

FORECAST

Lavender Predictions '96

by Bob Roehr

My predictions for last year of "benign neglect" of gay issues by the new Republican Congress held true, gay-bashing was about the same as it was the previous few years under Democratic control. The Ryan White CARE Act was reauthorized with some fine tuning, and AIDS funding inched upward.

I goofed on saying Melinda Paras would not survive the year at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and was half right on Roberta Achtenberg leaving the Clinton administration—she left to run for mayor of San Francisco.

So, with a glass of eggnog and some trepidation, I took a squeegee to the old lavender crystal ball and peered into 1996.

ELECTIONS

It's a long time out to predict, but Bill Clinton looks to be the odds-on favorite to win re-election. It proves the adage "You can't beat someone with no one." Look for Clinton to get about the same number of votes as last time. Two wild cards are the economy—will it start to slide downhill?—and body bags from Bosnia and Haiti. Either could sink him.

Steve Michael's quixotic challenge to Clinton on AIDS in the Democratic primaries could cause a lot more worries than White House politicians imagine. The press isn't going to have much to write about this primary season; Michael's principled stand could give him ink—and protest voters a place to make a statement.

Bob Dole leads the Republican pack, and it is his race to lose. There will be surprises in New Hampshire and elsewhere, probably a kinder, gentler Steve Forbes replacing the vitriolic Pat Buchanan as the protest vote of choice for Republicans. But it seems the only thing that could deny Dole the nomination is his own health. His choice of a running mate may be the difference between winning and losing in November. If he chooses someone who can generate his own excitement—chiefly Colin Powell—then he might be able to upset Clinton.

Ironically enough, a Dole presidency would likely include the first openly gay Cabinet secretary—retiring Rep. Steve Gunderson at either Agriculture or possibly Education.

Republicans will retain control of the Senate, picking up a few seats but not the 60 necessary to close off filibusters. In North Carolina, Jesse Helms will again face a tight race, and if the Democrats again nominate Harvey Gantt, Helms will eke out a tight win.

One of the most interesting races will be in Massachusetts, where very pro-gay Democratic in-

cumbent John Kerry is being challenged by Republican William Weld, called by many the most pro-gay governor in the nation. Too bad one of them can't be elected from another state, say North Carolina.

Newt Gingrich will remain as speaker of the House, as Republicans pad their margin of control by a handful of seats. That is due chiefly to the number of Democrats retiring, especially in the South, and the likely pickup Republicans will make in those open seats.

Barney Frank will be the only openly gay legislator elected to the 105th Congress.

AIDS

The predominate action of 1995 was moving promising lab research through trials and regulatory approval.

This year will see the usual number of research "breakthrough" announcements—some will pan out in the long run and others won't. Most of the news from the labs will take several more years to move from discovery to clinical use.

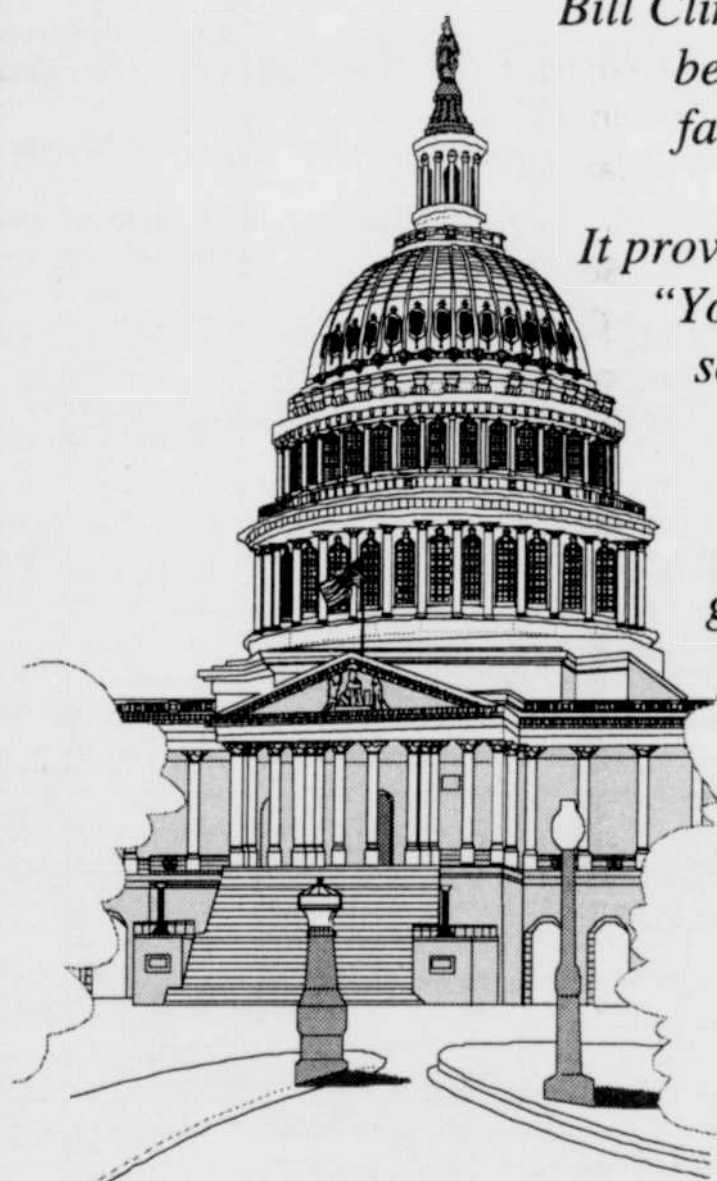
The average person with AIDS comes front and center this year, with widespread availability of newly approved drugs such as 3TC and protease inhibitors, which now become part of the mix of front-line treatment for AIDS.

