

NATIONAL news

Gay politicians and their allies packed into a grand Victorian townhouse in Washington, D.C., for a Feb. 29 gathering sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, a national organization whose sole mission is to increase the number of openly gay and lesbian public officials.

Donna Shalala, secretary of Health and Human Services, was on hand and praised special guest Tammy Baldwin, a Wisconsin Democrat and the first lesbian to serve openly in Congress.

HIGH-LEVEL HOBNOB

Gay group stresses the importance of a seat at the table by Bob Roehr

cizing its endorsements to inform the voters about qualified openly gay and lesbian candidates, the group invites direct contributions from its members to the campaigns of their choice. The organization then bundles those contributions and

"I can't tell you how important it is to have somebody sitting in that Republican caucus meeting when our issues are discussed," noted Bond.

Another priority is re-electing freshman Baldwin, who looks to

She spoke of how "the naysayers, the cynics, and the keepers of the status quo said you can't, you shouldn't, you won't succeed. They said you are too young, you're a woman, you're a lesbian, you're too progressive."

Part of the challenge, Baldwin said, is "gaining the confidence that we actually can run and win."

Baldwin also praised the Victory Fund for its support, which she said helps "level the playing field."



From left: Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis.; Victory Fund's Brian Bond; Julian Potter of the White House; former Clinton appointee Bob Hattoy; and Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala

"She's a natural leader, she's smart, she clearly knows the issues," Shalala told the approving crowd.

"The Victory Fund started in 1991," said the group's executive director, Brian Bond. "Since that time we have tripled the number of openly GLBT elected officials in the country."

The fund has done so by raising more than \$2.5 million for queer candidates. Beyond publi-

sends 100 percent of the assistance to the campaigns. In addition, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund's political action committee makes its own direct donations to candidates.

"It is important for us to have our own at the political table," said Bond, who added that one of his group's priorities is to see U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe, an Arizona Republican, get re-elected.

Kolbe, a gay man, is facing a tough battle.

have an easier race. Bond presented her with a \$10,000 check—the maximum contribution allowed under federal campaign finance law.

"When I get the honor of walking onto the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, I am mindful of the fact that I go there with a little piece of every donor, of every voter, of every volunteer," said Baldwin. "It is the congregate effort of those people that got me to Congress."

"We can now say that millions of people have walked into a voting booth and pulled the lever for an openly gay or lesbian candidate. That is transformative in this country," she said.

Also in attendance was Julian Potter, White House liaison to the queer community.

■ Contact the GAY AND LESBIAN VICTORY FUND at www.victoryfund.org or (202) 842-8679.

'GAY RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS'

All around the world, unacceptable violations of human rights have taken place against individuals solely on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation," said Rep. Tom Lantos, D-Calif., at a March 1 news conference outside the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. "These ongoing persecutions against gay people include arbitrary arrest, rape, torture, imprisonment, extortion and even execution."

Lantos was introducing Congressional Resolution 259, which "condemns all violations of internationally recognized human rights norms based on the real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of an individual."

The measure, which has 23 cosponsors, demands equal protection of all human rights.

"Some states fail to prosecute, or even investigate [crimes] because of [the victims'] sexual orientation. These abuses are not

only sanctioned by some states, but often they are perpetuated by agents of these states," Lantos said.

He cited cases: A lesbian couple in Brazil was tortured and sexually assaulted in a police station. In Uganda, the president ordered police to arrest all gay people.

"As a nation, our founding was derived from the respect that our founders had for universal human rights," said Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio. "Today we have an opportunity to make good on that commitment, which is as old as America itself."

Rep Lynn Woolsey, D-Calif., added: "The United States is the remaining superpower. We have an obligation, therefore, not just as an economic or military leader but as a moral leader. We must show the world that gay rights are human rights. We must speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves."

Openly lesbian Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., cited the 1948

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which she said "articulated a common understanding of the rights of every citizen of the world."

"We must use our moral suasion whenever possible to ensure that all of our world's citizens can live their lives with the freedom and dignity that is everyone's birthright," Baldwin added.

"It is pretty basic stuff; that you shouldn't rape and murder and kill people in the name of the state is not controversial, one would think," assessed Nancy Buermeyer, a lobbyist with the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay political group.

Still, she acknowledged, getting CR259 approved is going to "be tough with the [Republican] leadership being the way it is" in Congress.

"Depending on how the elections go, it could be [passed] in fairly short order next session," Buermeyer said.

■ Reported by BOB ROEHR, a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.

Gay Friendly Travel



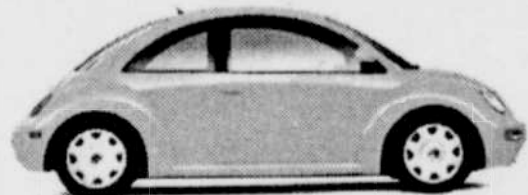
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