

“You may not know me, but until last week I was the highest-ranking member of the Bush administration who is openly gay.”

With that startling revelation, Fred Hochberg launched into an opinion piece that ran Feb. 10 in the *New York Times*. In actuality, he only stayed on board at the Small Business Administration for nine days to ensure a smooth transition, but his statement speaks volumes.

In 1998, Hochberg became the first openly gay person to serve as deputy in a U.S. Cabinet-level agency. He was among more than 150 such appointees during the Clinton administration; President Bush currently has only one.

Hochberg, who visited Portland last November for the Human Rights Campaign dinner, was again in town June 26 to deliver a speech about workplace diversity at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Here are some excerpts from his interview with *Just Out*.

Jim Radosta: Bill Clinton was the first president to hire openly gay and lesbian people, right?

Fred Hochberg: Without question. Erskine Bowles, who was his chief of staff, actually was surprised when he was told that this was the first administration that had so many openly gay and lesbian people.

JR: And the Bush administration already has taken a lot of flak from conservatives for having even one openly gay appointee.

FH: One of the things that's come through in the last few years is that one of the hallmarks of someone being moderate in their approach is, "Well, they are good on choice, they believe in gun control, and they're good on gay rights." The

MINORITY PRIORITY

Top Clinton appointee Fred Hochberg touts workplace diversity by Jim Radosta

fact that those have become the three legs of the stool that define a moderate Republican is kind of remarkable. It also just says that this administration doesn't want to be moderate—or temperate.

JR: What did you accomplish while at the SBA?

FH: We took loans to minority business owners and almost quadrupled them in eight years. We tripled loans to women. We made two times more loans to minorities in eight years than the prior 40 years of the agency's history. So we really worked hard to really make choices to extend economic opportunity to all Americans.

And we signed for the first time ever an agreement with the federal government and the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Community Centers to bring business counseling, entrepreneur workshops and so forth to lesbian and gay community centers around the country. So we really did work to make sure that when we talk about this being a country of equal opportunity, we really meant it.

The current administration seems to be in the interest of big business and has a much more narrow view of what that equal opportunity and access is.

JR: Have you noticed changes at the SBA since your departure?

FH: The Bush administration proposed a 40 percent cut in the budget. That's still being

debated in Congress.

President Clinton elevated it to a Cabinet-level agency; George Bush chose not to continue that. And then George Bush took, relatively by federal standards, a moderate-size agency and whacked it with some of the largest cuts of almost any agency in the government.

In the last eight years, between 75 percent and 80 percent of all the job growth was in small business. So why would you, at a time when the economy could be stalling or certainly not be as robust, want to not shore up one of the best engines for growth we've had in the past eight years? It doesn't make sense.

JR: Is it frustrating knowing that all the work you've done could be undone so quickly?

FH: Sure. It certainly is frustrating and disheartening when you see a lot of good things that were good for the country and good for the economy being undone.

We had put through—and it was passed by a large bipartisan majority—what we called a New Market Initiative to really help inner city and



PHOTO BY JIM RADOSTA

Fred Hochberg's next mission: serving as senior adviser on former Housing Secretary Andrew Cuomo's New York gubernatorial campaign

rural areas with economic development. And that's also been cut to zero.

JR: Was being out at work ever an issue for you?

FH: Barney Frank once said: "We all come out retail, one person at a time. We don't take a full-page ad in the newspaper and say: 'Attention world! Everyone should know that I'm gay!'"

So it becomes an evolutionary process. Coming out, frankly, when you have a partner becomes less of a political statement and is much

more of a personal statement.

I use this analogy: Imagine if you were African American and you took a pill and had to look white between 9 and 5 and only could be black when you were at home. What a terrible way to live your life! And that's how so many gay people still have to live their lives.

One of the things the Human Rights Campaign has been working on is to pass the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, in part, to change that. Our work is such a basic part of who we are as a people that that's an important ingredient to ultimately change this culture and this society. [□]

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