

Predictions for '95

The old lavender crystal ball saw things pretty clearly last year. After a bit of Windex on a soft rag, this is what we see for 1995.

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by Bob Roehr

Congress

The new Republican majority will be too busy with its "Contract with America" for the first six months to pay much heed to lesbians and gay men. Call it benign neglect.

That will change in late summer and fall, as appropriations bills move forward. Newt Gingrich and the leadership will allow "no promo homo" amendments to be attached to a few pieces of legislation so that both pro- and anti-sexual minority sides can have recorded votes for their congressional ratings.

None of our "friends" in the Senate will fall on their swords by filibustering to stop discriminatory legislation. The number of such provisions and their impact won't be significantly different from past years.

Gay and lesbian activists will attempt to out newly powerful Republican members of Congress, with minimal success. There will be circumstantial evidence but no "smoking dick." Gingrich will say it doesn't matter to him whether or not the member is queer.

AIDS

Research: A theory of endogenous retroviruses as a significant cofactor in the progression of HIV disease to AIDS will become a hot topic of discussion. It will open up new lines of research the impact of which will be years in coming.

Clinical trials of protease inhibitors, the next family of HIV anti-virals, will continue to show promise. Access through trials will be expanded, but don't look for Food and Drug Administration approval for over-the-counter use this year.

Aids Czar: Patsy Fleming will continue to have the personal respect of AIDS activists. But the office is now seen as increasingly irrelevant by most activists, because Bill Clinton is unwilling to provide leadership on the issue.

Funding: Liberal allies who delivered increased AIDS dollars in 1994 warned not to expect further increases this year because of the cap on spending imposed by deficit reduction. And that was before the Republican landslide changed control of Congress.

Most AIDS money comes through the Ryan White CARE Act, and that legislation's five-year

mandate is about to expire. The act had strong bipartisan support in the past and may breeze through again. Much more likely is tough wrangling over sexually explicit materials and re-vamping of the formula for how money is distributed. Those fights won't necessarily be partisan in nature.



Patricia Fleming

A long-shot scenario, though one that has become more possible in the last few weeks, is that Ryan White will simply disappear. AIDS and other earmarked funding would be folded into larger health block grants to states and localities, with fewer strings and oversights attached. That would shift the fight for deciding resource allocation from Capitol Hill to 50 statehouses.

Gay men and lesbians in the military

Joe Steffan will decide not to appeal his case to the Supreme Court, thus seemingly ending the legal maneuvering over the "old" ban on gay men

and lesbians in the military.

Keith Meinhold is still in the Navy, having won his case in court under the "old" regulations. The brass will now try to go after him under the "new" regs, but it won't go quite as they had hoped. Judge Terry Hatter will find their action in violation of the 9th Circuit Court ruling and hold the Navy in contempt of court.

The first direct challenge to the "new" ban, the Able case, will go to trial early in the year in Brooklyn, N.Y. The decision will come quickly—a victory. It will be appealed up the chain in the 2nd Circuit Court into 1996.

Zoe Dunning and others will have a mix of success and failure in administrative hearings under the "new" regs. The entire issue of gay men and lesbians in the military won't be resolved until some time after the next presidential election.

National organizations

AIDS Action Council: The November elections seem to have crystallized a consensus of the board of directors that the group must become more broadly based and work more in coalition with others. The new executive director, starting early in the year, will move proactively in those directions.

Human Rights Campaign Fund: Look for HRCF to stumble in searching for ways to effectively communicate with the Republican majority in Congress. That will continue until it begins to listen to, and hire for its senior policy and lobbying positions, at least a few Republicans.

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund: This most tightly focused of the major national organizations has a seasoned staff in place and an ambitious-though-manageable list of cases on its docket. It will continue to win both large and small victories for the community in the courts.

Log Cabin Republicans: The group will be hampered by inadequate funding and unable to expand its staff sufficiently to build extensive or meaningful ties to the Republican majority in Congress.

National Association of People with AIDS: NAPWA has built a solid foundation and may be on the verge of becoming a major, perhaps lead, player in the politics of AIDS. A lot will depend on whether the leadership team can stay together and healthy.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: The question isn't whether but when newly appointed executive director Melinda Paras will announce she is stepping down. Meanwhile, NGLTF's income from small donors will continue to shrink. There is a very real possibility the organization will shut its chic new Washington office, though more likely it will keep administrative functions in D.C. and sublet a portion of the space to help pay the rent.

People

Roberta Achtenberg: With Joycelyn Elders gone, the woman Jesse Helms called "that damn lesbian" is likely to become a higher-profile target for the rabid right. They already have gone after her over controversies like those in Berkeley, Calif., and her recent apology to newspaper editors over the investigation of an Easter Bunny as promoting Christianity (don't ask, it's too absurd). Those attacks have been confined largely to the conservative press, but coverage will likely creep into the mainstream as other targets are picked off. Chameleon Clinton, in his transformation toward the right, may well add her to the sacrificial list before the year is out.



Bill Clinton

Jim Hormel: He's been mentioned as the first openly gay ambassador. Forget it. Clinton got credit for considering the appointment but procrastinated when he had the opportunity. Now that Jesse Helms is chairing the confirmation process, would any self-respecting queer want to subject himself or herself to that abuse?

Issues

Gay marriage: It bubbled just under the mainstream radar for much of last year but will probably explode in 1995, with a court ruling in Hawaii and a long overdue decision in D.C.

Health Care Reform: Remember that? Don't look for major initiatives, but there will be some tinkering. It should include insurance reform affecting pre-existing conditions, portability, and lifetime caps on payouts. All should be favorable to people with AIDS who can afford to purchase insurance. It will probably be folded into a package of Medicaid reform, necessitated by welfare reform (read: cuts for both).

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