her four years as secretary of the Washington State Department of Health, but only oversaw budget cuts in AIDS prescription drug and insurance continuation programs. Sissyfag describes the state of the Washington health department after Gebbie's departure in February as "a shambles." ACT UP/Seattle and ACT UP/Columbia are calling for immediate action from Gebbie in the areas of lifting the HIV-immigration ban, expediting development of a "Manhattan research project" as promised by Clinton and implementing the 30 recommendations issued in the 1991 report of the National Commission on AIDS.

No one would disagree that Kristine Gebbie has a very big job on her hands.

New AZT recommendations

A government-created independent panel of 18 experts has recommended a shift in strategy for treating people infected with HIV. The shift concentrates on a more flexible approach than before and reflects recent studies, especially one conducted in Europe, showing AZT to have a limited benefit for a limited time.

Panel member Merle A. Sande, an AIDS expert from the University of California, San Francisco, said, "AZT has benefits, but we are admitting it's not as good a drug as we thought it was. It works, but not as well as we would like it to nor

as long as we would like it to." The panel recommended switching from AZT, for those who experience progression despite its use, to ddI, a drug produced by Bristol-Myers Squibb, as well as cautiously endorsing use of more than one anti-HIV drug in a combination of sequence. They emphasized that studies have failed to show clinical benefit for such combinations and said it should be discontinued if the combinations proved toxic.

The recommendations made by the panel have no regulatory authority, but it is believed they will have "wide impact on the practice of medicine."

Trouble brewing at Miller

In his capacity as production supervisor at the Miller Brewing Co. plant in Fulton, N.Y., Harold Thomas still looks over his shoulder every day. "They have threatened my life," the African American worker recently told reporter Michael Janofsky of *The New York Times*. "[But] if I walk out ... Miller will never address the issue."

The issue is two years old. While working at his job supervising the packaging department, Thomas was shocked to hear racial slurs directed toward him over the paging system. He didn't know who was doing it. The verbal attacks continued, driving him, frightened and distraught, to take medical leave. When he returned nearly a year later, the voice returned also.

Waverly Faison heard the verbal assaults too. As the first African American at the plant to be promoted to a middle-management position of packaging superintendent, he oversaw 75 people, most of whom were European American. Faison began in September 1982 to keep a log of derogatory remarks. Within three months he had logged two dozen racial or sexual references to him and other employees.

Thomas and Faison were able to present enough evidence to warrant an FBI investigation, as well as to file civil claims against Miller with the New York State Division of Human Rights. Miller's lawyer insisted that the company had always complied with state and federal anti-discrimination laws. Thomas and Faison maintain their complaints were ignored by the company.

The FBI "largely substantiated" some of the allegations, according to a letter sent to Miller's lawyers from Paula Ryan Conan, assistant district attorney, but could not assemble evidence to identify the perpetrators. Without that, neither her office nor the Justice Department could take action against Miller Brewing Co. She did chastise the company for "the appearance of endorsement-by-inaction." The FBI is still interviewing witnesses, and Harold Thomas is still walking the line at Miller.

Compiled by Grant Michael Menzies and Ariel Waterwoman

cathartic comics I featuring The Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé by Prof. I.B. Gittendowne

