

PFLAG SPIRIT

November 2009

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Newsletter of Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Fort Worth Chapter, P.O. Box 8279, Fort Worth, TX 76124. Published monthly except January.

MISSION: Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons, their families and friends through *support*, to cope with an adverse society; *education*, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and *advocacy*, to end discrimination and secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

November meeting

Our November speaker is Rev. Vernon Gotcher, an Episcopal priest and PH.D. in psychotherapy. He will speak on issues facing the church today, including same-sex marriage and gay clergy.

Coming soon—mark your calendars: our annual holiday potluck. On December 3rd we will gather with friends and family to celebrate the joys of fellowship and the season.

PFLAG Fort Worth's Samaritan House Team always needs more volunteers to join our dedicated group one Monday evening a month.

Call Jerry at 972-366-3292 to volunteer to bring a potluck dish and help serve from 5:30-7:00.

Dates to Remember

11/5	Fort Worth PFLAG meeting	7:00 p.m.
11/23	PFLAG Supper Club for Samaritan House	5:30 p.m.
12/3	Fort Worth PFLAG Annual Holiday Potluck	7:00 p.m.

PFLAG INFORMATION

Meetings: First Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church
1959 Sandy Lane, Fort Worth, TX 76112-5412

Hotline: 817-428-2329

Website: <http://pflagfortworth.org>

National Website: <http://www.pflag.org>

Newsletter: Sharon Salih, Editor

Change of address & news to share: 817-496-1587

Deadline: 15th of the month

Membership: Lisa EarleyVP/Membership Coordinator

Dallas judge paves way for gay couple to get divorce

By ROY APPLETON/The Dallas Morning News

October 1, 2009—In a first for Texas and a sweeping rejection of the state's ban on gay marriage, a judge has cleared the way for two gay Dallas men to divorce.

A voter-approved state constitutional amendment and the Texas Family Code prohibit same-sex marriages or civil unions. And the Texas attorney general had intervened in the two men's divorce case, arguing that since a gay marriage isn't recognized in Texas, a Texas court can't dissolve one through divorce.

But Dallas state District Judge Tena Callahan ruled Thursday that the state's bans on same-sex marriage violates the constitutional guarantee to equal protection under the law. She denied the attorney general's intervention and said her court "has jurisdiction to hear a suit for divorce filed by persons legally married in another jurisdiction."

"This is huge news. We're ecstatic," said Dallas attorney Peter Schulte, who represents the man who filed the divorce. The man, identified in court documents as J.B., asked that he and his former partner not be identified.

Schulte said the ruling was a surprise and that he hoped to have a divorce order for the judge to sign in the "next few weeks."

In a prepared statement, Attorney General Greg Abbott said he would appeal the ruling "to defend the traditional definition of marriage that was approved by Texas voters.

"The laws and constitution of the State of Texas define marriage as an institution involving one man and one woman. Today's ruling purports to strike down that constitutional definition — despite the fact that it was recently adopted by 75 per cent of Texas voters."

http://www.wfaa.com/sharedcontent/dws/wfaa/latestnews/stories/wfaa091001_mo_gaymarriage.1d60aad6b.html

Have you visited our webpage??

If you have links to other community resources, let us know!

Hate Crime bill goes to Obama for signature

WASHINGTON (CNN), October 23, 2009 -- The Senate passed groundbreaking legislation Thursday that would make it a federal crime to assault an individual because of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.

The expanded federal hate crimes law now goes to President Obama's desk. Obama has pledged to sign the measure, which was added to a \$680 billion defense authorization bill.

President George W. Bush had threatened to veto a similar measure.

The bill is named for Matthew Shepard, a [gay](#) Wyoming teenager who died after being kidnapped and severely beaten in October 1998, and James Byrd Jr., an African-American man dragged to death in Texas the same year.

"Knowing that the president will sign it, unlike his predecessor, has made all the hard work this year to pass it worthwhile," said Judy Shepard, board president of the Matthew Shepard Foundation named for her son. "Hate crimes continue to affect far too many Americans who are simply trying to live their lives honestly, and they need to know that their government will protect them from violence, and provide appropriate justice for victims and their families."

Several religious groups have expressed concern that a hate-crimes law could be used to criminalize conservative speech relating to subjects such as abortion or homosexuality. Attorney General Eric Holder has asserted that any federal hate-crimes law would be used only to prosecute violent acts based on bias, as opposed to the prosecution of speech based on controversial racial or religious beliefs....

More than 77,000 hate-crime incidents were reported by the FBI between 1998 and 2007, or "nearly one hate crime for every hour of every day over the span of a decade," Holder told the Senate Judiciary Committee in June.

