

NATIONAL news




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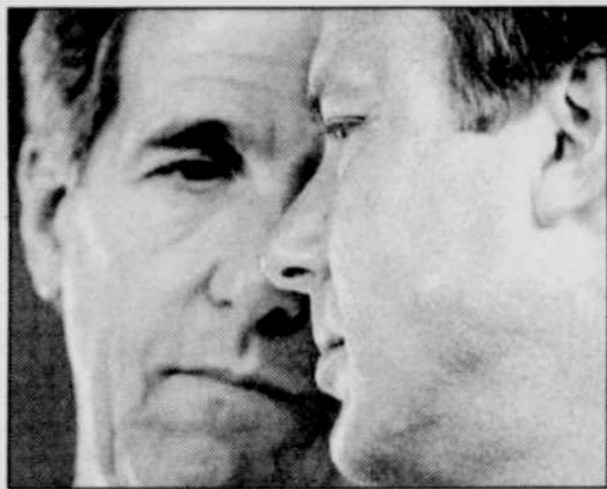
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Kerry-Edwards 2004: the most gay-supportive national ticket in U.S. history

NATIONAL

U.S. Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., has selected U.S. Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., as his presidential running mate. According to the Human Rights Campaign, Edwards has a strong record of support for queer equality:

- He is opposed to the Federal Marriage Amendment.
- He thrice voted for the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, which would add sexual orientation, gender and disability to existing federal hate crimes law.
- He co-sponsored the Employment Non-discrimination Act, which would ban bias based on sexual orientation.
- He believes adoptions by same-sex couples should be decided on a case-by-case basis by family courts.
- He supports the Early Treatment for HIV Act and full funding for science-based prevention programs and the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act.
- He opposes "don't ask, don't tell," saying, "As the recent discharge of Arabic language specialists demonstrates, the current policy does not serve our national security interests and should be changed." (Several Arabic and Korean linguists from the Army's Defense Language Institute were discharged for being gay in a highly publicized case in the fall of 2002.)

"John Kerry and John Edwards make up the most gay-supportive national ticket in American history," said Matt Foreman, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director. "But, in order for them to win the enthusiastic support of the gay community, a critical part of their base, they will have to take a strong and bold stand on supporting our civil rights."

Within minutes of Kerry's announcement July 6 in Pittsburgh, the Republican National Committee issued an anti-gay screed titled "Who Is John Edwards?" Claiming that Edwards "doesn't share the priorities of American families," the 23-page document raged against his support for employment protections, equitable hate crimes enforcement and civil unions.

When asked about the RNC piece, the White House called the attacks "perfectly reasonable."

"It's perfectly legitimate to talk about the issues and the differences on those issues, as well as to discuss the record," spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters. "There are individuals in this race who have records, and those records are a reflection of how they would lead in office."

National Stonewall Democrats condemned the onslaught.

"Republicans insist on running a negative campaign that is dripping in pessimism and that is barren of vision," executive director Dave Noble said. "It is time for our community to hold the Republican National Committee accountable for its continuous attacks on our families."

Four years after the Pentagon issued an Anti-Harassment Action Plan, and a full year after a congressional inquiry into the matter, the Defense Department issued its first formal review of efforts to curb anti-gay harassment in the armed forces. In

a July 24 letter to members of Congress, Under Secretary of Defense David Chu said implementation of the policy "varies" by service.

The Pentagon adopted the action plan after the July 1999 murder of Pfc. Barry Winchell at Fort Campbell, Ky. It calls for annual, rank-appropriate training for all military personnel, a clear definition of harassment, accountability for those engaging in or condoning harassment and annual reporting on each service's implementation of the plan.

In his letter to Congress, Chu said "measuring the true outcomes of a policy or training is difficult," despite the Defense Department's inspector general having done just that in December 1999. He described the existing programs as "sufficient to address" harassment and said Pentagon leaders concluded a "directive is not necessary."

Meanwhile, overwhelming evidence indicates continuous and persistent harassment throughout each branch of the services. Specialist Brad Powell reported in 2002 that his command told soldiers that "the only thing a good fag needs is a good fag-bashing" and that they were encouraged to visualize "blowing up a gay bar" while throwing grenades.

"The Department of Defense's response is feckless," said C. Dixon Osburn, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network executive director. "Such abusive harassment flies in the face of Under Secretary Chu's claim that the programs already in place are effective or sufficient. Our leaders must take harassment seriously at the very top. To do otherwise puts our men and women in uniform at risk."

NEW MEXICO

Opponents of a 2003 law protecting queers from discrimination announced July 1 they had given up trying to place a referendum on the November ballot to overturn it. As a result, New Mexico became the first state this year to thwart efforts to put an anti-gay measure on the November ballot by voter initiative.

"This is a great day not only for LGBT people in New Mexico but for all of the people of the state," said Linda Siegle, Basic Rights New Mexico campaign committee member. "It's wonderful to live in a state where people simply refused to support taking away basic protections from a minority."

Last April, New Mexico became the 14th state to extend nondiscrimination protections to queers and the third state to include trans people. Immediately after the measure was signed into law by Democratic Gov. Bill Richardson, conservative groups announced they would seek to repeal it by ballot initiative. They needed to gather about 50,000 valid signatures by July 2.

A well-organized statewide campaign by queer activists is credited with defeating this anti-gay attack. Dan Hawes, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's organizing and training project director, took a leave of absence in February to manage Basic Rights New Mexico.

"Today's victory demonstrates the power of what a strong, well-organized campaign that starts early can accomplish," he said. "Action by action, as the opposition saw hundreds of volunteers campaign with voters, the New Mexico LGBT community and its allies made it clear they were ready to stand their ground and win. Strong organizing

made it tougher for the opposition to sell their anti-gay bigotry in New Mexico."

COLORADO

The National Center for Lesbian Rights praised a Colorado court July 1 for holding that a lesbian co-parent can seek custody or visitation with a child she jointly raised with her former partner.

Eley Maxwell McLeod and her former partner Cheryl Ann Clark were in a committed relationship for 11 years. Clark adopted a baby girl from China with the intention that both women would raise her. The couple changed the child's name to reflect both of their surnames, and her medical and school records reflect that both Clark and McLeod are her parents.

About six years after the child was adopted, Clark and McLeod ended their relationship. After the couple separated, Clark argued that McLeod had no legal right to visitation or care of their daughter.

In its decision, the Colorado Court of Appeals upheld a trial court's order giving both Clark and McLeod equal parenting rights. The court explained that McLeod was entitled to seek parenting rights based on her established parental relationship with the child.

"We are extremely pleased that the Court of Appeals recognized the importance of protecting children's relationships with both of the people who have functioned as their parents," attorney Courtney Joslin said. "It is outrageous that loving, devoted parents have to fight so hard for their right even to appear in court and ask for visitation with their own children."

MARYLAND

The American Civil Liberties Union sued Maryland county clerks July 7 charging



Alvin Williams and Nigel Simon, who describe their meeting six years ago at a discussion group for black gay men as "love at first sight," are suing the state of Maryland for the right to marry