

THE LESBIAN/GAY RIGHTS LOBBY OF TEXAS



Our Vote Matters on Nov. 5!

On October 5, 1996, Melinda Paras, Executive Director of the National Gay/Lesbian Task Force helped energize lesbian and gay Texans about the upcoming election. Paras came to Austin to participate in a gathering of lesbian and gay leaders who

discussed strategies for maximizing the vote of the lesbian/gay/bi/trans community in Texas.

Paras reminded us that we must look beyond the Defense of Marriage Act when voting in November. She pointed out that 1996 brought the lesbian/gay community the most significant gain in our civil rights movement when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Colorado's Amendment 2. "For the first time in our history the Supreme Court made clear that lesbian and gay Americans should not be denied access to the same civil rights protections as other Americans," stated Paras. "This election is about picking the President who will choose the next three Supreme Court Justices. The Supreme Court is expected to rule on every major case of the gay rights movement in the next decade. With so much of our future at stake, we must make our voices heard clearly by voting on Nov. 5."

LGRL Steps Up Pressure to Pass TX Hate Crimes Bill

The murders of three gay men in the Austin area this summer, four stabbing deaths in the Fort Worth area in the past two years and a cross burning in August, have reignited the urgency of passing strong hate crimes legislation in Texas. Seventeen gay men have been killed in Texas since 1990 because of sexual orientation; and these only represent cases that are known and documented. The Executive Director of LGRL, Dianne Hardy-Garcia, said "Hate crimes terrorize whole groups of people-not just minorities or homosexuals. It's time to do all we can to slam the door on that kind of hatred."

What Can We Do? Take the Pledge to help end hate crimes in Texas. If you have already taken the Pledge, get a friend or family member to take the Pledge. The Pledge is a project of LGRL and already 10,000 cards have been signed. The Pledges represent the number of Texans who will no longer tolerate hate-related violence in our state. "The best way to get the attention of our elected officials is to show our strength in numbers. The Pledge Project is designed to get a bigger cross-section of gay and non-gay Texans involved in the effort to end hate-related violence," said Dianne. The NAACP, AFL-CIO, Texas Council on Family Violence and Texas Faiths United have already endorsed the project. **Sign today!**

The National Gay/Lesbian Task Force provided a guide for helping you decide who to vote for on November 5.

Bill Clinton

Gay/Lesbian Job Protection
Supports

First President to tackle this issue but settled for "don't ask, don't tell"

Bob Dole

Opposes

Supports discrimination against gays in the military

Gays in the Military

Ryan White Funds to Fight AIDS

Supported 120% increase

Voted to reauthorize funding

Medicaid for People with AIDS

Fought cuts that would have devastated PWA's relying on Medicaid

Supported cut of Medicaid funding by \$163 billion over the next 7 years

The Reasons LGRL Opposes Initiative and Referendum

In the upcoming legislative session State Senator Jane Nelson will attempt to pass a bill that would make Texas a state that allows the initiative and referendum process. In our last newsletter, LGRL announced that as part of our legislative agenda we would attempt to defeat the initiative and referendum bill. Here are our reasons for opposing this bill in Texas.

The device of initiative and referendum was originally embraced by populists and liberals in the U.S. as early as the 1890s. It was viewed as a way to get around vested interests that controlled the state legislatures. It was hailed as a victory for participation in a "direct democracy" where citizens could propose and vote directly on laws and amendments. However, over time, just the opposite seems to have occurred.

Initiative and referendum actually circumvents representative democracy. The vested interests that I+R sought to curb now exercise great control over this process of "direct democracy." They can ignore the legislative process and all the debate and compromise that it requires. There are no floor amendments, no testimony by concerned groups and no accountability to the voters. It contradicts the idea of "representative democracy" which was intended to free people from narrow, special-interest representation and to encourage voters to select representatives with ability and integrity.

