

Affirmative action may take hit in Washington

A member of the Washington House of Representatives who applied for but was not offered a job with the King County Police Department has drafted a bill to ban affirmative action in the state. According to an article in *The Oregonian*, Rep. Scott Smith (R-Graham) said he has the backing of Republican leaders and has been promised a hearing and a vote in the House Law and Justice Committee.

Affirmative action is coming under fire from many sources. A bill to ban it is before the California legislature. There is also a drive in California to place an anti-affirmative action initiative on the November 1996 ballot. GOP presidential contender Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Texas) has stated his opposition to affirmative action. Others, including Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kansas) have called for a review of all affirmative action programs.

Kristine Chatwood

Efforts in California may protect sexual minorities

New bills introduced this session in the California Assembly aim to protect same-sex couples and students.

A bill allowing unwed couples to register with the state as domestic partners and obtain a few benefits of marriage was introduced by Assemblyman Richard Katz.

Gov. Pete Wilson vetoed nearly identical legislation last year, saying, "Government policy ought not to discount marriage by offering a substitute relationship."

Katz accused Wilson of being an election-year "pawn of the religious right" and is hopeful he might act differently this time around.

"It was unconscionable for the governor to ignore the needs of a million Californians, many of them low- and middle-income seniors, just to win an election," Katz said.

The bill, AB 627, requires hospitals to grant partner-visitation rights and changes state laws on wills and conservatorships.

Meanwhile, lesbian Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl of Santa Monica introduced a bill to bar discrimination against sexual minority students in public schools.

AB 1001, a copy of a new law in Massachusetts, adds "sexual orientation" to the state Education Code's list of protected categories.

"It a simple matter of human rights, a simple matter of dignity," Kuehl told students at Alexander Hamilton High School in Los Angeles, as she unveiled the measure.

Rex Wockner

"A half million people in the United States who are HIV positive and do not know it are committing suicide of ignorance," Sean Strub told participants. Strub operates a dozen businesses marketing to the gay and AIDS communities, including *POZ* magazine. He is a strong supporter of HIV home test kits, has worked extensively with Johnson & Johnson—the company seeking approval of such a kit, and has received significant money from them for those efforts.

"For people who are geographically isolated and people from communities of color, we have a very lousy system for getting them tested," Strub said. He cited studies in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles showing that most people of color do not know they have AIDS until they show up at emergency rooms with opportunistic infections.

"Sean, I am a black gay man," responded Cornelius Baker, director of public policy for the National Association of People with AIDS. "And I have to tell you, this test will be of no use to my community. It will certainly not be of any use to the increasingly poor, black and Latina women who are at risk for HIV and who are not going to walk into a pharmacy and pay \$30 for this test. So stop pimping them."



PHOTO BY BOB ROEHR

Shepherd Smith

"This test has the potential for undermining our public health," continued Baker. "It has the potential for undermining directing the resources to the communities where we know [the needs] are most great."

Baker acknowledged the test may have some limited value, but questioned how it would affect our "ability to track and monitor the epidemic" and with that, how federal money is disbursed to meet needs.

Shepherd Smith fears the tests will generate a lot of business and "the government will then use that as an excuse to reduce the \$110 million now allocated to testing and counseling, with the rationale that it is being done." Smith, executive director of Americans for a Sound AIDS Policy, believes the tests won't be used much in poorer communities "that cannot afford a \$30 to \$50 test. And they are the communities that need our focus right now."

"Why HIV [test kits] and why now?" questioned Chris Portelli, executive director of the National Lesbian and Gay Health Association. "Why don't we have home test kits for leukemia? Breast cancer? A whole array of serious medical diseases? We don't have them because the fear and the misinformation that exists about HIV means big profits and big dollars for corporate America. Especially for the company who can get on the market first with such a kit."

Bob Roehr

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