

00623067904857 YEAR IN REVIEW



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National Black Justice Coalition leader Keith Boykin (at the podium) was excluded from the Millions More Movement.



Virulently anti-gay Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became virulently anti-gay Pope Benedict XVI.



The Campaign to End AIDS ended its cross-country caravans with protests at the White House in November.

A Year in Review

Politics, military, religion and health

by Bob Roeher

Long-sSpeculated-upon vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court became a reality this year when Sandra Day O'Connor announced her retirement from the bench July 1, pending confirmation of her successor. That matter was complicated by the worsening health and death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist in September.

President Bush nominated Judge John G. Roberts Jr. to fill first O'Connor's then Rehnquist's seat on the court. The well-respected constitutional litigator had only a short and generally noncontroversial record as a judge. And it turned out that he had offered brief but crucial assistance in preparing the attorney who argued 1996's *Romer* case—the first significant pro-gay decision by the court, which struck down Colorado's anti-gay Amendment 2.

Most liberal and gay groups ended up opposing the Roberts nomination, largely for ideological reasons, but they were able to convince only half the Democrats and no Republicans, and he was easily confirmed.

The nomination of Harriet Miers to succeed O'Connor was a short and painful period where unhappy movement conservatives essentially smeared the conservative attorney and assistant to the president.

That resulted in the nomination of Samuel A. Alito Jr., whose 15 years on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit offers an extensive record to examine. Abortion rights groups have led the way in opposition, with gay groups not far behind. His confirmation hearing is set to begin Jan. 9, and the current odds are that he is likely to be confirmed.

Illinois became the 15th state to enact comprehensive gay rights legislation, after many years of effort. The rare victory was almost forgotten after a year that saw so many defeats in other areas.

The National Black Justice Coalition had a series of meetings and communications with Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam that appeared to be leading to inclusion within the Millions More Movement and its rally on the National Mall in October. Those hopes were dashed at the last minute by rally executive director the Rev. Willie Wilson.

Wanda Alston, the mayor's dynamic liaison to the sexual minorities community in Washington, D.C., was brutally murdered in her home in March. A drug-crazed neighbor has since pleaded guilty to the murder.

Joe Solmonese was named to lead the Human Rights Campaign in March. Marty Rouse, the campaign director behind MassEquality and the fight for same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, will move to D.C. to head up HRC's national field operations.

Marsha Martin departed AIDS Action in August to take on the equally daunting task of running AIDS programs in D.C., which has the highest rate of infection in the nation. Terje Anderson said he will leave the National Association of People with AIDS at the end of the year.

Just before Thanksgiving, U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe of Arizona, the only openly gay Republican serving in Congress, announced that he will not run for re-election.

The ongoing war in Iraq has offered opportunity for a steady drumbeat of stories, such as that of Purple Heart recipient St. Robert Stout, of gays and lesbians serving in and being kicked out of the military. Public support for "don't ask, don't tell" has continued to erode.

But it will take an act of Congress, or the courts, to reverse the policy. In March, U.S. Rep. Marty Meehan, D-Mass., introduced a bill to do so, House Resolution 1059. By Veterans Day it had gathered 100 co-sponsors.

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network also went the legal

route, filing suit in Boston late last year that challenges "don't ask, don't tell." Motions on *Cook vs. Rumsfeld* were heard in July, and a decision as to whether the case will proceed is expected shortly.

Pope John Paul II died in April, and the College of Cardinals took little time to select Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as his successor. He took the name of Pope Benedict XVI. Catholic gays and lesbians had little hope for improved relations with the Vatican, but that did not lessen the sting when, in November, new guidance was issued for seminarians that signaled a deeper, renewed jihad against those with homosexual tendencies and their allies.

In July the United Church of Christ became the first mainstream Christian church in the United States to endorse gay marriage. Other denominations continue to struggle with issues and the roles of gays and lesbians within their traditions, though it appears that the divisiveness of those fights might have peaked.

The Rev. Troy Perry retired as founding moderator of the Metropolitan Community Church, and the Rev. Nancy L. Wilson was installed as his successor in a moving ceremony in November at the National Cathedral.

A media frenzy about a possible HIV "superbug" gripped New York City in February when health officials breathlessly spoke of a single person who had become infected with a multiple-drug-resistant variant of HIV and had rapidly progressed to AIDS-defining symptoms. There was nothing suggesting that the virus had changed significantly, no others were infected by it, and most signs pointed to the patient who was unique. Months later those same health officials said that the patient was doing well on his regimen and that perhaps they did overreact.

The other great demon of the year was crystal methamphetamine. A swell of concern about meth use within the community reached a hysterical crescendo, then abated to a more sustainable level of concern.

The first national conference on meth and HIV, in Salt Lake City in August, offered a historical framework of drug use in U.S. society. It made the point that use and abuse are not synonymous. Behavioral interventions have been useful in helping some quit meth, while ongoing trials suggest pharmacological interventions used to help stop cocaine addiction also can be used to treat meth abusers.

Syphilis and gonorrhea rates increased among gay men in 2004, according to figures released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in November. But unlike earlier years when CDC officials warned that this might lead to an increase in HIV infections among gay men, this year they acknowledged that might not be occurring. They speculated it might be because of serosorting—men consciously having sex with people of the same HIV status.

The number of U.S. citizens living with HIV passed 1 million, according to estimates released by the CDC in July. However, resources are not keeping pace with the caseload. HIV programs are tightening their eligibility and cutting back services, and some state AIDS Drug Assistance Programs are creating waiting lists for access to life-saving medications. The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act technically expired at the end of September while reauthorization continues to languish in Congress.

One of the more encouraging organizational signs is the rebirth of AIDS activism at the grassroots level. The Campaign to End AIDS grew out of an organizational meeting in January, with the aim of training and empowering a new generation of activists. It used a series of caravans from across the country in the fall to raise awareness as well as demonstrations in D.C. in November to catch the media's eye. 10