

A majority of voters surveyed in a recent poll said civil rights laws for gay men and lesbians are meant to secure equal rights rather than special rights.

Most of the respondents also expressed support for the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act and Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

The survey was conducted for the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay and lesbian group based in Washington, D.C.

The poll, done in November, surveyed 800 randomly selected adults in the United States who indicated they planned to or had voted in the 1998 congressional elections. The margin of error is 3.5 percent.

HRC is touting the findings as consistent with the results of the 1998 elections.

"American voters rejected the mean-spirited anti-gay positions that have been expressed throughout the election season and registered their dissatisfaction at the polls," says Elizabeth Birch, HRC's executive director. "In most cases where the voters had a choice, they picked the moderate pro-gay candidate."

The bipartisan poll, conducted by the Democratic pollsters Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates, and the Republican polling firm American Viewpoint, shows the recent negative attacks against gay and lesbian people have not decreased but rather increased support for gay and lesbian issues, says HRC communications director David Smith.

POLLYANA POLL

New poll shows hopeful signs that voters are inching toward recognizing the realities of gay and lesbian citizenship by Gip Plaster

"That anti-gay activity backfired," he explains. "What we are seeing is the country moving toward supporting gay and lesbian people. The country is moving in a more tolerant direction."

Nearly two-thirds of the voters polled said the U.S. has become more tolerant of gay men and lesbians over the past decade. Almost 20 percent said there has been no change, while 13 percent described the country as less tolerant.

A majority of the voters—54 percent—said that civil rights laws aimed at protecting gay men and lesbians are meant to bring about equal rights. Fewer than a third said the laws are aimed at creating special rights.

In HRC's May 1995 study, voters were split on the issue, with 41 percent saying the laws were a matter of equal rights and 38 percent dubbing them special rights. The polling companies call this change a "significant increase" in the perception that the laws provide equal rights.

When told that fewer than a dozen states currently have laws that prevent employment discrimination based on sexual orientation,



HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch

more than 58 percent of those surveyed expressed support the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a law that would prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. More than a third strongly support the legislation, but a quarter oppose it.

Nearly 80 percent of respondents said they

thought it was already illegal to fire someone due to sexual orientation. The number of people holding this belief has not changed much over the last few years.

"Our poll reveals that only 14 percent of people realize that it is still legal to fire people in 40 states because of their sexual orientation," Smith says. "We need to work to clarify that misconception."

About 56 percent of voters surveyed favor the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, and 40 percent strongly favor it. More than 60 percent favor the act when told that sexual orientation is not covered under existing hate crimes laws.

Support for hate crimes legislation extends across all party groups even more broadly than support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The results show 65 percent of Democrats favor the hate crimes law while 51 percent of Republicans favor it. About 48 percent of independents favor the law.

Just over half of those surveyed responded that they disagree with U.S. Sen. Majority Leader Trent Lott's statement equating homosexuality with alcoholism or kleptomania. Thirty-eight percent, however, agree with the senator.

Additionally, strong majorities of those surveyed favor legal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships for the purposes of health care coverage, hospital visitation and inheritance rights. No more than a third opposed any of those rights.

HERE'S NOT TO YOUR HEALTH

The Clinton administration has virtually ignored gay men and lesbians in putting together the nation's health blueprint for the next decade.

The report is *Healthy People 2010*, which the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services describes as "the basis for monitoring and tracking health status, health risks, and use of prevention services."

According to Fred Fox, policy director of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, the plan's goal is to eliminate health care disparities among various populations, notably minority groups.

"Gays and lesbians are left out as a minority," he says, adding he is shocked that gay men and lesbians "have virtually no place at the table."

One GLMA member conducted a keyword search of an electronic version of the 800-page draft document. He found the word "gay" used twice, while "lesbian" and "transgender" did not appear at all.

Even in the context of HIV and AIDS, gay men "appear as the category of men having sex with men, and the word 'gay' is never used," Fox says.

"That is an interesting case of where we have a place at the table, but it is a funny one [because] they can't even speak our name," he adds.

"The feeling that I have from reading the document," Fox continues, "is that gays and lesbians don't exist, or if they do, it is in the Trent Lott context of pathologies."

Winnie Stachelberg, political director of the Human Rights Campaign, says *Healthy People 2010* fails to address homophobia in the health care and medical research communities.

That homophobia, she contends, has blocked the development of solutions to health care problems pertaining to gay men and lesbians.

"The good news is that it is a draft," she says. "The bad news is that [it is from] an administration, and a department in particular, that has been so responsive to the gay and lesbian community."

She adds, "I was disturbed by the lack of recognition of our unique needs."

Areas of concern include HIV and AIDS, lesbians' increased health risk for breast and cervical cancer, domestic violence, and the health needs of gay and lesbian youth.

A Department of Health and Human Services fact sheet notes that *Healthy People 2010* was written over a period of months by "an alliance of over 600 national membership organizations representing professional, voluntary, and business sectors, and state and territorial public health, mental health, substance abuse, and environmental agencies."

Gay and lesbian groups were not included.

The draft document was available for public comment from Sept. 15 to Dec. 15. Public meetings were held in Washington, D.C., and five other cities during that time.

Still, Ben Schatz, executive director of GLMA, says gay and lesbian health advocates had little notice about the draft's contents.

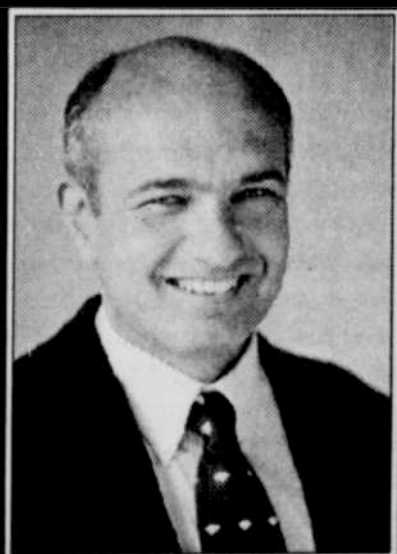
He says federal health officials "have an outreach process, and [gay groups] weren't in it."

Schatz adds, "The burden is on them, it is their responsibility to reach out to us."

GLMA will soon hire its second policy person. HRC, meanwhile, has one health policy advocate, who focuses primarily on HIV.

The National Lesbian and Gay Health Association has virtually collapsed and no longer has paid staff.

■ Reported by BOB ROEHR



An innovative marketer
and Buyer's Agent who
listens to your needs

Marvin Salles

Associate Broker
tel. 320-1271



E-mail: marvin@spiritone.com
www.johnlscott.com/home/marvin/index2.htm

• 20 years marketing & negotiating experience • Multi-million dollar producer

**WILLAMETTE
MORTGAGE
SERVICES, INC.**



- Speed
15-20 day closings
- Good or bad credit
- Self-employed
- Personal service
your home or office
- Jumbo loans available
- 0% down programs

503-722-3969

Cory Graunitz
Senior Loan Officer

