

NATIONAL news

One result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack has been to paper over partisan divisions, at least temporarily, in the political terrain of Washington, D.C.

That has both positive and negative effects on what advocates had hoped to accomplish during the remaining days of this session of Congress on issues affecting the gay and lesbian community. A traditional priority at the end-of-session rush is to pass the appropriations bills to operate government agencies for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1.

"Previous to Sept. 11, I think that we were all pessimistic about increases in funding for a number of domestic discretionary programs, including AIDS, breast and cervical cancer detection and research programs," said Winnie Stachelberg, Human Rights Campaign political director. "Things are very different on every level in all of our lives since Sept. 11."

Bill Arnold of the AIDS Drug Assistance Program Working Group said "the starkly partisan political debates" concerning tapping the Social Security Trust Fund for deficit spending virtually have disappeared. His agency pays for HIV drugs and is in need of additional money.

"We're benefiting somewhat from the 'let's not have any fights' atmosphere on Capitol Hill," Arnold said. "The politics of the moment is that if the economy tanks, there won't be anybody working to provide the money," so spending to stimulate the economy is OK.

"It's no secret that the White House is advocating for more ADAP money," but the final number is still unclear, Arnold said. The Department of Health and Human Services has promised to release the money early, which "may prevent the Florida ADAP program from collapsing in November, and who knows what else."

CASUALTY OF WAR

Gay rights legislation might be another victim of the terrorist attacks

by Bob Roehr



Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., embraces President Bush after his Sept. 20 address to a joint session of Congress

But Stachelberg added, "I think that the proactive legislative agenda is very much on hold as we, as much of the rest of the country, grieve and as we try to figure out what our next steps are." A Senate hearing on the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, sched-

uled for Oct. 2, was canceled.

Log Cabin Republicans spokesman Kevin Ivers was even more blunt. "What was defined as the gay agenda before Sept. 11 has been shoved to the side" along with most other legislation, "and you are not hearing any screaming and yelling

from the gay groups about that. If you walk the gay neighborhoods, you see American flags everywhere. You realize that things have changed."

Ivers added, "Very real concerns have come to the forefront, things like partner and survivor benefits and the Pentagon policy" known as "don't ask, don't tell." He said gay men and lesbians are looking for a way to support the effort against terrorism.

Ivers pointed to public officials' statements of tolerance, even though they were directed toward Muslims and Arab Americans, as having a spillover effect on creating a better atmosphere for the gay and lesbian community. The fact that the FBI is investigating more than 300 allegations of such discrimination perhaps lessens the need for further legislation in this area.

A vote on hate crimes legislation, once promised in the fall by Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., now seems unlikely this year. However, one can create a scenario in which the measure might be attached to anti-terrorism legislation, with the acquiescence if not quite the support of the White House, to help allay fears of the erosion of civil liberties.

Stachelberg said HRC has taken on other responsibilities. One was to monitor closely the package of financial relief for the airline industry that was rushed through Congress.

"We were concerned that a provision might be attached to exempt airlines from state and local laws" that the industry views as financial burdens. She mentioned local living wage laws and the San Francisco domestic partners benefits law that the industry has been fighting. But that did not end up happening. [E]

BOB ROEHR is a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.

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