The FBI, Holder added, reported 7,624 hate-crime incidents in 2007, the most current year with complete data.

For the rest of the story: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/10/22/hate.crimes/>

Editorial: A right to have and to hold

The D.C. Council takes a major step toward legalizing same-sex marriage.

Friday, October 9, 2009

BY INTRODUCING the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009, D.C. Council mem-

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail.

- - - Ralph Waldo Emerson

ber David A. Catania (I-At-Large) has started the District's long-awaited effort to permit same-sex marriage. The bill is short on pages, but its impact on the lives of gays and lesbians, and on the advancement of civil rights generally, is immeasurable.

Think of this as part two of a considered strategy by Mr. Catania and the council. The first was passage of a law earlier this year that recognized same-sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions. An effort to nullify the measure before it took effect in the spring failed when the Board of Elections and Ethics ruled that a referendum on the subject could not go on the ballot because it violated the District human rights law's prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation. A similar fate most likely awaits a proposed ballot initiative that would "provide that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized" in the District. As D.C. Attorney General Peter Nickles wrote to the board this week, "asking voters to distinguish between same-sex and opposite-sex marriages, which are legally indistinguishable in the jurisdictions where the marriages were performed, authorizes, or has the effect of authorizing, discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation."

Ten of 13 council members, including Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray, are sponsoring the bill to legalize same-sex marriage in the District. The legislation would honor the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom by stating that no member of the clergy or official of a nonprofit religious group would be required to solemnize any marriage in violation of his or her religious beliefs. The District's domestic partnership registry would sunset on Jan. 1, 2011. Those who are currently domestic partners would be able to apply for and receive a marriage license free of charge.

A public hearing will be held on Oct. 26. A vote of the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary is expected next month, with a full vote of the council possible by mid-December. Then, as with all District laws, Congress has to review the same-sex marriage statute. If we're to believe the Capitol Hill chatter, Congress is unlikely to thwart its implementation. We hope that proves true. Same-sex marriage is legal in four states -- Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa and Vermont. New Hampshire's law goes into effect Jan. 10. If the District's elected representatives want it to join their ranks, as it should, Congress should not interfere.

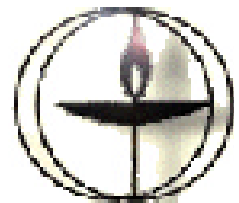
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Vet says 'don't ask, don't tell' should end

Web Posted: 09/30/2009 12:00 CDT

By Gary Martin - Express-News

WASHINGTON — Former Marine Staff Sgt. Eric Alva, the first casualty in the Iraq war, said Tuesday that the nation's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays and lesbians serving in the military is having a detrimental impact on readiness.

Alva, a San Antonio veteran, openly declared his homosexuality after he left the U.S. armed services as a hero, earning a Purple Heart after he lost a leg from a land mine in the first hours of the war.

The veteran, now a gay rights activist, said his homosexuality was well-known in his Marine unit, which bonded on trust and capabilities, not sexual orientation.

"My being gay didn't damage unit cohesion," Alva said. He said the outdated policy is discouraging young patriots from joining the military at a time when they are needed most.

He argued for repeal of the ban on homosexuals openly serving, saying, "It's either something we are going to address now or later — but it's never going to go away."

Alva and other experts urged repeal of the policy during a panel discussion at the National Press Club sponsored by the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy.

Lawmakers in both political parties have opposed lifting the restrictions that permit gays and lesbians to serve in the military if they keep their sexual preferences private even though the law calls for the discharge of personnel who engage in homosexual acts.

Brian Jones, a retired sergeant major who directed the Army Rangers in Somalia, told Congress last year the presence of openly gay men in close quarters "would elevate tensions and disrupt unit cohesion and morale."

Legislation filed in 2008 by former Rep. Ellen Tauscher, D-Calif., to repeal the ban has since stalled in the House, although it has gained 175 sponsors.

It is now being shepherded by Rep. Patrick Murphy, D-Pa., after Tauscher left Congress to join the Obama administration at the State Department as an undersecretary for arms control.

The House is expected by early next year to take up the bill to repeal the ban that has resulted in the discharge of roughly 13,000 people over the past 16 years, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

And a Senate panel will hold its first hearing this year. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., agreed to hold a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing at the behest of Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., who has called the law "a very ineffective policy for our military."

The Senate hearing is a milestone, and the first since the ban was approved by Congress and implemented by President Bill Clinton's administration in 1993, said Aubrey Sarvis, executive director for Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

What Defense Secretary Robert Gates says in the Senate hearing about the ban and repeal could carry weight with undecided lawmakers, Sarvis said.