Money will become the key issue. These expensive new medications will push many people with AIDS with private health insurance up to their drug and/or policy caps. AIDS Drug

Assistance Programs for people without resources could easily face demands totaling more than \$1 billion for the year. And if research shows, as seems likely, that these medications are beneficial for people infected with HIV long before they suffer an AIDS-defining infection, then the demand for ADAP money could increase several-fold. The funding just isn't there.

The Senate will take up modest reform of the Food and Drug Administration early in the year. Its draft legislation has the support of most AIDS activists. The House seems more intent upon pushing for radical reform that would rely less upon government regulation and more upon market forces. Look for the Senate to win most of its points.

Reauthorization of the National Institutes of Health may prove to be a more contentious matter, with AIDS, genetic research, and a replay of battles over fetal-tissue research at its center. The Office of AIDS Research was created as an "institute without walls" to coordinate AIDS research within the separate entities of the NIH. It has had mixed success, in large part because of the autonomy of institute directors.



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The Levine Group is making the first evaluation of all NIH-sponsored AIDS research. Its report is due out in late January. It is likely to show deficien-

cies in many areas, parallel to those reported in 1995 at the National Cancer Institute, which has the largest single AIDS-research budget at NIH. That could stimulate public debate on whether to retain the current "institute without walls" character of OAR or consolidate those programs under a separate, newly created Institute of AIDS.

The Clinton White House will continue to be a virtual nonplayer in these debates.

THE COURTS

The U.S. Supreme Court will return a verdict favorable to lesbians and gay men on the Colorado Amendment 2 case. But the opinions are likely to be divided and leave muddy the issue of initiative challenges to rights of gay men and lesbians. The earlier the decision comes down, the more positive it is likely to be for the community and the more it is likely to impact other cases working their way through the system.

The military policy of "don't ask, don't tell" is on appeal in two different federal circuit courts. The decision on *Thomason vs. Perry* is expected to come out of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., in late winter. There is a reasonable chance it will be favorable.

The second case, *Able vs. Perry*, being decided in New York, was favorable to lesbians and gay men in the first round. That is likely to be sustained by the three-member panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which heard the case in December. The full circuit will probably not accept an appeal.

That sets up the likelihood of a spring appeal to the Supreme Court. If both circuits rule in favor of allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly, the court may surprise people by declining to hear the appeals. It would be forced to take the appeals if the courts differ.

Oral arguments would likely be scheduled for the fall. That would put the issue in the public spotlight just before Election Day. It is not what the Clinton administration wants, as the president's flip-flops on the issue have dismayed both conservative opponents and sexual minority supporters.

Incremental gains will continue to be made in state courts in terms of dismantling sodomy statutes and securing parental and partnership rights for lesbians and gay men. Progress will be made on the Hawaii gay marriage case, though final resolution at the state level will not come until 1997.

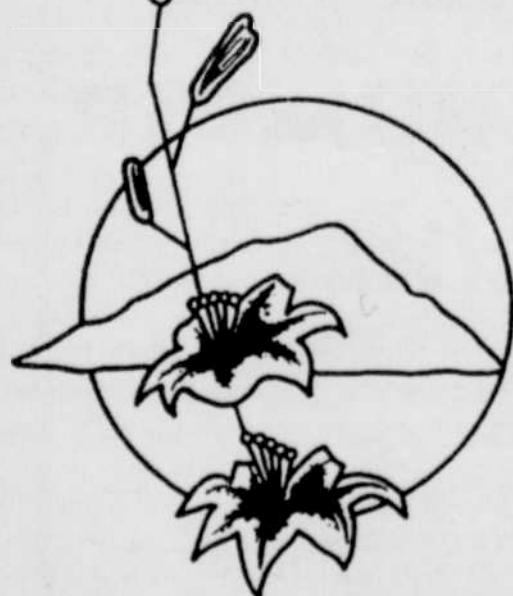
Activists will use the time to educate the public and build alliances for the inevitable battles that will follow.

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