

Nine arrested protesting DOMA

The gay and lesbian community is rising to protest passage of the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act. The response is coming from individuals and organizations usually not heard from, while leaders of the traditional political organizations are often remaining in their offices.

The Rev. Mel White and eight supporters were arrested in front of the White House on Sept. 13 while urging President Clinton to change his mind and veto DOMA.

"One of the reasons I am here is because of David Mixner," said White. "He reminded me of the words of Gandhi: 'If they ask you to postpone justice, and you do it, they will only ask you to postpone it again.'"

White began a fast and vigil at the Capitol building on Sept. 1 in an attempt to influence the Senate vote. After that, he moved his vigil to



Rev. Mel White

Lafayette Park, across from the White House. He had planned to continue until Clinton either signed or vetoed the bill. But plans changed when the timeline became muddied. Congress may not actually transmit the bill to the White House for some time, perhaps weeks. The president then has 10 working days in which to take action.

"We thought it would be better to make our statement now than to stand here and watch our physical and mental health go down the tubes while we waited," said White. "We don't need martyrs, we need workers."

Steve Michael of ACT UP was among those arrested.

"There comes a time when a president should show some courage. Bill Clinton is sufficiently ahead in the polls where he can show some courage. Congress may even be out of session by then [so a veto could not be overridden]," Michael said.

Christian Coalition, DOMA target of D.C. rally

Lesbians and gay men rallied on Sept. 14 in Washington, D.C., against the Christian Coalition and the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act. "Pride, Faith, and Anger" brought together the communities of faith, PFLAG, the Lesbian Avengers and the sexual minority youth group SMYAL. The Washington Post reported 600 protesters. It was the largest, most spirited action in the community in recent years.

"We take pride in ourselves and in the unity within our richly diverse neighborhood," said organizer Frank Asher. "We make it clear that the Christian Coalition does not speak for all people of faith. We take anger at the injustice shown towards us."

The group assembled at Dupont Circle.

"We are going to make it very visible to the

Christian Coalition that we are not what they say we are," said Asher, quickly adding, "Well, some of us might be."

Perhaps he was referring to the Lesbian Avengers, one of whose members was dressed as Christ—with a loincloth, a crown of thorns and trickles of painted blood. Rainbow triangle pasties covered each nipple. She carried a 6-foot wooden cross from which hung a poster with the word "Dyke."

At the other end of the spectrum was the elderly, diminutive Sister Mariah, dressed in her habit.

"We are taught not to judge," she said. She had taken her vows as a woman who had been raised a Baptist, married and widowed.

The group was led by "the DOMA 9," those arrested the previous day at the White House for protesting DOMA and urging President Clinton to veto the bill. It was led by the Rev. Mel White, Justice Minister for the Metropolitan Community Church.

The protesters marched up Connecticut Avenue to the Washington Hilton, where the Christian Coalition was holding its annual "Road to Victory" convention. "Anti-lesbian, anti-gay, born-again bigots go away," "Separate church and state," were two of the more popular chants.

At the hotel they gathered on one side of the street, shouting "Have no fear, Jesus loves us when we're queer."

A bevy of Coalition members on the opposite sidewalk responded with "God made Eve, not Steve."

Last year the Human Rights Campaign rented a meeting room at the hotel, and executive director Elizabeth Birch gave a speech to try to open a dialogue with the Coalition and begin to break down stereotypes and hate. This year HRC was absent both inside and outside the building.

Protests of DOMA cross the nation

In San Francisco, 60 people rallied the evening of Friday, Sept. 13, at Harvey Milk Plaza. Tommi Avicelli Mecca hosted the event, which featured a "rice toss"—the traditional symbolic act of good luck and fertility at weddings—in blessing the assembled couples and in protest of DOMA. Organizer Michael Petrelis urged people to write President Clinton urging him to veto DOMA, and include rice in their letters.



Seattle activists also used the rice-toss idea and implemented it first with a demo on Thursday. It drew 30 people and good TV coverage. Organizer Jeff Harris condemned liberal Senator Patty Murray for her vote: "A friend does not betray friends by voting for a bill whose only purpose is to encode as federal law second-class citizenship for lesbians and gays."



The rector of an Episcopal Church in Providence, R.I., Jan Nunley, said she would continue to bless the Christian relationships of couples of any gender. But she is "no longer going to sign marriage licenses or act in any way as an agent of the state for mixed-gender couples until same-gender couples are respected on an equal footing in both federal and state law."

"As a priest of Christ's Church, I will not act as a legal representative of government in perpetuating policies that are discriminatory, immoral and unjust. And as a citizen, I must protest when my partner and I are denied the equal protection of the laws guaranteed to us in the Constitution."

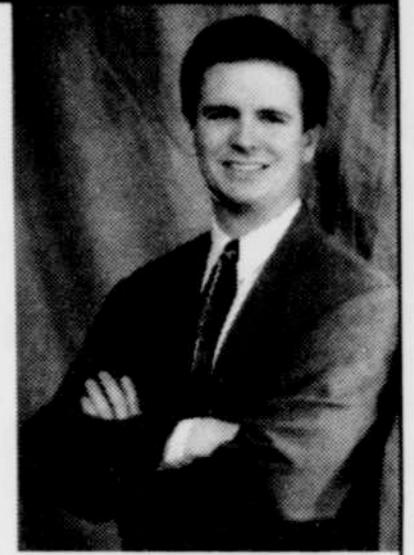
Nunley sees this as "an opportunity to teach all couples about the covenantal nature of Christian marriage, which transcends the contractual aspects of a legal relationship."

Reported by Bob Roehr

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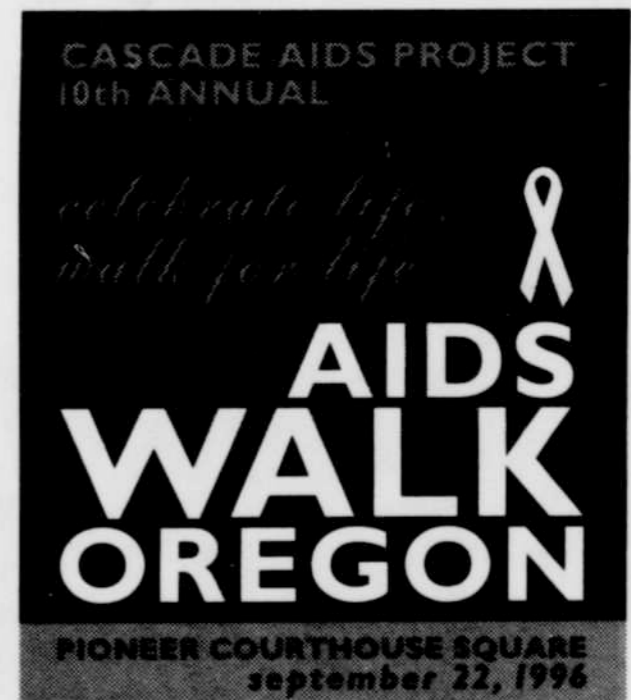


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