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national news

Time for change

NGLTF's annual conference is a time for queer politicians to meet, strategize—and sometimes wrangle

by Rex Wockner

More than 2,000 gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans activists descended on an uncharacteristically chilly and wet San Diego for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 10th Creating Change conference, held Nov. 12-16.

They attended 150 workshops and training sessions as the ongoing battle between gay-male sex activists and so-called neo-cons bubbled around them.

"It's a conference for activists or people who want to know what's happening in the gay community," says NGLTF spokesman Mark Johnson. "They come here, they meet each other, they learn from each other, they share, and they go back hopefully a lot more empowered, a lot stronger, a lot more knowledgeable."

In the cyberized '90s, the conference is also a time to match faces with e-mail addresses, says Don Romesburg, publications manager for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

"Especially since the Internet, we all work so closely together and yet we don't really know each other, and I think it's a way to bring our community closer together as persons instead of names," he says.

NGLTF Executive Director Kerry Lobel adds, "This is the most incredible political gathering and party every year. It is just such a tapestry of every idea and issue that is facing our community."

With an impending court ruling, it's no surprise that same-sex marriage was a hot topic.

"The participants in the marriage workshops were really high-caliber," says Evan Wolfson, director of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund's Marriage Project. "People were very motivated, very into it. [There was a] good exchange of views from state and national perspectives, so I actually am in a really good mood, really enjoyed it, it was very productive."

Wolfson is in a good mood for another reason, too. He and other court watchers speculate that same-sex marriage will soon be legal in Hawaii.

"We're going to see a decision from the Hawaii Supreme Court—possibly as early as December, almost certainly sometime this winter—and at that point same-sex couples will be able to get married and we will enter into the next phase of this struggle," he says.

Wolfson adds, "We'll have a range of challenges but also unbelievable opportunities to engage non-gay people in support of our families and our equality, and to really have people understand what this discrimination has meant and why it should end."

Even if, as threatened, Hawaii's voters and Legislature amend the state Constitution to prohibit same-sex marriage, logistics will prevent them from doing so until after same-sex marriage has been legal for several months.

"Our job is to make that [amendment] not happen by getting in there and fighting," Wolfson says. "If, however, this constitutional amendment proposal is ratified by the voters, one question is, what will the Legislature do? The actual amend-

ment proposal says that the Legislature shall have the power—though not the obligation—to restrict marriage. So it's not automatically clear what would happen."

He says even if restrictive legislation is ultimately approved, "it's very clear that our legal position would be that people who are married are married, and whatever the subsequent change in law that may occur as to who can then get married, it would not take away the validity of those lawful marriages."

The conference's other spicy topic was the ongoing fight between New York's Sex Panic! group and its supporters

on the one hand, and gay authors Michelangelo Signorile, Gabriel Rotello and Larry Kramer and their supporters on the other.

Sex Panic! says gay men are under renewed attack from some outside and within the gay community seeking to curtail gay men's sexual expression. (See related story on next page.)

A daylong Sex Panic! Summit explored the issue in detail from the sex-activists' point of view, while an NGLTF town meeting on the topic at times degenerated into a shouting match about "barebacking," the deliberate decision to have anal sex without condoms.

Keynote speakers at this year's Creating Change conference included lesbian California state legislator Sheila Kuehl, National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization Executive Director Martin Ornelas-Quintero, youth activist Roland Sintos Coloma, and dyke author Dorothy Allison, who wrote *Bastard Out of Carolina*.

Next year's conference is scheduled to be held in Pittsburgh.



PHOTO BY REX WOCKNER

just out welcomes Letters to the Editor

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