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national news

Youth and AIDS

"Youth and HIV/AIDS: An American Agenda" is the title of a report issued March 5 by the White House Office of AIDS Policy. President Clinton requested that Patsy Fleming undertake the study when he appointed her as AIDS policy coordinator in late 1994.

Community reaction to the publication has been mixed.

"This report is neither a set of new recommendations nor a set of new ideas," read the opening lines of the executive summary. "It is intended as a catalyst of change in the way Americans view HIV and AIDS to the next generation."

Troy Petenbrink, spokesman for the National Association of People with AIDS, said, "They did good in terms of what they produced...but a report is just a report."

He pointed to a 1993 report by the National Commission on AIDS which covered much of the same ground.

"What is their commitment to seeing [that] the report is followed through on?" he asked. "When they talk about open and honest education, then they turn around and fire Joycelyn Elders, you have to wonder how committed are they to open, honest education."

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Center was shocked that the report "completely ignores gay and bisexual youth in its list of action steps."

"Sixty-three percent of the reported AIDS cases among men under 25 are from unsafe sex with other men," noted the center's executive director Lorri L. Jean. She said the recommendations "turn a blind eye to gay and bisexual youth."

"It is not enough to make recommendations that talk about youth in general. Gay and bisexual youth are disproportionately affected by HIV, and any action to curb the growing infection rate must not only mention them, it must include programs tailored to them."

Jay Coburn, lobbyist with the AIDS Action Council, pointed out "there are also not specific recommendations for youth of color and young women."

He thinks it "makes some sense" that the recommendations don't target specific groups, because the demographics of the epidemic differ from geographic community to community. He is encouraged by "the intensive involvement of young people in the formulation of this report."

Bob Roehr

LPGA golfer comes out

The Ladies Professional Golf Association has its first out lesbian player. Muffin Spencer-Devlin, 42, told *Sports Illustrated* that she plans to marry her lover, musician/composer Lynda Roth, in May.

"Coming out is like an incredibly huge weight being lifted from my shoulders," Spencer-Devlin said. "No more living in the shadows. No more lies."

"Could you imagine me hugging and kissing my woman lover at the conclusion of my last tournament win? Well, [that's what you'll see] at my next one."

Spencer-Devlin said she has no intention of becoming an LPGA lesbian spokeswoman.

"I'm not anybody's mouthpiece," she said.

LPGA President Vicki Ferguson said, "Not...every player will be thrilled about [the coming out], but we're a family and we respect each other."

"I applaud Muffin," she said.

LPGA Commissioner Jim Ritts said: "I don't have any concerns about this. I know there are still individuals who have problems with diversity, but we've come so far as a society that I don't see this as a topic that really moves people."

Spencer-Devlin has won three LPGA tournaments in her 18 years on tour.

Rex Wockner



Keith Meinhold and Zoe Dunning

Meinhold retires from Navy

Keith Meinhold, the only person to successfully challenge in court the old ban on gay men and lesbians in the military and remain on active duty, retired from the Navy on March 27. He ended his 16-year military career by deciding to take a package of early retirement benefits.

"My emotions and my heart say to stay in the Navy, but my head says, 'You're 33 years old and it's time to start a second career,'" Meinhold said.

He will make a fund-raising tour to benefit the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network before settling into a new life. In the past he indicated some interest in attending law school and also in going into politics.

Bob Roehr

Court strikes down 'don't ask, don't tell'

Judge Sandra Brown Armstrong of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the "new" military ban on gay men and lesbians in a decision issued March 29. The opinion mirrors one issued last year in the *Able* case in New York.

This challenge was brought by California Army National Guard Lt. Andrew Holmes, who wrote a letter to his commander stating, "As a matter of conscience, honesty and pride, I am compelled to inform you that I am gay."

He was subsequently discharged.

Armstrong said the law and regulations implementing "don't ask, don't tell" "target and punish service members who simply acknowledge who they are.... That is impermissible under our Constitution."

She rejected government arguments that said the ban was necessary to maintain good order and discipline in the service, calling it a thinly veiled attempt to justify prejudice. She ordered that Holmes be reinstated.

The Clinton administration has a policy of appealing these decisions for review by a higher court, in this case, a three-member panel of the 9th Circuit. That is the same circuit that earlier ruled for Meinhold.

Bob Roehr

Back at the Pentagon

The Department of Defense remains the only Cabinet-level office that has not issued a policy statement prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation among its civilian employees.

Three years ago, rather than issue a government-wide executive order implementing that policy, President Clinton asked all departments and agencies to adopt it as part of their individual regulations.

The Navy and Coast Guard have issued such statements, but the other services have not. And so gay and lesbian civilian workers at the largest federal employer remain without protection.

Bob Roehr