

**** Their Goal: Political Power

Homosexuals Seek to Win New Laws By Influencing All Candidates Here

BY JAN JARBOE
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Not too long ago, most homosexuals in Houston wanted only one thing from the rest of the community: to be left alone. Suddenly, they want to be a political force.

A local group has organized a Gay Political Caucus with specific goals for breaking the stigma of gays as second-class citizens.

Ray Hill, one of the organizers, said questionnaires will be sent to all candidates in the November city election as an attempt to get them to take stands on gay issues.

What are gay issues?

- Repeal of the state law that makes homosexual acts a misdemeanor tops the list. Hill said that though the law is rarely enforced, homosexuals are in the position of acting illegally on a regular basis.

- State legislation outlawing job discrimination against homosexuals. The caucus will push, specifically, for the removal of the local ban on hiring gays to be police officers.

- Federal legislation giving partners in a homosexual marriage the right to file a joint income tax report to benefit from tax incentives.

- Inclusion of the homosexual perspective in sex education classes in the public schools.

Hill, who has spoken for gays here since 1965, said there are several reasons

why the political organization was not formed previously.

"Up until now I was the only faggot with a face and name in town," Hill said. "There was a time when I was a freak show at city hall. But now we have people who don't mind going to the mayor's office every day."

Jerry Miller, another leader in the caucus, said a number of gays with conservative political leanings have recently made their sexual preferences publicly known and are ready to become involved in the "movement."

"In the '60s if you were a gay activist you were a political radical. The community is more broad-based now," he said.

Nevertheless, getting guys to "come out of the closet" is one of the major hurdles the caucus faces. Hill estimates they make up 10 per cent of the city's total vote but he has no solid figures to back up that estimate.

There are about 10 informal homosexual organizations in Houston and Hill said there are more than 30 gay bars where homosexuals congregate.

But for the last two years the non-denominational Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Church, which operates out of a storefront location at 2020 Waugh, has served as the focal point for organizing gays.

Its pastor, the Rev. Bob Falls, said that about 100 persons attend weekly services.

Falls said fear keeps many homosexuals from attending services: fear of public exposure and loss of jobs.

Falls understands the reluctance to make public one's homosexuality.

Two weeks before he was to be ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1947, Falls confided to a superior that he may have homosexual tendencies. He was told to leave the monastery.

"At that time I had never laid a hand on a man," he said, "and I spent the next five years trying to cure myself."

He worked as a hospital administrator and did not practice any form of organized religion until, 25 years later, he affiliated with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches.

Though Falls said he will not hesitate to relate candidates' stands on homosexual issues from the pulpit, he is quick to point out that the church has a Christian, not political, mission.

One of the caucus leaders who is not a member of the church is Pokey Anderson, a lesbian and free-lance secretary.

Women members of the caucus, Anderson said, will be seeking reforms that are related to their particular problems.

"We will concentrate on the child custody problem," she said. "The courts do not think lesbians can be fit mothers. They seem to think we are dangerous around children — that we are going to molest them or something."

Both Hill and Anderson indicated that the caucus will also work on changing

the public's image of homosexuals through the mass media.

Hill said the group will press for "positive" treatment of homosexual-related news events by local television stations through appeals to the Federal Communications Commission. He said the caucus

GAYS ORGANIZE POLITICALLY Leaders From Left, Falls, Hill, Miller, and Anderson



Chronicle Photo

will also monitor hiring practices of local newspapers.

But, by and large, the major thrust of the caucus will be an attempt to get political candidates to deal with gay issues.

"Not too long ago I called a candidate for justice of the peace and asked him what his stand was on repeal of the sodomy laws and other gay issues," Anderson said. "He told me that those are the kind of things he wouldn't discuss in public or in private — especially with a woman."

She admits that, in the past, political candidates in Texas have not catered to the homosexual vote because it hurt their chances to get elected.

However, Anderson and the other gay leaders hope that the caucus will give

gays here enough clout to make them respected politically.

They point out that homosexuals in other areas of the nation are making major inroads into politics.

In San Francisco, the gay groups are a prime source of financing for campaigns and even conservatives woo the homosexual vote.

When U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug, D-N.Y., introduced a bill last year prohibiting job discrimination against homosexuals, it attracted more than 20 cosponsors in the U.S. House.

A homosexual was elected to the state legislature in Massachusetts in 1974 and, in Minnesota, a state senator won widespread support when he announced he was a homosexual.



From left, Falls, Hill, Anderson discuss gays' plans

—Post photo by Fred Bunch

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Homosexual county aide fired after resolution try

Harris County commissioners refused to take action on a resolution Friday which would have had the court actively resist all discriminatory practices against minorities including homosexuals.

The resolution was offered by Gary Van Ooteghem, who, until he was fired Thursday by County Treasurer Hartsell Gray, was comptroller of the treasury.

Van Ooteghem, a 36-year-old certified public accountant, announced before the crowded commissioners' courtroom that he was a homosexual and asked that his resolution be adopted.

He said that across the country there is a growing movement of homosexuals who

are beginning to "realize that we no longer must suffer the intimidation and persecution placed on us by others."

"We are realizing only now that we have rights, too, and should be demanding them if, when, and where they are not freely offered to us," Van Ooteghem said.

Commissioner Tom Bass said that the court had adopted a resolution in June 1974, against minority discrimination in hiring and promotion practices.

