

# STAND BY WHICH MAN?

**Queer registered voter seeks dependable Democrat for president, appearance less important than politics** by Gip Plaster

*Editor's note: The following is the first in a two-part series. Although the presidential primaries are months away, the articles offer an early glimpse at the candidates. This story looks at the two candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination. The next piece, to run in Just Out's Aug. 20 issue, will look at the Republicans.*

Vice President Al Gore, arguably the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, visited a gay and lesbian community center in Los Angeles in June.

Bill Bradley, a former senator from New Jersey and Gore's only announced competition thus far, visited the center a week earlier.

Spokespeople for each candidate claim they had the idea first.

"The vice president's visit had been long scheduled and had been planned for some time," says Marla Romash, deputy chair of Gore 2000, the campaign to elect Gore as president.

"That's completely untrue," counters Eric Hauser, Bradley's press secretary.

Whoever had the idea first, both candidates are courting gay and lesbian voters. With very few differences on most issues—and no real differences on gay and lesbian issues—it's not surprising to see the two popping up at the same places.

While both are looking for gay and lesbian votes, both fall short on at least one issue of concern to some gay and lesbian voters: marriage. The candidates' positions on allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the military are not strong either.

First, a little background: Both Gore and Bradley hail from the South, and both were senators who had other careers before stepping into the chamber.

Gore, born March 31, 1948, is the son of a senator. He was raised in Carthage, Tenn., and Washington, D.C. He graduated with honors from Harvard University in 1969 with a degree in government. Gore later became an investigative reporter for *The Tennessean* in Nashville and also attended divinity school and law school. His home church is New Salem Missionary Baptist Church in Carthage.

Gore served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977 to 1985, then served in the Senate from 1985 until 1993, when he was inaugurated as vice president.

Bradley, born July 28, 1943, in Crystal City, Mo., is the son of a banker and a schoolteacher. He attended Princeton University and graduated with honors with a degree in U.S. history. He became a professional basketball player, retiring from the sport in 1977.

In 1979, at age 35, Bradley was sworn into the U.S. Senate as its youngest member. He left the Senate in 1996 and has since been writing, lecturing and consulting.

Both candidates support passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would provide employment protections based on sexual orientation.

Romash says ENDA "affords, to all, basic employment nondiscrimination" and that "the vice president supports protections against workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation."

During a Human Rights Campaign dinner last year, Gore said: "So I say to Congress: Let's give everyone who is willing to work for it a fair and equal chance to succeed. Pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act into law."

On a recent trip to California, Gore reaffirmed his position, expressing support for the newer version of ENDA introduced in June.

Bradley has not spoken much publicly

Asked whether the policy would be rescinded under a Bradley administration, Hauser indicates "there is a possibility of reviewing the policy."

A few years back, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., introduced an amendment to an appropriations bill that sought to remove the codification of the ban on gay men and lesbians in the military. The amendment failed, but Bradley voted in favor of removing the ban.

Pending legislation co-authored by openly gay Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., would partially repeal 1996 restrictions that require the withholding of federal funding—including some financial aid for students—from institutions with anti-discrimination policies that prohibit military recruiting. Neither candidate currently has a position on the proposal.

Both candidates have made clear their opinions on legalizing same-sex marriage.

While Gore supports legal recognition of same-sex domestic partnerships, he supported President Bill Clinton's signature on the Defense of Marriage Act, a largely symbolic piece of legislation that put the federal government on record against same-sex marriage despite the fact that no state allows it. Gore says he opposes "a change in the institution of marriage as we now know it between men and women."

Bradley was serving in the Senate when DOMA came up for a vote. He backed it. Bradley left the 104th Congress with a 78 percent HRC rating on gay and lesbian issues.

"That's a complicated one for him," Hauser says of Bradley's position on same-sex marriage.

Bradley is aware, he says, that many people oppose same-sex marriage on religious grounds.

"He has respect for that view, but he also has said he feels very strongly about rights between gay partners," Hauser adds.

In a 1996 *Detroit News* article, Bradley said: "In trying to balance the religious and historical idea of marriage with the need for extending rights, I say that rights should extend up to but not include recognition of same-sex marriage."

Gore has received criticism on AIDS issues of late.

He is blamed for giving new life to the AIDS Growth and Opportunity Act, a piece of legislation that would, among other things, attempt to prohibit African nations from developing less-expensive generic forms of AIDS drugs and therefore force them to pay higher prices for U.S.-patented versions of the drugs.

A handful of Gore campaign appearances have been disrupted by activists concerned about the issue.

"The vice president has always worked hard to get drugs into Africa," Romash says. "And he has always supported funding for AIDS."

Bradley demonstrated support for AIDS funding as early as 1983, according to Hauser. Even back then, Bradley called AIDS the most significant disease since polio. In 1985, he co-sponsored the Ryan White Act.

"He has always fought hard for AIDS issues," Hauser says.

Neither candidate has yet been endorsed by any major gay and lesbian groups. While endorsements can make or break a campaign, Hauser suggests gay and lesbian voters should think for themselves.

"Gay and lesbian Americans, like other Americans, need to make individual judgments about who they believe should be president," he says.



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about gay and lesbian issues, but he was a co-sponsor of ENDA in 1994 and 1995, and voted in favor of the measure in 1996.

Gore has been supportive of federal hate crimes legislation and believes that hate crimes should be punished with "the full force of the law," Romash says.

"If we allow even a small number of Americans to harbor and act upon malice and intolerance, then every American feels the sting of injustice," Gore has said.

In the 101st Congress, Sen. Jesse Helms, a highly conservative Republican from North Carolina, proposed an amendment to the Hate Crimes Statistics Act that said "the homosexual movement threatens the strength and survival of the American family" and that state sodomy laws should be enforced. Gore voted against the proposal, and earned a 90 percent rating that session from HRC.

Gore garnered a 100 percent rating during the 102nd Congress.

Hauser says Bradley supports tough hate crimes legislation.

Both candidates have a murky stance on the military issue and the future of the "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" policy.

Romash says Gore believes the policy has not been implemented well. When pressed about whether the vice president believes the policy itself is a good one, she would not comment further.

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