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Despite the fact that HIV rates rose from 156 cases in 2001 to 428 cases in 2002, Valerio senses a lack of concern among queer men about the disease.

"HIV is not at the forefront [of our minds] anymore," he says. "It has come to be viewed as a chronic condition that you have to live with instead of a serious disease. The community is tired of hearing messages about HIV, so they are tuning it out."

According to Valerio, men younger than 25 are especially cavalier about the risks of HIV. "They think it is never going to happen to them," he says.

Rising rates of gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis and HIV are proof that no one is immune from being infected, and health officials are working feverishly to spread that message.

"From a public health standpoint, we want rates to be going down," says Harger. "It is not just the numbers we are concerned about; behind those numbers are real people and their health."

The Year in Political Fissures

by Bob Roehr

Perennial fault lines of issues, strategy and rhetoric within the gay community—largely papered over for the past few years in the surge of activity around marriage rights and opposition to the Bush administration—have re-emerged in the post-election analysis of what went wrong and what the community should do next.

Some of this has played out in the pages of the mainstream press. Those reports often have lacked the background knowledge to place those discussions within a meaningful historic framework of the gay community.

The abrupt departure of president Cheryl Jacques from the Human Rights Campaign, far and away the largest and most influential of the gay political organizations, brought additional attention to a regularly scheduled meeting of HRC's governing boards Dec. 6 and 7 in Las Vegas. Discussions at the meeting were frank and reflect an ongoing examination of the organization's priorities and tactics.

A Dec. 9 article in *The New York Times* said HRC had "adopted a new, more moderate strategy, with less emphasis on legalizing same-sex marriages and more on strengthening personal relationships." It cited an unnamed official as saying the group would consider supporting President Bush's efforts to privatize Social Security in exchange for the right of gay partners to receive benefits under the program.

In a game of telephone—where a reporter interprets and passes on second-hand information, then asks a third party to comment—the *Times* summarized those comments as criticizing HRC for "pre-emptive surrender and wrong-headed political calculations."

The comment on Social Security prompted a letter to members of Congress, organized by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and signed by several dozen people generally identified as being on the center-left of the political spectrum. It promised, "We will not sacrifice our rights—or the rights of others like senior citizens—on the altar of political expediency."

HRC responded to the article with a statement saying its "goals are unchanged and rock solid. There will be no retreat or compromise in the pursuit of full equality for GLBT Americans, in the laws of our nation and in the hearts of our fellow citizens."

HRC has been heavily involved in traditional lobbying activities at the national level and has long taken a more pragmatic and incremental approach to representing the interests of the gay community than have some other groups and individuals. Its reaffirmation of that perspective is neither new nor surprising.

The fact that other groups and individuals articulate a somewhat differing spectrum of priorities and approaches is, likewise, neither new nor surprising.

While those on the left often are heard, it is less clear who speaks for the nearly one-quarter of the community who, according to exit polls, voted for Bush.

What has emerged during the past several years is increased and regular conversation among the national queer organizations. This has diminished the sniping at each other and has increased coordination in the roles that each plays in advancing the interests of the gay community. That is not likely to change.



to a Twinkies diet; or a Talib concluding that his obsession with a woman's bare ankle is best addressed by blowing up a pair of >>