

Can we stop hate?

President Clinton has called for a national meeting to address the issue of bias crime

by Bob Roehr

President Clinton turned to the "hated and division that still exist in our society" on June 7 in his regular Saturday radio address to the nation.

Among the incidents he cited was an anti-gay beating and robbery in Washington, D.C. "Such hate crimes, committed solely because the victims have a different skin color or a different faith or are gays or lesbians, leave deep scars not only on the victims, but on our larger community," he said.

The cornerstone of his effort will be a national conference Nov. 10 which will bring together experts and community leaders to discuss how to ease the problem. Attorney General Janet Reno has begun a review of laws concerning hate crimes.

The president's remarks were not seen as controversial. In 1990, conservative Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) took a leadership role in passing the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, which included lesbians and gay men. President Bush invited gay leaders to a Rose Garden signing ceremony. Earlier this month even that bastion of progressive thinking the Louisiana state Legislature moved a bill which allows for enhanced penalties for hate crimes.

"President Clinton has the ability to set a national tone that hate-violence will not be tolerated," said Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign, in praising the initiative.

Kerry Lobel, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force welcomed "a more vigorous effort to stamp out these acts of violence." The Task Force took the lead in proposing and lobbying for the 1990 federal legislation. It was an important first step in documenting anti-gay violence.

Keith Boykin, executive director of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, said he was grateful for the president's remarks but thought they "broke no new ground." He sees the conference as an opportunity to further educate the U.S. public on hate crimes against all groups, including lesbians and gay men.

"The conference is a sop to the left," said Riki Anne Wilchins, executive director of the transgender political organization GenderPAC. "It's like saying you are for motherhood and against badness; it's a no-brainer."

GenderPAC was among the groups who met with the Justice Department in mid-May to discuss the issue.



Bill Clinton

People need to be "speaking out about hate crimes against people who are gender queer, gender different, or simply gender vulnerable," said Wilchins. "That includes everyone from [murdered transsexual] Brandon Teena, to a straight girl in the East Village with a one-inch hair cut and piercings who goes home to her parents for a visit and gets beat up, to a straight man in prison who is raped. Those are all gender hate crimes."

Legislators butt heads over HIV-drug funding

Congressional budget negotiators refused to accept a proposal by Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and others to add \$68 million to the federal AIDS Drug Assistance Program this year. According to the *Washington Blade*, Republican leaders in the House of Representatives nixed the proposal to tack the amendment onto a fiscal year 1997 supplemental appropriations bill aimed ostensibly at paying for flood relief in North Dakota. (President Clinton recently vetoed the bill because, he said, it had too many unrelated amendments.)

Rep. John Porter (R-Ill.), chair of the House appropriations subcommittee in charge of health-related issues, told the *Blade* he is sympathetic to those calling for an increase in ADAP funding, but said that any increase would need to be specifically requested by the White House.

The Clinton administration, believing the \$167 million already budgeted for the program to be sufficient, declined to make such a request.

Meanwhile, civil rights and AIDS activists were caught off guard by an inconspicuous clause in the Senate version of the same supplemental budget bill, which called for the elimination of a federal purchasing discount program that would allow state and county hospitals to buy AIDS drugs at discounts of up to 60 percent through bulk purchases. The clause was withdrawn after several lawmakers, including openly gay Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.), raised objections.

A kinder, gentler post office

Kathy J. Worthington, an employee of the U.S. Postal Service's Remote Encoding Center in Salt Lake City, has been granted open-ended leave to care for her partner, Sarah Hamblin, who has breast cancer and must undergo chemotherapy treatments every three weeks.

"She has a family member who may be dying and she needs time off," Karen Kolowich, the facility's interim manager, told the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

The Postal Service twice denied Worthington's request for leave without pay. Her attempt to invoke the Family and Medical Leave Act, a 1993 law requiring companies with more than 50 employees to grant up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for workers to care for ailing spouses, children, parents or themselves, was hindered by the fact that she and Hamblin are not spouses in the eyes of the law. The couple has exchanged rings and has shared a committed relationship for five years.

Before embarking on the arduous road of a court battle, Worthington made a last-ditch effort to win over Kolowich, who eventually intervened with the organization's legal department and helped procure the indefinite leave of absence for Worthington.

Postal Service officials emphasize that this leave was not granted under any workplace policy, particularly not under the Family and Medical Leave Act, and say that it does not set a precedent for the rest of the 760,000 postal workers.

Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone



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