

Pink elephant frolic

GOP members of Congress and major supporters of Log Cabin Republicans convene in Washington, D.C.

by Bob Roehr

Log Cabin Republicans held its first "Washington Weekend" for about 40 members of the Lincoln Club, the group's major supporters. The event drew an impressive retinue of members of Congress for briefing on issues, and visitors found a warm reception in Congressional offices, where discussion focused on AIDS legislation and funding.

Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, often called the most pro-gay governor in the nation, and openly gay Wisconsin Rep. Steve Gunderson were featured guests at a June 7 kick-off reception. It was held at the Capitol Hill Club, the Republican bastion run by the national party.

Briefings the next morning took place in a hearing room of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. Log Cabin Executive Director Rich Tafel announced that Sen. Mike DeWine (Ohio) had agreed the previous day to become the

58th co-sponsor of a reauthorized Ryan White CARE Act. "That happened because there were six people from all over Ohio" in his office talking with DeWine, Tafel said.

"Much of what we have accomplished [on AIDS] over the last two or three months we really would not have done without the help of Log Cabin," Mark Barnes told the group. He is executive director of AIDS Action Council, the nation's principle AIDS lobbying arm.

"These guys [Log Cabin lobbyists] went to the mat on HOPWA [housing for people with AIDS] and saved almost all of it in a House-Senate conference. The point is," Barnes said, "President Clinton did not save HOPWA, in the end it was Chris Shays [R-Conn.] and Kit Bond [R-Mo.] who saved HOPWA."

Barnes noted the "big change on Nov. 8, which many in the AIDS community...traditionally so identified with the Democratic Party...have not quite understood. They are, in many ways, in denial. Our challenge as a community is in how we respond to that change in a constructive way, to embrace the agenda of change."

Rep. Jim McCrery (La.) spoke from his perspective as a senior member of the Ways and Means committee. He outlined some of the radical changes in tax policy being discussed, acknowledging their preliminary nature and concluded that "we are a long way from getting to where we need to go." He did foresee a new tax code if the Republicans retain control of Congress and win the White House in 1996.

"We cannot continue to sustain 10 to 12 percent annual increases in Medicare and Medicaid," he said. McCrery hoped that Congress would "be honest" with the American public and say, "We cannot afford to take care of every nut and bolt." He saw part of the solution as moving people into managed care. "But we can't, won't and shouldn't move everyone into managed care."

McCrery's mere presence at a gay event was interesting in light of a 1992 cover story by *The Advocate* alleging several homosexual affairs by the then recently married congressman. He de-

nied the reports and, even though redistricting pitted him against another sitting congressman, won re-election by a surprisingly large margin.

Rich Lazio's Long Island district includes the gay enclave of Fire Island. Lazio spoke of increased partisan polarization in the House with surviving Democrats being more urban and liberal than before: "It appears that the conservatives are in control but the reality is that things are much more broadly based." He is one of four leaders of the Tuesday Lunch Bunch, a group (30 to 50 depending on the issue) of moderate Republicans.

Lazio spoke of efforts to reform federal housing from his key position as subcommittee chairman. He criticized local authorities for not effectively using HOPWA funds and promised that "HOPWA will be protected, fenced off and reauthorized" in restructuring the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Sen. Alan Simpson (Wyo.) told the luncheon

audience he didn't think the 1996 Republican Convention would reprise the gay-bashing of 1992. "I still hear people say they did not like at all the tone of what Pat Buchanan said in Houston." He closed by praising the group for "conduct[ing] yourselves with great pride in what I know must be a very difficult situation."

David Boaz provided the red meat at the luncheon. He is the openly gay executive vice president of The Cato Institute, an increasingly influential libertarian think tank.

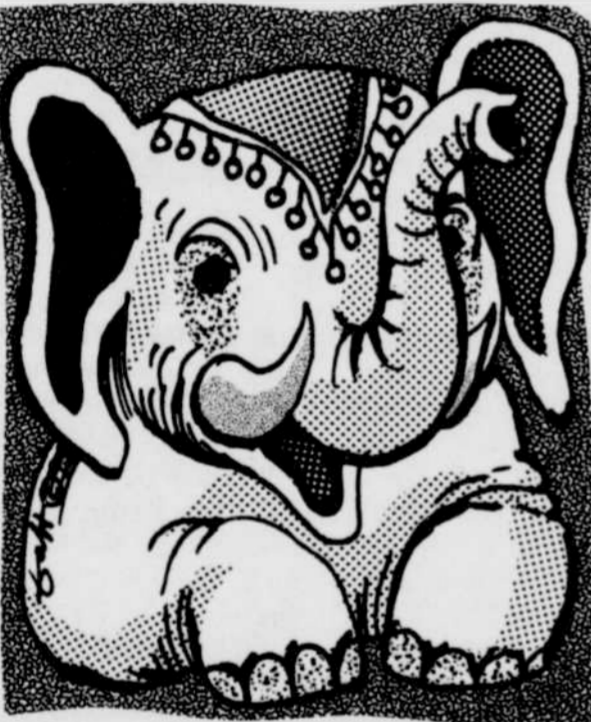
"We ought to be talking about why, in a free society, we have turned something as important as retirement over to the federal government," he said in a blistering attack on Social Security. For gay men and lesbians in particular, "Greater social diversity means that a monopoly bureaucratic system is increasingly outmoded."

He believes one of the major problems the gay community has is that most of its prominent and most widely quoted "leaders" are socialists. "People need to stand up to this notion that the gay leadership wants to define gays as a marginalized class and suggest that their political salvation lies in being allied to the other marginalized classes like welfare recipients and the inner city poor."

Lobbying efforts, which began earlier in the week for many delegations, continued that afternoon. Frank Ricchiazzi, a political appointee of Gov. Pete Wilson to the number-two slot in the 9,000-employee California Department of Motor Vehicles, led representatives from his state to meetings with 10 California Republican congressmen.

"Unbelievably positive, just very supportive," is how he described those sessions. He noted the three openly gay employees working in conservative Dana Rorabacher's office.

"We are helping them understand how to protect their flanks," explained Ricchiazzi. "Because these groups will come in and say, oh, we want you to do this, and we want you to do that, but when it comes to election time, they will turn to every one of these Republicans and say, screw you, I'm supporting the Democrat."



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