

Gay Pride kicked off June 6 in Washington, D.C., with a forum of local and national leaders discussing "Pride + Vote = Power," the theme of this year's celebration.

It was no surprise that talk of same-sex marriage dominated the evening. Most notable were a consensus on principles and a minimum of partisanship.

"We're an economic powerhouse," said Justin Nelson, co-founder of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. "The problem is that some people think we can't talk about activism and talk about economics in the same sentence."

Nelson added that other communities have used that power to help gain acceptance. "When you take this out of the bedroom and stick it in the boardroom...when you talk about job creation, health care for employees, how do you grow the overall economic health of our community and our nation," then some people are more likely to listen.

Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, was perhaps the most upbeat. She recounted how in 2002, about 5 percent of the U.S. population was covered by laws protecting the rights of trans people. Legislative action and the courts have expanded that to about 45 percent.

Keisling could count 30 trans friends who had been fired in the past two years, and yet there is resistance to including trans people in the Employment Nondiscrimination Act.

"We are spending so much of our energy fighting our friends," she said, singling out U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., for criticism. "We have traded the closeted folks for the assimilators who have sort of gone away. Before, where we couldn't get most of the people because they were in the closet, now we can't get a lot of them because they've moved on. We've shifted that much."

One young member of the audience said: "I think we are all very nervous about what will happen if Bush is re-elected. But in some ways I'm even more scared by the direction of the Democratic Party, because these people are supposed to be our allies. How can we keep them accountable?"

Moderator Jonathan Capehart asked whether U.S. Sen. John Kerry's opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment but possible

POWER PLAY

D.C. forum forecasts a busy year for queer activists

by Bob Roehr



Trans leader Mara Keisling slammed on "assimilators"

support of an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution "kind of sounds like he's trying to have it both ways. Can we really trust the guy?"

"I think we can," said Chrissy Gephardt, lesbian daughter of U.S. Rep. Dick Gephardt, D-Mo., who represented the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund. It is about "which candidate is going to further our rights the most...[Kerry] is going to be leaps and bounds above President Bush."

Republican D.C. Councilor David Catania said, "There is a common language in this country, and it is called money." He noted that the sexual minorities community is the fourth-largest block of contributors to the Democratic Party—right behind unions, trial lawyers and Jews.

"What do we expect of the Democratic Party? [Queers] should get something in return. If the community is disproportionately in one party, then we really have no place to go," he argued.

Catania raised more than \$75,000 for Bush's re-election. "But there comes a time when a party does something so egregious that it makes it impossible for us to be at home there," said Catania, who broke with Bush when he announced his support for the Federal Marriage Amendment.

"George Bush won 25 percent of gay votes in 2000; he will be lucky if he

gets 12 percent this time," Catania said. "And what he will have done is hurt two generations of gays who will be outside."

Catania compared it with 1960, when Richard Nixon won about 26.5 percent of the African American vote, but that fell to 12 percent in 1964 under the insensitive policies of candidate Barry Goldwater. The GOP has yet to recover.

"You have to remember that somebody running for president is going to be inherently conservative in the careful sense and is not going to put their head on the block," Keisling said. She pointed to the importance of a few dozen truly competitive congressional races and to state legislative races where supporting a campaign can have a bigger impact.

"It has to be about more than the presidential election," Keisling said. "I think it is really dangerous for us to think that we have to work with the Democrats and be anti-Republican." Bias within the community against Republicans and conservatives can hinder political effectiveness, she added.

Mark Perriello, associate director of the Human Rights Campaign Political Action Committee, ticked off a list of Democratic candidates who support the Federal Marriage Amendment. "We need to make sure that our community isn't helping those people simply because they have a D beside their name."

Rea Carey, deputy director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said, "When you get down to it, we are probably going to have at least 10 amendments to state constitutions" banning same-sex marriage on the fall ballot. State organizations are telling her, "We cannot focus on anything else in our state because all of our



Cornelius Baker said the sexual minorities community should "take some lessons from the black civil rights movement"

resources are being put into marriage." The goal is to defeat at least one and hopefully a couple of them, "so that gay-bashing is not longer politically acceptable."

Cornelius Baker, executive director of the Whitman-Walker Clinic, offered tactical advice on likely demonstrations and protests at national party conventions this summer.

"We have to take some lessons from the black civil rights movement," he said. "There is a reason they wore their Sunday best when they marched. There was a benefit to that. What happened was that our oppressors were uncivil when they unleashed dogs and fire hoses on people who were in their Sunday church-going best, marching in a civil

action. It made them look brutal, and that is when America turned on the South and what they saw as oppression.

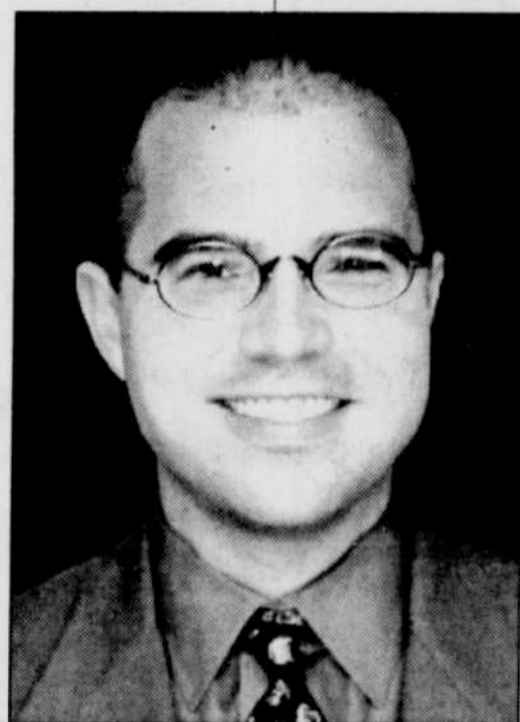
"We have made enormous progress; we should be very grateful for that," Baker added. "I don't want to be the skunk at the garden party about that, but I will also say, if we are in a post-Civil War period, this may look like what Reconstruction looked like. The black community had a lot; in the South we even held elective office. And then Reconstruction ended and there was this huge backlash, there was segregation and Jim Crow. It took another hundred years for the progress that we have now.

"I think that we are still in a very early stage [of the queer civil rights movement]. There is a lot of work left to be done. We who work here in a place like Washington, we are in our Harlem Renaissance, but there are a lot of people who live in Alabama and Mississippi, and we always have to be very conscious of that." □

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



Justin Nelson



Gay Republican David Catania dumped President Bush after raising more than \$75,000 for his re-election

We love you just the way you are.
Find your place with us!



first timers welcome!
all credit/loan types
free consultation
\$0 down loans

www.RoseCityMtg.com 503.768.4248

Rose City
Mortgage Specialists

Don Vaierio, MD

Board Certified Internal Medicine
Fanno Creek Clinic
2400 SW Vermont Portland

Sports Injury - HIV Testing - HPV/STDs - Hepatitis - PSA/Prostate Cancer
Skin Problems - Physical Exams - General Adult Healthcare
"An annual checkup is the easiest step to preventing disease."

New patients are always welcome.
Appointments are now available: (503) 452-0915

