

SAVING FAITH

Bush denies Salvation Army desire to discriminate

by Bob Roehr

The Bush administration is working with the nation's largest charity, the Salvation Army, to make it easier for government-funded religious groups to practice hiring discrimination against gay people, according to an internal Salvation Army document," began a front-page story July 10 in the *Washington Post*.

It charged that the White House had made a "firm commitment" to revise regulations to allow this discrimination, while the Salvation Army pledged to lobby for the administration's faith-based initiative. It quoted extensively from the leaked document.

The Salvation Army is concerned that a growing number of state and local governments prohibit discrimination against gay men and lesbians when contracting for social services programs. It suggested an Office of Management and Budget regulation, Circular #A-102, be amended so federal regulation supersedes state and local nondiscrimination laws when it comes to religious organizations running social programs.

White House spokeswoman Anne Womack claimed, "This issue has been brought to our attention, but no such commitment has been made."

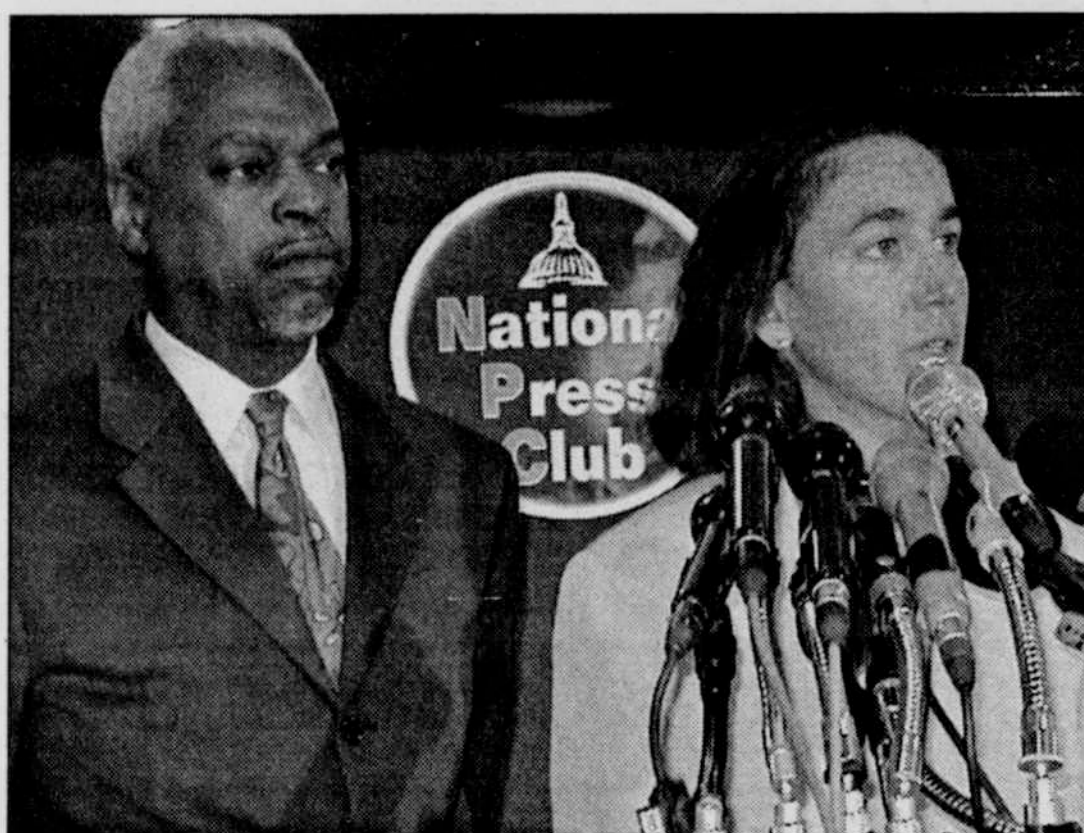
That morning at a news conference aboard Air Force One, spokesman Ari Fleischer reit-

erated the message. "The White House told them that would be reviewed, and that's the extent of it." He said the administration is "committed to our nation's civil rights laws," which have bipartisan support and are not likely to be changed.

Gay rights supporters were taking no chances, hastily calling a noon briefing at the National Press Club with Winnie Stachelberg, Human Rights Campaign political director, and Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Council on Civil Rights, a coalition of 185 organizations.

"Today's report suggests that the administration is willing to throw the rights of some citizens overboard in return for political support from the Salvation Army," said Henderson, who called on the Bush administration to support three fundamental principles. "No federal funds should be used to discriminate against any American, that should be inviolate." He asked the administration "to reinforce that fundamental principle."

He also asked it to "repudiate" the press account of negotiating "to help override the responsibility of state and local governments to



Wade Henderson and Winnie Stachelberg challenge the backroom deal during a news conference July 10

protect the interests of their citizens." He pointed to the inconsistency of an administration that claims to want to return power closer to the people.

Finally, Henderson asked the administration to reconsider "charitable choice initiatives" that would allow religious organizations to evade existing civil rights laws in implementing social service programs. He said, "The civil and human rights of our country should be measured by a single yardstick, and every American should be free from discrimination."

Stachelberg called the news report "a serious mistake that must be challenged." She hoped Fleischer's view that the Salvation Army misinterpreted White House intentions was accurate

but called upon the administration "to further clarify its position and fully disclose their objectives."

She accepted that religious freedom allows religious groups to discriminate when it comes to operations that apply directly to their religious function. The Employment Nondiscrimination Act allows this as well.

"What we cannot support is federal funds being used by organizations to discriminate based on sexual orientation," Stachelberg said. Conferring these "special protections to religious organizations" is a debate that should be carried out in Congress, she added.

This "backroom deal" to override state and local law "is reprehensible," Stachelberg said. "It appears that the Salvation Army is attempting an end run around the Congress, with the assistance of the Bush administration."

The 1964 Civil Rights Act established "a very important principle, that people should be judged on their performance in the workplace," Henderson said. "To have the administration now willing to work out a deal to override local protection of this important principle is deeply troubling."

A dozen states and 122 local jurisdictions have enacted legislation protecting gay men and lesbians, although Maryland's law is being held in abeyance pending resolution of a petition to put the measure before voters.

Henderson said the administration has the authority to change the Circular #A-102 regulation, but that must be done through established procedures. They include publication of pro-

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— The Oregonian, August 10, 1996

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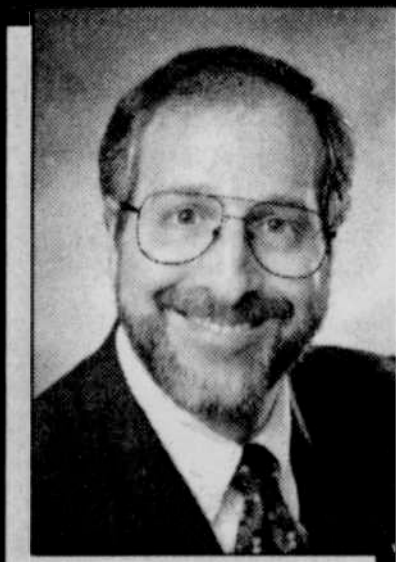
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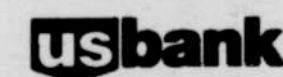


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