

national briefs

AIDS czar out

AIDS czar Kristine Gebbie resigned from that position Aug. 2, the one-year anniversary of her appointment.

"I have come to a mutual agreement with President Clinton to leave the position," she stated in a letter dated July 8. She went on to list her accomplishments during her tenure.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," said Steve Michael of ACT UP Washington. The group had opposed Gebbie from the date of her announcement. A year ago, Michael had characterized Gebbie as "a very poor administrator who is in way over her head in this job. She is going to get eaten alive by people at [the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Health and Human Services]."

Bill Freeman is executive director of the National Association of People with AIDS. The organization had formally called for Gebbie's resignation in mid-April and was building support for that position among other groups.

"The other half [of the problem] is the office structure," Freeman said. "We can have ten thousand Kristine Gebbies and be no further along."

Martin Delaney, with Project Inform in San Francisco, was on the same wave length. "We have to be very careful here that her resignation isn't used to buy off broader criticism of the Clinton administration on AIDS. The problems here are much broader than Kristine Gebbie."

"The next AIDS czar has got to be a cabinet-level person with the ear of Bill Clinton," Freeman said. He said the AIDS policy office has got to be physically located "in the White House, which means the Old Executive Office Building."

"It's important [the administration] get it right this time, not only in terms of the person, but right in terms of what they want this office to be," said Dan Bross, executive director of the AIDS Action Council. Bross continued, "We now look to President Clinton to demonstrate the leadership the president promised and that the epidemic demands. This is the opportunity for a new beginning. He talked the talk, now he better walk the walk."

Clinton named Patricia S. Fleming, special assistant to Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala, to be the interim coordinator of AIDS policy while a successor to Gebbie is sought.

Bob Roehr

Camp Sister Spirit gets congressional hearing

Camp Sister Spirit was back in the news July 6, when the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights held a hearing in Jackson, Miss., on incidents surrounding the camp. Reps. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) and Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) convened the meeting in the McCoy Federal Building, in the presence of federal marshals.

Brenda and Wanda Henson opened testimony with their account of the harassment they have suffered since opening the camp in Ovet, Miss.

"The questioning by Rep. Frank of the Mississippi for Family Values leaders, James Hendry and Rev. John Allen, made them go on record in a very different way than they have in the past," said Robin Kane, spokeswoman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "They backpedaled on several issues because, I think, of the media attention and of the congressional attention."

"We felt like the goddess of stupid had arrived," exclaimed Brenda Henson after the hearing. "It was an incredible experience, they [opponents] just got up and said all of the things that they shouldn't have said, they really did."

The fundamentalists were trying to demonstrate that they too had been harassed. But, as Frank pointed out, the controversy had sprung from the meeting and campaign they themselves had created.

"When you add all of the quasi-officials together with the few officials, you get a sense of a

pattern," said Kane. "And that is what this hearing was about: Is there a pattern of any sort of official involvement in the harassment or the lack of protection against the harassment."

Frank had explained on announcing the hearing, "The ultimate legislative question is, do we need an expanded federal role where people are being abused by essentially private citizens, and the local officials won't help them? If you are being abused by local officials, the federal officials can step in. But what happens if the local officials are doing nothing? Should there be a federal backup?"

Ozell Sutton, southern Regional Director of the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice, was one of the federal officials who testified that their efforts to intervene on behalf of the Hensons were hampered by lack of specific language including sexual orientation under their legal mandate. Several state officials declined an invitation to appear before the panel.

Bob Roehr

"Normal people" banned from pride march

The failed attempt by a right wing group to sue their way into the San Diego gay and lesbian pride parade was credited with bringing out a record 60,000 marchers and spectators July 16 in Hillcrest, the city's main gay neighborhood.

In a case reminiscent (but the reverse) of the St. Patrick's Day battles in Boston and New York, a group of about 200 people, led by radio talk-show host and former San Diego mayor Roger Hedgecock, sued parade organizers after their application to march was rejected.

The group, calling itself "The Normal People," claimed it was being discriminated against based on its members' sexual orientation, in violation of the city's Human Dignity Ordinance.

Superior Court Judge Charles Wickersham dismissed the lawsuit the day before the parade, rejecting the argument that because the parade made use of city streets, police and sanitation services, it was a city-supported event and thus prohibited from discriminating.

"The parade is not a city service," Wickersham said. "It is a private event, and the organizers' First Amendment right of free speech allows them to ban anyone they want," he said.

"And even if [banning the group] was a violation of the [Human Dignity] Ordinance, the ordinance can't prevail against the [U.S.] Constitution," Wickersham added.

The right wing group responded to the ruling by holding a rally several miles from Hillcrest the morning of the parade.

"This is a special day of solidarity and it certainly is pride," summed up Christine Kehoe, San Diego's openly lesbian city councilor.

Rex Wockner

HRCF's McFeeley to step down

Tim McFeeley is resigning as executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

The official word came in a news release from HRCF dated July 1, which announced that McFeeley would leave "after the November elections." The announcement puts to rest rumors to that effect which had mounted over the last few months.

"It is very unlikely I will be here a year from now," McFeeley said in an extended interview last December. He restated his often-enunciated view that five years was about the right amount of time for an executive director "to effect whatever he or she can. After that time it is just healthy for the organization to get new leadership." McFeeley took the position with HRCF in June of 1989.

Bob Roehr

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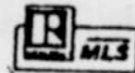
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