President Barack Obama said in June he would sign legislation repealing the ban, but he ruled out issuing an executive order to do so.

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/politics/62698722.html>

Lesbians suffer most from 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy in U.S.

Research has revealed that lesbians suffer disproportionately compared to gay men as a result of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that applies to the U.S. military.

Research carried out by the Palm Center at the University of California in Santa Barbara revealed women made up a mere 15 percent of all active-duty and reserve members of the military but accounted for more than 33 percent of the 619 members of the military discharged from service in 2008 because of their sexual orientation.

Lesbians in the Air Force were at the most risk of being discharged, with MSNBC reporting that whilst women formed just 20 percent of the Air Force, 61 percent of those who found their military career at an end because they were gay were women.

It is the first year since the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which removes from the military those who are openly gay, was introduced in the mid 1990s that a larger percentage of women were discharged from a branch of the military than men.

According to CNN 90 people in total were discharged from the Air Force in 2008, 56 of them women and 34 of them men.

In the army too there was considerable disparity, with 36 per cent of those removed from the service being women. However only 14 percent of those serving in the army were female.

The Navy figures were 23 percent of discharges compared to 14 percent of the personnel and in the Marines it was 18 percent of discharges to 6 percent of personnel.

Julianne Sohn was the only female Marine officer discharged as a consequence of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" last year and she had just returned from seven months in Iraq when she was told that she was being investigated because of her sexual orientation. The call giving her that news was not a great surprise, several of her colleagues already knew that she was a lesbian and had warned her that an investigation was likely pending, but she said that she felt insulted at being treated almost like a criminal.

Nathaniel Frank is one of the researchers from the Palm Center, which studies in depth gender and sexuality in the military, and he said that one of the reasons for the discrimination that is seemingly revealed by the figures might be that gay women are more prevalent than gay men in the armed forces.

But another explanation offered by Mr Frank, supported by some women who had served in the military, was that rumors of lesbianism and subsequent investigation of the person at the center of the rumors followed rejection of a male colleague's sexual advances. Failing to meet traditional notions of feminine beauty may be another reason for what may amount to little more than persecution in some cases.

Anuradha Bhagwati served in the Marines and is the founder of the Service Women's Action Network, which states on its website that it is "a non-partisan, non-profit organization that works to improve the welfare of current U.S. servicewomen and to assist all women veterans". She said of the situations described by Mr Frank: *Often times the lesbians under my command were under scrutiny by the same men who were also sexually harassing straight women, so it was this kind of sexist undercurrent of 'You don't belong here'*

For the rest of the story: <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/280279>

Gay rights advocates urge passage of bill to protect gays, transsexuals from bias at work

Sam Hananel, Associated Press Writer, September 23, 2009
WASHINGTON (AP) — Two openly gay members of Congress on Wednesday urged their colleagues to pass a sweeping job discrimination bill that would — for the first time — protect gays and transsexuals from workplace bias.

The testimony from Reps. Barney Frank, D-Mass., and Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., comes as supporters of the measure believe Congress is closer than ever to banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Frank told the House Education and Labor Committee that opponents of the bill often accuse the gay rights community of pushing a "radical agenda."

"Trying to get a job or join the military has not been the hallmark of radicalism," he said.

Baldwin, whose home state of Wisconsin was the first to pass a law protecting gay employees from bias in 1982, said it was time "to bring our laws in line with the reality of American life."

The Employment Nondiscrimination Act would ban employers from making any decisions about hiring, firing, promotions or pay based on a worker's sexual orientation or gender identity. It would exempt the military, religious groups and businesses with fewer than 15 employees.

Opponents complain some of the bill's language is too murky. It offers protection based on "perceived" sexual orientation and for workers who have "undergone" or are "undergoing" gender transition without defining those terms.

"It does not take a legal scholar to recognize that such vaguely defined protections will lead to an explosion in litigation and inconsistent judicial decisions," said Minnesota Rep. John Kline, the committee's top Republican.

Craig Parshall, general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters, warned lawmakers the bill would subject religious groups to "a crazy quilt" of inconsistent court decisions and send a "chilling pall" over their activities.

He also argued that for-profit faith-based groups, like Christian radio stations, would be denied any exemption at all from the measure.

The House passed a similar bill two years ago — without protections for transgender workers — but it stalled in the Senate and faced the possibility of a veto from President George W. Bush. This time, President Barack Obama supports the bill.

Stuart Ishimaru, acting chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, said the measure would not create the chaos and confusion predicted by opponents.

Frank says chances have improved for passage, given a stronger Democratic majority this year. A House vote is expected later this year, but the Senate is not expected to consider it until next year.