Initiative and referendum allows majorities to trample the rights of minorities and women. In fact, legislatures have tended to adopt laws prohibiting discrimination while initiatives and referendums tend to incite and repeal them. Latinos, Afri-

can-Americans, women and the lesbian/gay/trans community have all been targets of such proposals. Colorado's notorious Amendment 2 was passed this way. Anti-gay initiatives have been turned back in several states including Oregon and Maine, but at a very high cost in terms of the time and energy of thousands of activists and millions of dollars. Because of the mean spiritedness of the language and of the campaigns, there is also fallout from these proposals. Hate crimes, harassment and discrimination against all Latinas/os have risen sharply in California since the passage of Proposition 187 there in 1994.

Initiative and referendum can and has been used to pursue special interests with big money. An entire industry has sprung up around initiative campaigns. There are professional firms that will gather signatures, provide fund-raising assistance, develop the campaign message, conduct research and provide computer and direct mail services. Obviously groups with limited financial resources will have much less opportunity to articulate and communicate their issues to the general public. Initiative and referendum gives disproportionate voice to those with the resources to run well-financed, slick campaigns and may erode the voters' faith in the democratic process. Right-wing groups such as the Christian Coalition and several consulting firms would be happy for initiative and referendum to become the law in Texas.

For all these reasons, LGRL is proud to stand in coalition with civil rights groups like MALDEF, NAACP, NOW, and the AFL-CIO as we oppose initiative and referendum.

New AIDS Drugs Bring Hope -if We Can Afford Them

The battle of the budget has already begun for the upcoming legislative session. It has been recommended that AIDS/HIV programs receive the same level of funding in 1998-1999 as we received in 1996-97. Level funding is not what we need. Level funding is, in fact, a cut in funding.

To meet the needs of Texans with HIV and AIDS, we need at least \$12 million in increased state funding. This money would be used for the HIV Medication Program. This program has become especially important for people who cannot afford the more expensive medications like protease inhibitors. Protease inhibitors have been known to reduce the traces of HIV in the blood stream to undetectable levels and have decreased the incidence of life threatening opportunistic infections. With all the hope that these new medications bring it would be tragic if people were not able to access these medications because of the lack of funding of the HIV Medication Program. The \$12 million increase would also be used to help more people with AIDS keep their insurance and to strengthen HIV prevention programs.

Twelve million dollars is more pocket change than most of us have to spare, but it's less than ten percent of the surplus now sitting unspent in the Texas Department of Health. It's a tiny fraction of the overall state budget. Yet this tiny fraction will save lives and make life better and more productive for thousands of Texans.

For more information call the Texas AIDS Network at 512-447-8887 or call LGRL of Texas.

Our New Address

LGRL of Texas

P.O. Box 2340 Austin, Texas 78768 (512)474-5475

Conduct Unbecoming

After 22 years of unblemished service, an Air Force major was facing the sudden loss of her pension and military benefits. She even faced the possibility of eight years in a military prison. Charges of conduct unbecoming an officer were first filed against Major Debra Meeks in 1994 when an adult civilian accused the Major of threatening her with a gun. The civilian, Pamela Dillard also claimed that Major Meeks was her lover. The Air Force dropped these charges in April of 1995 saying that the investigation was inconclusive.

Unknown to Major Meeks, and for unclear reasons, the Air Force at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio revived its investigation, cancelled her retirement and asked her to plead guilty to charges of conduct unbecoming. If she had agreed, she would have been discharged and lost all her benefits. Major Meeks refused and asked for a military trial instead. That is when the Air Force added the sodomy charge.

Court martial proceedings opened on August 12, 1996 at Lackland Air Force Base. Four days later, a seven member jury acquitted Major Meeks of all charges. Unfortunately, not all military personnel are so lucky.

