

NATIONAL news

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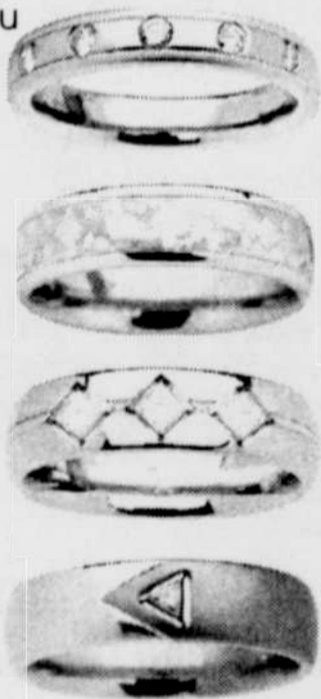


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The U.S. Department of Justice has reversed its decision to ban its annual Gay Pride ceremony.

However, the event will not enjoy the sponsorship of the agency as it has in the past, and as other events do. Other federal agencies—including the State Department, which is headed by Secretary of State Colin Powell—are holding similar Pride events that enjoy full departmental support.

Officials at DOJ Pride, the agency's voluntary group of queer employees, were told earlier this month that they would be prohibited from holding their annual Pride event at the department. Last year's DOJ Pride event featured a department-sponsored speech by Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson to roughly 150 employees.

Department officials claimed this year's event would be disallowed because the White House had not issued a proclamation acknowledging Gay Pride Month. There was no proclamation from President Bush prior to last year's event either.

During Attorney General John Ashcroft's nomination hearing to head the department, he responded to a question by U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., about whether he planned to discriminate against gay and lesbian employees or DOJ Pride: "I would not tolerate discrimination against any employee at the Department of Justice based on sexual preference. I have no intent to...treat this group differently than any other."

Feingold called on Ashcroft to honor his word in a letter sent June 10: "Congress and the American people expect the attorney general to ensure equal treatment and equal protection for all Americans. I urge you to reverse the department's decision immediately and allow DOJ Pride to use department facilities to hold meetings and events."

After caving to the pressure, the department said the ceremony could be held in the Great Hall of Justice at the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C., as it has been for several years, but without agency sponsorship—which would force DOJ Pride to pay more than \$1,000 to use the space, unlike every similar employee group. DOJ Pride rejected this deal, opting to hold the June 20 event at the Russell Senate Office Building instead.

"The board has decided to decline the department's offer of second-class citizenship," it said in a statement. "We will not pay a toll to access the Great Hall of Justice."

Honorees at the event will include Lambda Legal for its historic challenge of the Texas "Homosexual Conduct" Law. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision in the case June 23.

President Bush has nominated anti-gay Alabama Attorney General William Pryor to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. He is on record using mean-spirited rhetoric that compares same-sex relationships with incest and pedophilia and perpetuates hurtful myths.

Pryor abused his position by utilizing government resources to directly and indirectly attack queer U.S. citizens across the country. He linked the state attorney general's Web site to vehemently anti-gay groups, including the Family Research Council and the American Center for



U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton, D-Minn., has reintroduced a bill providing benefits for federal employees' domestic partners

Law and Justice, which regularly litigates cases against gay rights. In contrast, his Web site does not connect visitors to groups that support queer civil rights.

Pryor also filed a friend-of-the-court brief in *Lawrence vs. Texas*, the U.S. Supreme Court case challenging the state's "Homosexual Conduct" Law, likening homosexuality to incest, necrophilia, pedophilia, prostitution and adultery. He also argued that sodomy is a chosen behavior unworthy of constitutional protection and failed to recognize queers as people worthy of the same rights that other U.S. citizens take for granted.



Retired Gen. Wesley Clark believes the time has come to reconsider "don't ask, don't tell"

A retired NATO commander and four-star general told NBC's *Meet the Press* June 15 that he would "absolutely" look at changing the U.S. military's ban on gay, lesbian and bi servicemembers.

"I don't think it works," Wesley Clark said when asked about the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. "Essentially, we've got a lot of gay people in

the armed forces, we always have had, always will. And I think that...we should welcome people that want to serve."

Clark went on to say that the ban is "an issue that the leaders in the armed forces are going to have to work with and resolve." The United States "should welcome people that want to serve," he told host Tim Russert.

Clark also pointed out that many NATO allies have abandoned their policies of discrimination against queer troops. Openly gay troops from allied nations "already are" serving together in joint exercises with the United States, he said. "And they served together in Kosovo and in Bosnia and so forth."

Clark is considered a possible candidate for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination. Of the party's nine declared candidates, eight have voiced support for repealing "don't ask, don't tell."

An article published in the summer issue of *Parameters*, a publication of the U.S. Army, concludes that the ban is "based on prejudice, not on military necessity." The report examines the experiences of foreign military allies who have lifted their ban on gay servicemembers.

It finds no detrimental impact on unit cohesion, morale or retention of recruiting. In interviews with numerous military officers and scholars from Britain, Israel, Canada and Australia, the study found that lifting the gay ban was a "non-event" for U.S. allies.

The Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act was reintroduced June 11 in the Senate and House. The legislation, introduced by U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton, D-Minn., and U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., would grant the same benefits, including health insurance coverage, to the domestic partners of federal employees that are currently granted to employees' legal spouses.

Unlike married couples, unmarried federal employees currently receive no health insurance coverage for their partners, representing a significant form of discrimination against gay and lesbian employees. Health care and other benefits account for a considerable portion of an employee's compensation package. The current lack of coverage, consequently, denies federal employees with domestic partners equal compensation for equal work.

The Associated Press began offering domestic partner benefits to its gay and lesbian employees effective June 1. The far-reaching decision will cover the same-sex unmarried partners of the AP's 3,700 employees working in 242 bureaus around the world.

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William Pryor: another "inclusive" Republican