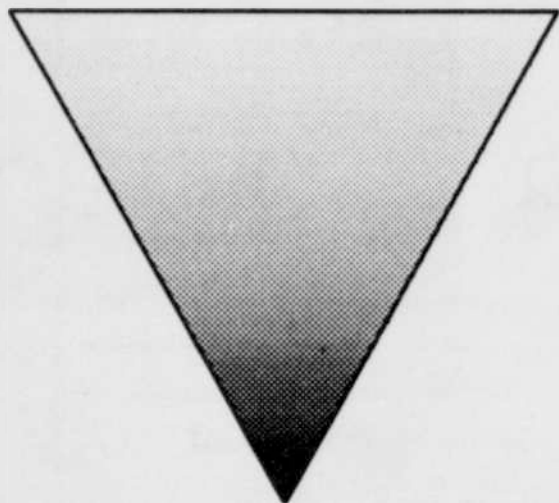


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## national news

### Gay, by the way

Republican U.S. representative from Arizona comes out  
after being outed and defends his pro-DOMA vote

by Bob Roehr

**C**ongressman Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.) acknowledged that he is gay in a statement issued Aug. 1. That action was prompted in part by a "Call to Conscience" ad in the July 26 *Washington Blade* that was directed at closeted members of Congress regarding their votes on the Defense of Marriage Act and a July 27 "outing" of Kolbe by Kurt Wolfe on WBAI radio in New York.

In the statement Kolbe defended his vote for DOMA: "If the citizens of Hawaii believe it to be in their public interest to permit same-sex marriage, they should be permitted to do so. By the same token, other states—as Arizona has done—should be allowed to define marriage differently and not be required to accept the definition adopted by others."

Arizona recently passed a law promoted by Christian conservatives that defines marriage as between one man and one woman.

Kolbe criticized those "who have decided that their disagreement with this particular vote warrants their making public information about my private life—information they may have heard second- or thirdhand about my sexual orientation."

"That I am a gay person has never affected the way that I legislate. The fact that I am gay has never, nor will it ever, change my commitment to represent all of the people of Arizona's 5th District."

Kolbe's statement asserting his privacy and decrying pressure from activists reflects both personal beliefs and sound politics. It helps downplay the perceptions of being seen as a "gay activist" by voters. But in fact the outing seems to have provided the opportunity he was looking for. For the past three or four months he had discussed with openly gay Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Wisc.) and Gunderson's life partner Rob Morris how to publicly break that news.

"Jim wanted to come out," says Morris. "He just couldn't possibly fathom what would be the right way to do it. For anybody doing this on such a public scale it is always a difficult leap."

Arizona Republicans rallied behind Kolbe. Sen. John McCain, who had been a possible vice presidential running mate with Bob Dole, issued a strong personal statement of support. He called the representative's legislative record "genuinely exceptional" and said that the people of the 5th District "could have no more able and decent advocate than Jim Kolbe."

"Jim, although he is a public servant, retains the right to some privacy in his personal life," said McCain. "Jim deserves, and I hope he will receive from all of us, the same courtesy and decency with which he has always treated us."

Human Rights Campaign political director Daniel Zingale said the group "applaud[s] his

action and look[s] forward to continuing to work with him on issues of mutual concern." HRC rated Kolbe's votes as a 43 in 1993 and a 60 in 1994, the most recent years for which it rated legislators.

"The most effective way to educate Republican members of Congress is to have effective, intelligent and respected colleagues who are openly gay," said David Greer, spokesman for Log Cabin Republicans. "We are sure that by his very presence on the Hill, Jim Kolbe will continue to dispel myths and stereotypes."

Log Cabin rated him at 92 for the 1995 session of Congress. It cited his co-sponsorship of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, the Ryan White CARE Act, and his support of AIDS funding.

David Blais, administrative director of the

Arizona Human Rights Fund, was "really pleased that Kolbe has taken this step in the coming out process." He realizes that "some people are going to give Kolbe a lot of flak if he doesn't vote 100 percent on our issues." Blais said he didn't think that coming out would significantly affect Kolbe's re-election.

The queen of political outing, Michael Petrelis, was stunned, saying, "Oh my god. I think this is great." He wasted no time offering a suggestion: "I think it is time to form a Congressional gay and lesbian caucus."

But he asked, "Just a few weeks ago he was voting the wrong way [on DOMA]. What's the process now, do we forgive him? Because Kolbe becomes an instant gay leader."

Kolbe, 54, graduated from Northwestern University and holds an MBA from Stanford. He was first elected to the Arizona state senate in 1976. He lost his first race in 1982 for the U.S. House of Representatives district that encompasses most of Tucson and southern Arizona. But he came back to win in 1984 by 6,204 votes and has won re-election five times, often by margins of 2-to-1 or more.

He is one of the more senior members of the appropriations and budget committees and has made free trade and local environmental issues the focus of his work. His record is that of a Republican moderate who embraces the "big tent" concept of the party.

Despite strong popularity among his colleagues and voters, Kolbe passed up opportunities to run for open seats for governor in 1990 and for senator in 1994. He also lost a 1994 bid for a House leadership position, the Republican Conference, to a more conservative member. Some have speculated that his being gay and closeted were factors in those decisions.

The rumor mill continues to churn about another Republican congressman coming out back in his home district during the August recess. If that happens it will raise the gay caucus to five—two Democrats and three Republicans.



Jim Kolbe

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HER UNSHEATHED  
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