

national news

Studds and Frank to introduce employment non-discrimination bill

Reps. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) and Gerry Studds (D-Mass.) are expected to introduce, within the next month, federal legislation that would outlaw anti-gay discrimination in the workplace.

"The right to be secure in one's livelihood is a bedrock principle with which every American can identify," said Studds. "Millions came to these shores in search of opportunity—the opportunity to build a decent life through their own hard work and ingenuity. I believe that when our fellow Americans learn how frequently lesbians and gay men are denied that basic promise of the American dream, they will agree that something must be done. That is what our bill is all about."

The strategy for this bill includes convening congressional hearings on job discrimination based on sexual orientation. The hearings are expected to begin within the next two months.

Said Frank, "I believe the time has come for Congress to put into law a very simple principle: Individuals have a right to be evaluated in the workplace based on the quality and quantity of work they do, and not be disadvantaged because someone doesn't like what they do in their private lives. Discriminating against honest, hardworking people because they are gay or lesbian makes no sense—morally, socially or economically. I believe the American people will support appropriately drafted legislation that embodies this principle."

Each year, since 1974, a Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Bill has been introduced in Congress, and each time it has died in committee.

"The time is right for federal legislation to end discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace," said Tim McFeeley, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund. "Several recent national polls make it clear that Americans, by large margins, oppose workplace discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals." According to McFeeley, more than 230 members of Congress have issued non-discrimination policies with regards to sexual orientation in their own employment practices.

"We will effectively communicate to the American people the ugly reality of discrimination that gay people face everyday and how it negatively impacts the entire country," said Peri Jude Radevic, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Both Radevic and McFeeley noted the value of educating the public about anti-gay bias during the 1994 election cycle, during which nine states are facing anti-gay ballot measures.

A coalition of organizations, led by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, NGLTF and HRCF, is forming to organize support for the bill.

African American queer studies center to commemorate Stonewall

The African American Gay and Lesbian Studies Center will commemorate the 25th anniversary of Stonewall by sponsoring educational and cultural events in San Francisco and New York City. The events will focus on African American perspectives of Stonewall. Initial funding is being provided by the Ben and Jerry's Foundation and the Chicago Resource Center.

STONEWALL



The center will present a series of panel discussions in each city, featuring speakers who will chronicle African American gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender contemporary history. These discussions are also intended to serve as the basis for future research and documentation projects at the center. The New York and San Francisco events will be open to the public.

African American Gay and Lesbian Studies Center, Inc., is a national organization, based in Los Angeles. Its work includes the collecting, cataloguing and disseminating of data on the history, cultures, and socio-economic and health status of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals of African descent.

The center also functions as a think tank, conducting studies that examine how various programs, policies and social or environmental conditions affect the well-being of African Americans in the United States. For information, contact project coordinator Troy Fernandez or president Gil Gerald at (213) 954-1420.

Domestic partner health coverage part of new union contract

The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild and the Bureau of National Affairs negotiated a tentative agreement in April for a new 3-year

contract extending health care coverage to unmarried employees' domestic partners. The new contract covers more than 800 employees in BNA's Washington, D.C., and Rockville, Md., facilities. This is believed to be the largest collectively bargained agreement by any U.S. company to provide this benefit.

WBNG is a local of The Newspaper Guild, AFL-CIO, CLC, a labor union representing U.S. and Canadian workers primarily in the news and information industry. The Bureau of National Affairs is a Washington, D.C.-based publisher of specialized business, legislative, judicial and regulatory information.

Newspaper Guild president Chuck Dale congratulated WBNG for being the first Guild local to win this benefit in bargaining. Dale said, "We can also point with pride to the fact that this Guild contract guarantees employees with terminal illnesses the right to a 'living benefit' option on their company-provided life insurance policies."

"We are gratified that the company and the union have now agreed to health care coverage for domestic partners. The union has been fighting for this for years, including a 1990 arbitration case we lost, and proposals the company opposed during 1992 contract bargaining," said Guild Unit Co-Chair Ken May, a legal editor at BNA.

Other breakthrough agreements in the contract include preserving employer-paid health care benefits and stronger job security guarantees.

New federal civil rights head worth wait

After remaining vacant for nearly 15 months, the post of chief advocate for civil rights has been filled. Deval Patrick, 37, a Boston attorney, was sworn in as assistant attorney general for civil rights April 14. If his speech at that day's ceremony was any indication, perhaps it was worth the wait.

"It was one of the highlights of my nine years at the Campaign Fund," said Eric Rosenthal, political director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, one of several gay men and lesbians at the ceremony. "He has a real moral center and a lot of integrity. I think he is going to be a real ally for our community and a leader on our issues," he said.

"It was so moving, I cried," said Tonya Domi, legislative director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "It reminded me why I do the work that I do." She added, "It is good to know there is someone at the Justice Department that really understands, that is not going to shift on this mission, based upon the political winds of the time."

Both Rosenthal and Domi have met with Patrick since he was nominated for the post. They expect to meet with him again, within the next few weeks.

In his remarks, Patrick noted that many people, particularly reporters, have asked him what his agenda will be for the office. He demurred, saying that he has only been on the job a few days, but promised that "formal goals will be developed collaboratively, in consult with the advocacy groups and with ourselves."

The core of Patrick's speech focused on the moral dimensions of the office: "The real and ultimate agenda is to reclaim the American conscience. Our true mission is to restore the great moral imperative that civil rights is finally all about. This nation, as I see it, has a creed. That creed is deeply rooted in the concepts of equality, opportunity and fair play. Our faith in that creed has made us a prideful nation, and enabled us to accomplish feats of extraordinary achievement and uplift."

"And yet, in the same instant, we see racism and unfairness all around us. In the same instant, we see acts of unspeakable cruelty and even violence because of race, or ethnicity, or gender, or disability, or sexual orientation. They present a legal problem, to be sure, but they also pose a moral dilemma. How can a nation founded on such principles, dedicated to such a creed, sometimes fall so short?"

"Let me assure you: This is a question asked not just by intellectuals and pundits of each other. It is asked by simple, everyday people of each other, and of themselves, in barber shops and across kitchen tables, in the mind's silent voice on the bus ride home from work, in the still, small times when the conscience calls."

"To be a civil rights lawyer, you must understand what the laws mean. But to understand civil rights, you must understand how it feels; how it feels to be hounded by uncertainty and fear whether you will be fairly treated; how it feels to be trapped in someone else's stereotype, to have people look right through you."

Patrick concluded his remarks with both a challenge and a promise: "Of the American people, those here and elsewhere, I ask only this: Give us your commitment to equality. Give us your sense of history and of the great unfinished agenda which derives from it. And we will set your hearts afire and help you know what I know about what is possible in America."

"Dr. King said, 'Cowardice asks the question: Is it safe? Expediency asks the question: Is it polite? Vanity asks the question: Is it popular? But Conscience, Conscience must ask the question: Is it right?' Ladies and gentlemen, as American citizens, so must we."

"We may not redeem the sleeping soul of this great republic and recreate the civil rights consensus that made possible the moral high points of this nation in my tenure, or even in my lifetime. But let us begin."

Compiled by Jann Gilbert and Bob Roehr

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