Twenty-one states already ban employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, and 12 states also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity.

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/sns-ap-us-congress-gay-rights,0,1236305.story>

Barack Obama gives a nod to same-sex Couples in his Family Day proclamation

September 28, 2009— In an official proclamation this afternoon, President Obama declared today Family Day 2009.

What is significant is the way he defined "family."

The president gave a nod to the gay community when he praised all families, "whether children are raised by two parents, a single parent, grandparents, a same-sex couple, or a guardian." (Emphasis ours.)

His shout-out to same-sex couples is sure to draw heat from some social conservatives. Interestingly, it has been met with some hostility from gay rights activists too.

One commenter on gay blogger [Pam Spaulding's website](#) called today's statement "honeyed words, easy to say." "Mr. President," the commenter asked, "when are you going to actually DO something for same-sex couples and their children? Other than make ceremonial proclamations, that is."

Obama's proclamation has fueled an ongoing debate among gay rights activists about whether the president is living up to his promise that he would be a "[fierce advocate](#)" for LGBT equality

Many gay rights activists greeted...

...Obama's inauguration with optimism. But some complain that he has made no significant efforts to further their cause.

They point out that since taking office, Obama has not moved to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. And his administration has defended the Defense of Marriage Act, which says that states don't have to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and that the federal government does not recognize same-sex marriage.

The president's support for gay rights, they argue, has not been reflected in policy decisions, but has been purely rhetorical. In April, Obama made a point of inviting gay families to the Easter Egg Roll at the White House. And in June, the president declared it Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month.

Other bloggers have [voiced support](#) for the president's agenda. They note that in June, Obama [ordered](#) federal agencies to "extend the benefits they have respectively identified to qualified same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees" where possible under current law. -- Kate Linthicum
For the text of the Family Day proclamation go to: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2009/09/barack-obama-gives-a-nod-to-samesex-couples-in-his-family-day-proclamation.html>

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“Coming Out in Middle School”

by Benoit Denizet-Lewis

Austin didn't know what to wear to his first gay dance last spring. It was bad enough that the gangly 13-year-old from Sand Springs, Okla., had to go without his boyfriend at the time, a 14-year-old star athlete at another middle school, but there were also laundry issues. "I don't have any clean clothes!" he complained to me by text message, his favored method of communication.

When I met up with him an hour later, he had weathered his wardrobe crisis (he was in jeans and a beige T-shirt with musical instruments on it) but was still a nervous wreck. "I'm kind of scared," he confessed. "Who am I going to talk to? I wish my boyfriend could come." But his boyfriend couldn't find anyone to give him a ride nor, Austin explained, could his boyfriend ask his father for one. "His dad would give him up for adoption if he knew he was gay," Austin told me. "I'm serious. He has the strictest, scariest dad ever. He has to date girls and act all tough so that people won't suspect."

Austin doesn't have to play "the pretend game," as he calls it, anymore. At his middle school, he has come out to his close friends, who have been supportive. A few of his female friends responded that they were bisexual. "Half the girls I know are bisexual," he said. He hadn't planned on coming out to his mom yet, but she found out a week before the dance. "I told my cousin, my cousin told this other girl, she told her mother, her mother told my mom and then my mom told me," Austin explained. "The only person who really has a problem with it is my older sister, who keeps saying: 'It's just a phase! It's just a phase!'"

Austin's mom was on vacation in another state during my visit to Oklahoma, so a family friend drove him to the weekly youth dance at the Openarms Youth Project in Tulsa, which is housed in a white cement-block building next to a redbrick Baptist church on the east side of town....I heard similar accounts from those who work with gay youth all across the country. Though most adolescents who come out do so in high school, sex researchers and counselors say that middle-school students are increasingly coming out to friends or family or to an adult in school. Just how they're faring in a world that wasn't expecting them - and that isn't so sure a 12-year-old can know if he's gay - is a complicated question that defies simple geographical explanations. Though gay kids in the South and in rural areas tend to have a harder time than those on the coasts, I met gay youth who were doing well in socially conservative areas like Tulsa and others in progressive cities who were afraid to come out.

What is clear is that for many gay youth, middle school is more survival than learning - one parent of a gay teenager I spent time with likened her child's middle school to a "war zone." In a 2007 survey of 626 gay, bisexual and transgender middle-schoolers from across the country by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 81 percent reported being regularly harassed on campus because of their sexual orientation. Another 39 percent reported physical assaults. Of the students who told teachers or administrators about the bullying, only 29 percent said it resulted in effective intervention. *For the rest of the article go to: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/magazine/27out-t.html?_r=1&ref=magazine&pagewanted=print*

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