

Gay and lesbian issues remain a hot item for the right wing, without a doubt," says Deanna Duby, director of education policy for People for the American Way, a Washington, D.C.-based organization "committed to fighting the political agenda of the radical right and building a new progressive movement in America."

The 16-year-old nonpartisan group, which boasts 300,000 members nationwide, recently released its third annual report, entitled "Hostile Climate 1995: A State by State Report on Anti-Gay Activity."

"Anti-gay activity is occurring across the country; no one region is more affected than another," says Duby, adding that she anticipates an escalation in anti-gay activity with same-sex marriages teetering on the brink of the public consciousness. "It may get rougher out there."

Beginning with the November 1994 elections and running through 1995, PFAW researchers documented 180 incidents of anti-gay activity in 43 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico—the highest number since the report was first published. Incidents fall into one of several categories: statewide or local ballot measures, federal or state legislative battles, local ordinances, court decisions, education-related activity, arts censorship and miscellaneous activities.

Duby says that unlike other groups that may, for example, gather hate crime information, PFAW focused on activities that institutionalize the hostility that many gay men and lesbians experience in their daily lives. The group maintains that its findings provide "evidence that the hatred and contempt that many individuals feel for lesbians and gay men has been institutionalized at the highest level of government, in corporations, organizations and even religious denominations."

"We saw an upswing in anti-gay incidents with the conservative takeover of Congress in November 1994," she says.

Since then, crude remarks toward sexual minorities have been openly expressed by federal lawmakers. For example, House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas) referred to openly gay Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) as "Barney Fag" during a radio interview. Rep. Randy Cunningham (R-Calif.), meanwhile, called gay people "homos" during a debate on the House floor.

In January, Congress bowed to the request of the Rev. Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition and held anti-gay hearings, purportedly about "Parents, Schools and Values."

PFAW charges that it was simply a fulfillment of a promise given to Sheldon by House Speaker Newt Gingrich to hold a hearing on the "promotion of homosexuality in the public schools."

PFAW also says the current crop of Republican presidential candidates, all of whom have publicly attacked equal rights for gay and lesbian citizens, is giving the anti-gay policy positions advocated by groups such as the Christian Coalition a dangerous

Surprised? No...

National group reports on institutionalized "hate crimes": anti-gay incidents are on the upswing

by Inga Sorensen

level of legitimacy.

In mid-February, GOP presidential candidates campaigning in Iowa attended a rally against equal marriage rights for same-sex couples. Pat Buchanan, Sen. Phil Gramm, who has since dropped out of the race, and Alan Keyes, who is backed by Oregon Citizens Alliance Chairman Lon Mabon, spoke at that gathering.

Other GOP presidential contenders, including Lamar Alexander, Bob Dornan and Steve Forbes signed on to the anti-gay "Marriage Protection Resolution."

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, considered the Republican front-runner, sent a letter to rally organizers endorsing their resolution but told them it didn't go far enough. Earlier in the campaign Dole also returned a contribution made by the Log Cabin Republicans, a gay and lesbian group.

Jay Sekulow, lead attorney for the Christian Coalition legal arm, the American Center for Law and Justice, was a featured speaker at the rally. He reportedly told supporters that his group is spearheading a drive to put anti-gay marriage bills in all 50 state legislatures.

"Senator Dole, in particular, has gained much political capital attacking the entertainment industry for promoting violence," says PFAW President Tom Andrews. "If in fact Senator Dole and other political leaders believe that violent language and images beget real violence, then it is time for them to condemn in no uncertain terms the words of Pat



Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, considered the Republican front-runner, sent a letter to organizers of a rally against equal rights for same-sex couples. He told them he endorsed their "Marriage Protection Resolution" but also told them it didn't go far enough.

Robertson, Reverend Lou Sheldon, and Reverend Jerry Falwell, who frequently vilify gay men and lesbians. Pat Robertson has likened homosexuals to Nazis, and Reverend Sheldon has called them "the enemy." Isn't it conceivable that such portrayals lead to the upswing in anti-gay incidents?"

According to PFAW, anti-gay activity continues to bubble up throughout the Pacific Northwest. The group cites the OCA's third and current attempt to pass a statewide anti-gay ballot initiative in Oregon.

The OCA has drafted eight anti-gay initiatives for 1995-96; titles and petition sheets for four initiatives have been approved by the state, and one has been selected by the OCA for signature gathering.

Additionally, the report highlights the failure of the leadership in the GOP-dominated Oregon House this past session to follow through on its promise to consider a bill that would have pro-

hibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, public transportation and real estate transactions.

Bill proponents say House leaders promised the measure would receive a hearing if advocates could prove they had the 31 votes. They maintained they did, but were then told that all "controversial" bills must have majority support from the GOP caucus, a requirement that ensured the measure's demise.

In Washington state, meanwhile, anti-gay organizations unsuccessfully attempted to gather enough

signatures for two statewide initiatives that would have barred civil rights protections based on sexual orientation, and would have prohibited lesbians and gay men from becoming foster or adoptive parents.

PFAW noted the sobering findings of the second Safe Schools Coalition report, which documented 27 incidents of harassment and violence perpetrated against gay and lesbian youth in Washington's public schools during 1994 and 1995. The incidents included six gang rapes, six other sexual assaults, five physical assaults, and various verbal attacks. The coalition documents such violence in an effort to effect changes in school policies and programs to make schools safer for sexual minority youth.

Also in Washington, a major controversy ensued when Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer was invited to speak during an optional assembly at Olympia High School in honor of Women's History Month. Cammermeyer is a decorated Vietnam War veteran who was discharged from the military for stating that she is a lesbian. Following her widely publicized legal battle, Cammermeyer was reinstated to the Washington National Guard.

PFAW says that when word went out about Cammermeyer's invite, education officials were deluged with angry letters and phone calls. One source estimates that 300 people turned out for a school board meeting to discuss the issue.

"It's not an appropriate thing for a school assembly," said one student. "[She's] going to have to mention that she is a lesbian. It's a smack in the face of God to claim you are a homosexual."

The board took no action, and the assembly proceeded as planned, though more than 250 students were absent from school that day—approximately 150 more than usual.

PFAW also says attacks on educational materials with lesbian and gay themes are up significantly from previous years. It says attempts to censor accurate and inclusive materials that address homosexuality remain a major problem in schools and libraries nationwide.

And then there is the case of Spokane County Coroner Dexter Amend, who blamed homosexuality for a 9-year-old girl's rape and murder because her autopsy revealed that she had been sodomized for years before her death.

"She'd been sodomized over and over, and sodomy is a homosexual act," said Amend, who is an elected official. "To have everybody think homosexuality is OK is a bunch of baloney. I don't care what the political ramifications are on this. It's a horrible, unbelievable thing that this child went through, and the [homosexuals] destroyed her life."

"As offensive as this is, we're not surprised by [our] findings," says Duby. "Perhaps what is most disturbing, however, is that anti-gay activities are occurring at all levels of government and society. They are not isolated incidents—even presidential candidates are jumping into the act. That's extremely frightening."

MICHELLE ABDILL
& ROXANNE ELLIS
May they not be forgotten

May each and every one of us take
a little of their spirit and carry on
in their place, in their name, with
their passion

Everyone counts—get active
Make that move!



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