The sodomy provision of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, on the books since 1951, ostensibly applies to all military personnel. In reality, it has been used to criminalize consensual sex between same-sex adults and to discharge gay and lesbian personnel. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy of the Clinton administration, which was instituted in 1993, was supposed to have improved this situation. Major Debra Meeks never "told" and was persecuted anyway. In fact, the number of discharges based on perceived sexual orientation has gone up steadily since 1990 according to the Servicemembers

Legal Defense Network. Several hundred gay and lesbian personnel are thrown out of the various branches of the military every year. **In 1995, the Pentagon spent over \$21 million to train replacements for these people, a cost higher than the previous three years in a row.**

Youth Unite!

On November 23, youth and youth advocates from all over Texas will meet in Austin to discuss the passage of the Non-Discrimination in Education Bill. The Non-Discrimination in Education Bill will protect Texas students from discrimination that is based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. At the meeting, this group will develop the plans for lobbying for this bill and organizing the first ever Lesbian and Gay Youth Lobby Day at the Texas Capitol. Lesbian and gay youth face too many obstacles as they try to get an education — it is time to do something about it! **Join us on Nov. 23, at the Capitol City Playhouse, 214 W. 4th Street in Austin from 1pm to 5pm.**

Establishing Our Grassroots Lobbying Effort

Volunteers for LGRL's Legislative Matching Project will meet in Austin on Nov. 23. You are invited as well. The goal of the Legislative Matching Project is to find one person in each district in Texas to coordinate a grassroots effort for that district. Each volunteer will coordinate between ten and twenty people from that district to write and call their legislators when legislation that effects our community comes up in the session. If you don't know anything about lobbying or about your Representative — you will. LGRL's short workshop on November 23 will introduce you to your Representative and help you get

Cross Burnings Alive and Well in Texas

In the pre-dawn hours of August 27th in Ft. Worth, the Schemmel Family was awakened by the barking of the family dog and the continuous ringing of the door bell. Although the family knew that something was terribly wrong, they were not prepared for the sight that awaited them in their front yard: a six-foot tall burning cross.

The incident has been classified as a hate crime. The burning cross is a symbol long known for racial hatred and intimidation.

The Schemmel family is white. Franz Schemmel is a Lutheran minister. Found on the front porch was an obscene and threatening note and two unfired shotgun shells. One of the shells had "Faggot" written on it and the other had "DOA" written on it. The family said they had no idea who would have done such a thing.

So it seems that the burning cross will continue to be a symbol of hatred and intimidation; only in this case the target group has changed.

started in your individual lobbying effort. We will also give you a profile on your Representative that covers how he or she voted on gay/lesbian related bills.

The kind of grassroots organizing that LGRL's Legislative Matching program establishes really DOES work. We hope that you will consider volunteering for this program. If you are interested in volunteering, call us or come to the volunteer meeting on **Nov. 23, at the Capitol City Playhouse, 214 W. 4th Street in Austin from 10am to 1pm. Your voice CAN make a difference.**

Houston, TX 77025



L.G.R.I. OF TEXAS
P.O. BOX 2340
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78768

OUR CALENDAR

- Nov. 2, 1996 - San Antonio Black Tie Dinner
- Nov. 2, 1996 - Houston Black Tie Dinner
- Nov. 23, 1996 - Legislative Matching Volunteers Meeting
- Nov. 23, 1996 - Youth Unite!
Meeting for Non-Discrimination in Education
- Dec. 9, 1996 - Dianne Hardy-Garcia speaks with HGLPC
- Jan. 9, 1997 - Board Meeting in Austin
- Mar. 23, 1997 - Our March on the Texas Capitol.
Yes, we will march! Mark your calendars!
- Mar. 24, 1997 - Our Lobby Day. Take the day off!

Executive Director

Dianne Hardy-Garcia

Staff

Jamie Spickler

Andy Delony

OUR BOARD

Chairs - Renee Buck & Peter Brooks

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Special thanks go to the people who made this newsletter possible

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|---------------|-------------------|
| Betty Naylor | Tom Henderson |
| Yolanda Reyes | Mary Anne Messina |
| Peter Brooks | Carolyn Parker |

Big Thanks to Nancy too!