

Jilted

Clinton says he would sign the right wing's Defense of Marriage Act

by Bob Roehr

The Defense of Marriage Act introduced to Congress by Rep. Bob Barr (R-Georgia) and Sen. Don Nickles (R-Oklahoma) with some bipartisan support is a pre-emptive move by religious conservatives to the likely legalization of same-sex marriage by the Hawaii court system. Such marriages would be valid in the other 49 states through what is known as the "full faith and credit clause" of Article 4 of the U.S. Constitution.

Lou Sheldon and his Traditional Values Coalition took the lead in drafting model legislation to deny recognition of same-sex marriages. His supporters have introduced this model in 34 states since the first of the year and have gotten it passed in about a dozen.

The federal version of DOMA would exempt states from having to recognize same-sex marriages, but it would not preclude them from doing so. It would define marriage as the "legal union of one man and one woman" for federal purposes of taxation, social services and other programs, thereby denying many of the legal benefits of marriage to gay men and lesbians.

"For more than 200 years, Congress has left the business of granting marriage licenses to the states," said Matt Coles, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project. "That tradition should not be disturbed. This bill throws it on the trash heap for no reason other than to belittle the relationships of lesbian and gay citizens."

Evan Wolfson, director of the Marriage Project at the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, called DOMA "a political attack bill intended to divert the public during an election year while attacking gay people. It uses the most radical, unprecedented, unconstitutional proposal to do that."

He compared it to state laws that prohibited interracial marriage, saying, "Couples were arrested for marrying the 'wrong' person in the 'wrong' state." Those laws were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1967.

Wolfson urged the community to contact both Congress and the White House: "Let's stop treating this like a defeat, it's a bill. We have to focus on defeating this bill and stop talking about it as if it is an inevitability. It is not."

Rich Tafel, executive director of Log Cabin Republicans said, "[It is] the height of hypocrisy to call for the devolution of power to the states and then propose this type of federal legislation." He predicted that "the real losers here will be Republican moderates in close races" unfairly burdened with a "gay-bashing image."

President Clinton declared himself in opposition to same-sex marriage at a May 23 news conference in Milwaukee: "This has always been my position on gay marriage. It was my position in '92. I can't change my position on that. I have no intention of it."

White House spokesman Mike McCurry had said the previous day, "The president would sign that bill [the Defense of Marriage Act] if it is presented to him as it is currently written." The

statement came after days of waffling and hoping the issue would just go away.

Clinton averred, "The only legal effect of the bill is to make it clear that states can deny recognition of gay marriage that occurred in other states. And if that's all it does, then I will sign it."

Many argue that that would violate the "full faith and credit clause" of the Constitution.

McCurry said the Justice Department reviewed the recent Supreme Court decision on Amendment 2 for implications to the Marriage Act. He concluded, "It does not change our view that it is constitutional."

Reaction from the lesbian and gay community varied only in its degree of negativity.

First friend David Mixner, the Californian who raised millions of gay dollars for Clinton's campaign in 1992, called the president's decision "nauseating and appalling...an act of political cowardice."

He told *The New York Times*: "Both Harry Truman and JFK were reluctantly drawn into the civil rights battle, but when they had to choose between political expediency and the moral high ground, both chose the moral high ground. Regrettably, this president has not."

Andrew Sullivan, editor of *The New Republic* and a long-time public advocate of gay marriage, said that Clinton "would rather sign this unconstitutional bill than have this debate continue."

"You can be against same-sex marriage and still be against this bill. But he isn't leaving anything to chance," said Sullivan. "If the president appears to be a completely cynical individual who has no principles, then it's going to hurt him politically."

Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign, called the decision "a capitulation to religious political extremists.... It is deeply disappointing that the president has chosen the politically expedient course of action."

At the same time, she continued to bash Republicans and yet defend the president for holding the same position. Birch charged, "This bill is a ploy by the foundering 'Dole for President' campaign to drive a wedge between the gay community and President Clinton."

In February the Human Rights Campaign endorsed Clinton for re-election. The early endorsement prompted gay administration insider Bob Hattoy to label the group the Human Rights Collaborators.

But Clinton's endorsement of DOMA proved to be too much for San Francisco supporters of HRC. Russ Roeca, co-chair of the June 15 fundraising dinner in that city, disinvited White House aide George Stephanopoulos, the scheduled keynote speaker for the event.

"This is a time to fortify the community," Roeca said. "We need voices of strength and hope, and at the moment, George Stephanopoulos is neither."

Seattle City Councilwoman Tina Podlodowski resigned as Washington state co-chair of the Clinton re-election campaign, saying, "I don't expect we'll always agree, but he didn't need to poke me in the eye."



Ragingly Yours
Fridays 5-6pm
KPSU 1450 AM

High Level Performance



In today's hot market, you need a Realtor who is experienced, efficient and quick. Whether buying or selling — I promise to put on my running shoes for you.

Scott
Bridgetown Realty

H — 234-1887
W — 287-9370

HIV UNIVERSITY

June

conference


June 29th
10 am to 4 pm
Free Admission

Resources
Medical Basics
Survival Skills
Emanuel Hospital
Lorenzen Conference Center
301 N. Graham
Busline #4, #40, #41

Join us for an all day conference created for people living with and affected by HIV. From local resources to protease inhibitors, support is here for you!

Register Now!
HIV University
503.223.5907
x111
Evergreen
AIDS Response
360.735.9170

Transportation and accommodations for out of town guests may be available for people living with HIV, call Laura at the PAL Program 223-5907 x116.



TRAVEL AGENTS INTERNATIONAL®

CORPORATE
LEISURE
DOMESTIC
INTERNATIONAL

"Serving Our Community ... By Meeting Your Needs"

Designated Agency for
Team Portland to Gay Games IV

Designated National Agency to
Lavender Law Convention

Designated National Agency for
Dignity Convention

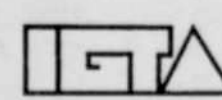

Official Agency for **NW Women's Show**

Official Sponsor **Rose City Softball Assn.**

Bonus Dollars issued for all Travel

HIV Community Support Program
through donated **Bonus Dollars**

Coming August 1998 **GAY GAMES V**
Call for details!

917 SW Washington
Portland, Oregon
503-223-1100 • 800-357-3194