

national news

Queer staff association forms on Capitol Hill

The queer presence on Capitol Hill is officially coming out, with the formation of the Lesbian and Gay Congressional Staff Association. Its first meeting was held April 28.

The association's request for registration was approved by House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) and will be formalized by the House Administration committee. That official status, a first on the Hill, entitles them to a House mail box and use of office space for meetings.

Several staffers had been talking about establishing a group for nearly a year. What galvanized them into action was an incident last fall—three members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation told the *Tulsa World* they would not hire gay men or lesbians for their office staffs.

This display of bigotry "illustrated the need for an association that would enable lesbian and gay House employees to offer one another mutual support," said Robert Raben, a founding member and legislative assistant to Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.).

The purpose and goals of the association are professional and personal development, education and mutual support. House rules, much like rules governing non-profit tax-exempt organizations, prohibit any such group from formal political activity, such as lobbying on a specific piece of legislation.

"A core group of about a dozen have been working on this, and upwards of 30 have expressed interest [in participating]," said Mark Agrast, another founding member and senior legislative assistant to Rep. Gerry Studds (D-Mass.).

Studds believes that "most members of Congress—like most people—are fundamentally decent and fair-minded." He feels that as House members learn some of the people they work with and trust are lesbian and gay, "They will develop a greater understanding [of the problems facing them]," and act accordingly.

In a related matter, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, also prodded by the incident involving the Oklahoma delegation, has conducted a congressional survey. It asked members to sign a statement saying they did not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in hiring and promotion. In February, HRCF announced that more than half the members of the House of Representatives have signed.

A similar survey began in the Senate in February. HRCF scheduled a news conference to announce they had garnered pledges from more than half the members of that body, but postponed the event.

The delay does not appear to represent a failure to gather 51 signatures, but rather a decision to wait until they get 60. That is the number of votes

necessary to end a filibuster. It is a more compelling figure to seasoned observers of the Senate. HRCF lobbyists hope to gain the additional signatures over the next few weeks.

Gebbie's leadership questioned by major AIDS organizations

A draft entitled "National HIV Action Agenda" from the office of the national AIDS policy coordinator, Kristine Gebbie, is drawing a critical response.

The document, stamped "draft" and "for internal use only—confidential," had been shared with a number of AIDS organizations for their reactions. The answer from even the most mainstream of the groups was one of growing frustration.



Kristine Gebbie

"It really isn't an action plan," said Dr. Mervyn Silverman, president of the American Foundation for AIDS Research. "These are just a set of goals."

"We could have said all of this two years into the epidemic, not 13 years into the epidemic," said Dan Bross, executive director of the AIDS Action Council. "We need timelines attached to it. We need dollars attached to it."

Helen Fox, of the National Minority AIDS Council, said that group would not publicly respond until after its board meets in May.

The National Association of People with AIDS, in a statement it released April 13, said, "It has become painfully clear that the Office is not meeting the challenges of the HIV epidemic."

Characterizing the draft as "yet another bureaucratic exercise that is long on process and short on results," the association charged, "There

has yet to be a meaningful discussion of poverty, racism, and homophobia—root causes of the epidemic. Nor have fundamental prevention strategies, such as condom-use and needle-exchange, been frankly discussed.

"Having had nine months to develop strategy, however, the forthcoming 'leadership statement' from the Office of the National AIDS Policy Coordinator is unacceptable."

The association called upon President Clinton "to reinvigorate the Office with dynamic leadership in the face of an astounding epidemic that continues unabated."

Steve Michael, of ACT UP/Washington, was not surprised by the banal content of the draft document. But he was pleased that other organizations are now in public agreement with his belief that "Gebbie has to go." He called Gebbie "a paper pusher who did the same thing to us in Washington state," and said she "is only there to handle queer voters."

Michael noted the timing of future release of the draft document when he said it "is one more piece of paper to flaunt at Gay Pride." He saw it as just the latest example of the Clinton administration's pattern of managing the news of AIDS rather than adopting policies to effectively combat HIV.

Subsequent actions have further eroded support for the administration within the AIDS community. The HIV prevention media campaign unveiled in January was most notable for ignoring the largest group of those infected with HIV—gay men. While Clinton's budget did show small increases in HIV funding, those increases did not begin to keep pace with the exploding caseload of people with AIDS.

The response to this draft document by mainline AIDS service organizations appears to signal a new, more combative phase in their relationship with the Clinton administration. It remains to be seen whether this stance will have any impact in moving the administration to take the more aggressive steps the HIV epidemic demands.

Pride Foundation grants awards

The Pride Foundation of Washington state announced in April that it has raised \$100,000 for its "Stand Up and Be Counted" project. The special three-month fund-raising project matched every dollar given with a challenge grant from the Allan Tanning Foundation. The money will be given to 20 projects which support outreach, education and visibility to further the lesbian and gay community's struggle against discrimination.

Recent polling suggests that people who claim they don't know any lesbians or gay men are more likely to vote against lesbian and gay civil rights.

"Stand Up and Be Counted" awards will go to non-profit organizations to fund education and advocacy projects throughout Washington state. The ultimate goal of these projects is to tie into efforts to pass a gay and lesbian civil rights bill and to defeat any discriminatory initiatives in 1994.

"In times of crisis, it is important for community foundations to show leadership. We believe the 'Stand Up and Be Counted' awards will provide the seed money necessary to build a strong bridge to visibility, acceptance and understanding for the lesbian and gay community," said Tina Podlodowski, the foundation's board president.

The Pride Foundation has made direct grants of \$400,000 to over 100 organizations since 1987. The foundation raises funds for its granting and scholarship programs, educates about community needs and solutions, fosters leadership, and promotes making the most of available community resources. During regular granting cycles later this year, the group will distribute an additional \$65,000.

Radical right at work on Capitol Hill

Members of Congress are being asked to sign a petition stating that they oppose "all federal attempts to use tax dollars to promote, encourage, fund [directly or indirectly], or indemnify by code of law, homosexuality or any perverse subgroup thereof." The petition is being circulated by the Christian Action Network, an anti-gay fund-raising organization, in response to a recent announcement by the Human Rights Campaign Fund that more than 200 members of the House of Representatives have non-discrimination policies regarding the hiring of lesbian and gay employees.

Martin Mawyer, president of the Christian Action Network, stated in a March 24 letter to members of Congress, "Recently you were asked to prove your social sensibilities by signing a pledge to prohibit discrimination against homosexuals in your personal hiring practices. Keeping in form, we are asking that you sign the attached pro-family pledge." Mawyer calls the homosexual movement "one of the greatest threats to the American family."

Daniel Zingale, public policy director for the HRCF, called the Mawyer petition "a clear example of the radical right's effort to distort an important issue." He said, "To suggest that opposing discrimination against lesbian and gay Americans in the workplace is somehow anti-family is an intentional distortion of the facts."

Compiled by Bob Roehr and Jann Gilbert

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

