

MUSICAL CHAIRS

The smoke has yet to clear following GOP shuffle of congressional leadership positions by Bob Roehr

Some gay and lesbian politicians say the incoming Republican leadership team in the U.S. House of Representatives isn't likely to change the congressional environment relative to lesbian and gay issues.

And many speculate that Speaker-elect Bob Livingston—who was tapped by House Republicans in November to succeed Newt Gingrich—will manifest a more managerial, less confrontational style than Gingrich.

Gingrich announced his resignation plans following the GOP's relatively poor showing in the midterm elections. He leaves office in January.

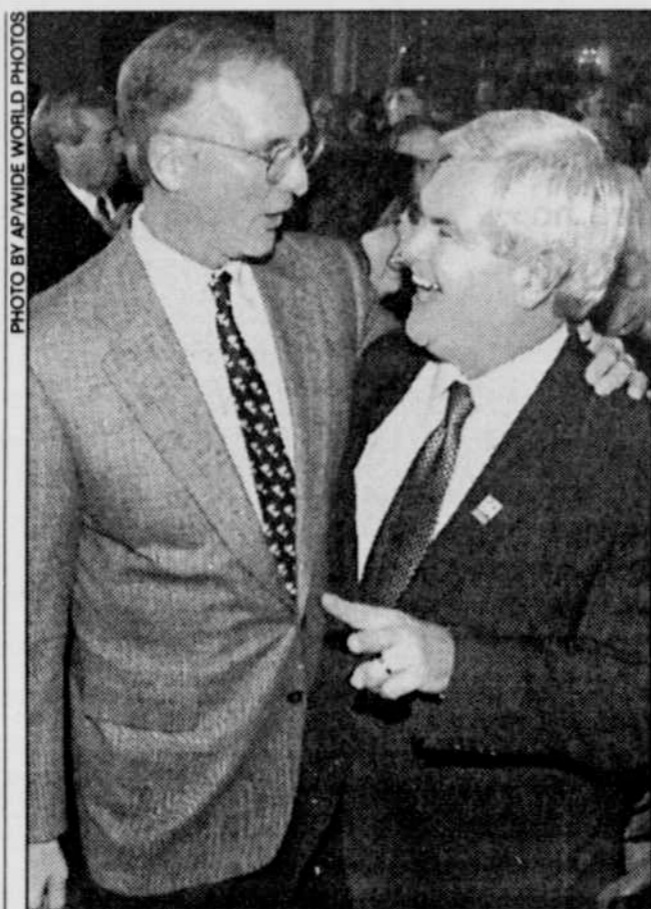
Livingston, who hails from Louisiana, has already met with influential outsiders including Jesse Jackson, conservative consultant Ralph Reed and White House chief of staff John Podesta.

Texas Republican Dick Armey, meanwhile, survived a GOP caucus challenge to retain his post as majority leader. His principal challenger was Oklahoma Rep. Steve Largent, who has close ties to anti-gay groups like Focus on the Family.

The strident Tom DeLay of Texas was unopposed for party whip. The only African American Republican in Congress, J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, defeated Ohio's John Boehner for conference chairman. Watts is an ordained minister and has articulated anti-gay positions.

The sole moderate to gain a leadership post was Tom Davis of Virginia, who will chair the National Republican Congressional Committee, which recruits candidates and raises money. The Family Research Council attacked Davis for not being "pro-family," but he rolled over incumbent John Linder of Georgia by a 130-77 vote.

Davis has a sexual orientation nondiscrimination employment policy in his office, and he



Bob Livingston (left) and Newt Gingrich

opposed three anti-gay amendments this year. However, he has not co-sponsored any of the Human Rights Campaign's gay-related legislation.

"Republicans learned in the '96 elections that bashing immigrants wasn't a successful strategy," says Winnie Stachelberg, HRC's political director. "It cost them votes."

She believes the November 1998 election sent the same message on anti-gay rhetoric and positions. "What remains to be seen is whether the Republican leadership will read the election the same way," she suggests.

Livingston leaves the chairmanship of an Appropriations Committee that has overseen a massive increase in AIDS funding, each year

adding more to the budget than President Clinton proposed.

The new chairman will be the GOP's C.W. Bill Young of Florida.

"We have a very good working relationship with him," says Stachelberg.

Young, 67, has been in Congress since 1970 and is a close ally of Livingston. He is considered to be a pragmatist who works well across party lines. He is likely to defer to John Porter of Illinois, a key subcommittee chair who has championed support for AIDS research and services.

Daniel Zingale, executive director of the AIDS Action Council, expects Porter will assume "even greater significance" in funding for all health issues.

Perhaps the most disturbing change in leadership comes in the least powerful position, that of chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the District of Columbia budget. Social conservatives have made it a battleground on issues such as abortion, needle exchange and anti-gay amendments pertaining to domestic partners and adoption. The symbolic impact is far greater than the small number of people the legislation impacts.

The new chairman of that subcommittee is Ernest Istook of Oklahoma, who recently joined nine other legislators in filing an amicus brief with the New Jersey Supreme Court opposing a lower court ruling that said the Boy Scouts of America illegally discriminated against an openly gay scoutmaster by expelling him from the group.

Stachelberg says the thought of Istook as a subcommittee chair "sends shudders through many of us."

Carl Schmid, a member of the gay group Log Cabin Republicans, has lobbied extensively on D.C.-related issues. He says, "There is no question that Istook is a social conservative, [but] everyone said his predecessors were so conservative, yet we still worked with them."

Meanwhile, Rich Tafel, executive director of LCR, accuses social conservatives of "using the [District of Columbia] as a playground."

He adds, "It will be interesting to see if they have learned the lesson of the last election, that gay bashing doesn't work."

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's \$3.2 million rainbow-themed redecoration of the North Halsted Street area—considered the city's queerest strip—is finished.

The modifications include the placement of huge retro-futuristic sculptures welcoming visitors to the area at each end of the strip; 20 concrete planters topped with 12-foot-high iron trellises containing the names of the cross streets; and 20 rainbow-ringed, 25-foot-tall art deco pylons placed along the length of the entire strip.

"This has been a labor of love," Daley said at the project's unveiling in late November. "I knew we were right at the beginning. It's called fairness. I'm thanking you for what you have done [for] North Halsted Street for many, many years—for the city of Chicago."

When the project was initially proposed as part of Daley's Neighborhoods Alive program, it was controversial. Some straight residents didn't want to live in a recognized gay and lesbian neighborhood, nor did some older gay residents who feared being outed or targeted by bashers. In addition, some critics said the project could lead to lower property values.

As a result of the objections, the overtly gay aspects of the design were toned down a little—

HALSTED HUBBUB

Rainbow motif colors Windy City queer strip despite a little hot air from the opposition by Rex Wockner

but the 20 sets of illuminated rainbow rings clearly remain its focus.

At the height of the controversy, Daley, who has long been gay-friendly, declared, "I won't let the homophobes run this city!"

Rick Garcia, executive director of the Illinois Federation for Human Rights, says: "I deeply appreciate Mayor Richard Daley's refusal to succumb to those who didn't want the rainbow motif to be included. One of the rainbow pylons is directly in front of our office and I love it. When I saw the first installed pylon, I cried."

Alderman Bernie Hansen, whose district includes much of the project, told the *Windy City Times*, "I think it's the culmination of a great program to recognize the contribution of the business and leadership of this community over the years. It's the frosting on a beautiful cake."

Gay state Rep. Larry McKeon, a Chicago Democrat, said, "It's great to be a part of history."



One of the rainbow-ringed pylons installed along Chicago's gayest strip.

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