Van Ooteghem said there are an estimated 200,000 homosexuals in Harris County who formed a minority not easily recognizable.

Gray called Van Ooteghem the "best accountant I've seen in local government," but he said he would not allow a non-elected official to take advantage of his office "to advance his politics."

He said Van Ooteghem's reputed homosexuality was not a factor in his dismissal.



VAN OOTEGHEM

City's gays seek to gain acceptance

Representatives of the city's gay organizations took their case for community acceptance to the public for the first time Monday and warned reporters they are launching a campaign to scrutinize media employment practices regarding homosexuals.

A longtime gay advocate here, Ray Hill, also said the gay groups will be checking on the media's response to coverage of stories involving gay issues.

Hill said at a press conference there are existing court test cases to back up their project.

The press conference, at the Metropolitan Community Church, 2020 Waugh Drive, marked the end of gay pride week in the city.

Pokey Anderson of the Gay Political Caucus said they hope to play a bigger role in upcoming elections.

She said homosexual acts are still illegal in Texas and they would bring this up in meetings with candidates in the city election. Anderson said 22 cities have passed civil rights ordinances covering gays. She said there are at least 100,000 gay persons in the Houston area.

Hill said there are still minor problems with police harassment of homosexuals but the problem improved under former police Chief Carol Lynn who appointed a liaison officer.

"We were sorry to see him go," Hill told reporters.

The Rev. Bob Falls, minister of the Metropolitan Church, said gays in the area would be focusing on outreach programs to promote community understanding.

Falls, who said he once studied for the Roman Catholic priesthood, said the Metropolitan Church hopes to secure a larger building that also will serve as a gay community center.

Hill said the gay community here is one of the largest in the country and "we aren't going to stay under the carpet anymore."

He said a year and a half ago only one gay organization existed in Houston but now there are eight, including the church.

Sociology invites Gay Caucus to speak Tuesday

Four members of the recently organized Houston chapter of the Gay Political Caucus have been invited to speak at a symposium held by the Sociology Club, Monday, Nov. 3 at 12:30.

Guest speakers will be Jerry Miller, vice president of the Integrity Organization of Houston; Hugh Cereel, secretary of Integrity; Gary Van Ooteghem, president of the Caucus; and tentatively, Pokey Anderson, vice president of the Political Caucus.

Miller is one of the founders of the Gay Political Caucus and one of the incorporators of the Gay Community Center.

Cereel, a graduate of Rice University, is on the Board of Trustees for the Gay Political Caucus and also an incorporator of the Gay Community Center.

Van Ooteghem is a former Trustee of the Comptroller of Harris county and is credited with the re-vamping of the accounting procedures of that office, but was fired due to his

homosexuality. He is now a CPA and a personal friend of Sgt. Matlovich, the man who raised the controversy of homosexuality in the Air Force.

It is tentative whether Anderson, office holder for the Sexuality Task Force of NOW, will be present. She is currently a writer for the magazine Point Blank Times.

The meeting will be held in room 2A of the student union bldg. and everyone is welcome.

Homosexual files suit on county over firing

The former top assistant to the Harris County treasurer filed a federal lawsuit Friday against the county Commissioners Court, the treasurer and deputy treasurer, alleging he was dismissed because he is a homosexual.

The suit, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, charges that Gary John Van Ooteghem, 33, of 1736 Marshall, was dismissed last July 31, after refusing to be restricted to his office during working hours.

According to the suit, county officials sought to prevent Ooteghem from addressing county commissioners on homosexual rights.

The suit alleges County Treasurer Hartsell Gray signed a letter that sought Ooteghem's consent to remain in his office during working hours. The suit states that Deputy Treasurer Don Brown delivered

the letter to Ooteghem, who refused to sign it.

In his suit, Ooteghem alleges that the letter, sent only days after he had informed Gray and Brown of his homosexuality and his intention to speak publicly, set restrictions that would have deprived him of his constitutional rights.

Ooteghem is seeking \$150,000 in damages and \$2,166.67 in lost pay, along with injunctions against county officials from any similar actions in the future.

At a press conference Friday, Ooteghem also claimed he is owed 88 hours overtime pay and 40 hours of vacation time.

Neither Gray nor Brown could be reached for comment on the suit, but County Judge Jon Lindsay said he does not think Ooteghem has a case. "I understood that it was made quite clear that he was let go for other reasons, not because of his sexual habits," Lindsay said.

Talking minds,

Fight

Homosexuals are organizing to fight for their rights as individuals, a founder of gay movements in California said Saturday at the Texas Gay Conference II being held in San Antonio.

The three-day convention, which concludes Sunday, was attended by 100 members of the Texas Gay Task Force, a statewide coalition of gay organizations and individual members.

Morris Kight, founder of the Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front, said in a press conference at the convention that gays will "no longer stand for oppression and discrimination."

Kight heads the Los Angeles Gay Community Service Center, which recently received a \$1 million federal grant for venereal disease and alcoholism programs among gay people.

"In Nazi Germany millions of gay people were exterminated and turned to cinders in death camps," Kight said. "Today we are being forced out of jobs and forced to play a secondary role in life. No longer will we play this role. The gay issue should never have been an issue at all, but since it is an issue, we will fight to win it."

Kight said that being born homosexual is as "natural as being born left-handed."

Ken Orr, Fort Worth, said the Texas Gay Task Force is