

FORECAST

The old lavender crystal ball saw the outline of things pretty clearly a year ago, particularly for election day. It called the easy ones of Clinton's victory and Dole as the Republican nominee, but also the less homophobic tone of the Republican Party and the surprise emergence of Steve Forbes with more protest votes than Pat Buchanan. Congress did not change substantively, and Jesse Helms was re-elected as predicted.

So I ventured deep into the closet to retrieve that dusty orb and, fortified with a glass of holiday cheer and goodwill toward all, looked anxiously into the future. And let me tell you, it's scary.

APPOINTMENTS

Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration: This might be Clinton's most important appointment for gay men and lesbians. Retiring Commissioner David Kessler played a unique role during the past six years in speeding up approval of HIV drugs. His succes-



sor will continue to face that issue plus the emerging one of microbicides, topical agents that can kill infectious diseases. Since their primary use is sexual, this raises the specter of anal and oral sex, and the potential for controversy from the theatrical right. It could be a rocky ride.

AIDS czar: Clinton interest in the subject continues to fade, but he seems unwilling to take the heat for folding the position into the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Look for another no-name bureaucrat with no independent voice or standing to be named, eventually, to the position.

Surgeon general: One observer has suggested that the post, vacant for the past two years, might remain so for four more. It's possible, given the administration's penchant for avoiding controversy. But a more likely outcome is a bland nominee once all other positions have been filled.

White House gay liaison: The post has been vacant since summer, when Richard Socarides officially moved to the re-election campaign. He may be back, or the title may be abolished as a budgetary move—the odds are about 50-50. If the latter option, look for someone in Vice President Gore's office to become the unofficial link to the community, after all, our money and votes are important in Democratic presidential primaries.

AIDS TREATMENT

Look for increased talk of integrase inhibitors, a new family of HIV drugs that attacks the virus at a different point in its life cycle.

Treatment activists will focus on the Glaxo nucleoside analogue known as "1592," now in initial clinical trials. Some believe it is a powerful successor to AZT and accuse the company of delaying it to protect the existing cash cow.

The FDA should grant accelerated approval to two or possibly three additional HIV drugs during the year. But we still will not have a very detailed sense of how to combine and stage their use in

clinical therapy.

The good news of the "Lazarus effect," with people living longer and better lives with the new HIV drugs, will continue. But the euphoria will be leavened by the reality of new and continued problems associated with the disease.

MONEY

AIDS groups have been united in Washington, D.C., to push for federal action. That began to come apart over Ryan White reauthorization and worsened in a scramble at the end of the congressional session by some Title I cities to grab additional money intended for AIDS Drug Assistance Programs run by the states, which pay for medications.

A number of reports will strengthen the case for ADAPs. In January, the National Institutes of Health will issue guidelines on standards of care that will solidify the staged use of combination therapies. In March, a study funded by the Kaiser Foundation will make clear that significantly more money is needed to pay for these therapies.

At the same time, the medicinal miracle is reducing demand for some AIDS services, particularly for late-stage patients. Pressure is growing to reprogram government funds, which some organizations will fight. It could get bloody.

MONEY, PART II

The viatical settlement industry is going through a last hurrah, a flurry of activity by middlemen to make their commissions off of purchasing policies and attracting investors still ignorant of the therapy breakthroughs. Look for AIDS coverage to crash. That could spell trouble for gay publications dependent on viatical advertising for a big chunk of income. It might be softened by the recent spurt of consumer advertising by pharmaceutical companies trying to buy market share for their HIV drugs.

You won't hear much publicly about it, but many AIDS and gay groups have come to count on bequests from the AIDS dead for a signifi-

cant piece of their income. The good news of protease inhibitors has begun to cut into that revenue stream and will do so even more in 1997. Look for a lot of belt-tightening at community organizations.

CONGRESS

A year ago, even its most ardent promoters at the Human Rights Campaign would not have predicted a vote—let alone a near favorable one—on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The tally of 49 supportive senators raises expectations that ENDA will pass the upper chamber this year and move on to the House, where the going will be tougher. Maybe.

HRC has the fragile backing of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights for ENDA and doesn't want to threaten that by changing the language of the bill. Trans folks are left out, and they don't like it. They are back and better organized this year, and may pursue new Labor and Human Resources chairman Sen. Jim Jeffords (R-Vt.) to write more inclusive coverage into the version he introduces.

Robert Dornan's departure and a more pragmatic approach on divisive social issues by the Republican leadership should mean fewer anti-gay amendments to contend with in the House. The fly in that ointment is the departure of openly gay Republican Steve Gunderson, who acted as a trip-wire on lesbian and gay issues, bringing them to Gingrich's attention to defuse them before a vote. That will be greatly missed.

COURTS

Don't look for any resignations from the Supreme Court this year—only a surprise death will give Bill Clinton the chance to make another appointment.

The legal struggle to lift the ban on gay men and lesbians openly serving in the military was stalled when a 2nd Circuit appeals panel sent the *Able* case back to trial court. A favorable verdict should be forthcoming early in the year, and a favorable appeals decision later in the year. The Supreme Court will take the government's appeal and schedule arguments for 1998.

If the fight for the freedom to marry is a war, then Hawaii is the Battle of Stalingrad. It will be long and painfully bloody, but at the end there will be no doubt that the tide of the battle has turned. Victory becomes not a question of if, but of when and at what price. The Hawaii Supreme Court will signal the end of that phase with its positive decision in late 1997.

There will be symbolic losses as many states pass mini-Defense of Marriage Acts refusing to recognize Hawaiian same-sex marriages. But the pace will slow as the public begins to look seriously at the idea of same-sex marriage and finds less and less to fear from it. A big boost will come in the summer when the Episcopal Church, at its triennial general convention, votes to perform same-sex unions.



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LAVENDER PREDICTIONS '97

Another year, another squint into the old crystal ball...

by Bob Roehr