

Who will Kerry choose?

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) points to N.C. Sen. John Edwards as possibility

by Sheri A. Lunn

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute



Picking someone like Sam Nunn would send a terrible message to the LGBT community, while Dick Gephardt or John Edwards could go a long way in healing the rift between Kerry and queer voters.

released May 7 the first comprehensive analysis of the six most frequently mentioned prospective

Democratic vice presidential candidates on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. The six discussed in the report are Sen. John Edwards (N.C.), Rep. Richard A. (Dick) Gephardt (Mo.); Sen. Bob Graham (Fla.), former Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia, Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico and Gov. Thomas J. Vilsack of Iowa.

The report is based on an analysis of the voting records and public statements of the prospective candidates in 13 key issue areas, including: sexual orientation and gender identity non-discrimination laws; HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment; lifting the military's ban on openly gay and lesbian servicemembers; marriage equality for same-sex couples; and education policy that supports the right of LGBT youth to attend school in a safe and affirming environment.

According to the report, the most supportive prospective V.P. candidate is Rep. Dick Gephardt, who has taken supportive positions on 11 of the 13 issue areas (unclear in one area and opposed in one area). He is followed by: Sen. John Edwards (supportive in nine,

unclear in three, opposed in one), Gov. Richardson (supportive in eight, unclear in four, opposed in one), Sen. Graham (supportive in four, unclear in six, opposed in three) and Gov. Vilsack (supportive in five, unclear in eight). Former Sen. Sam Nunn, who led efforts to pass the much-reviled "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law, ranked last (supportive in only two, opposed in four, unclear in seven). None supports marriage equality for same sex couples.

"To win in November, Sen. Kerry must have the enthusiastic support of the LGBT community and who he selects as his running mate will have a lot to do with that," said Matt Foreman, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director. "Our community needs to see a vice presidential candidate on the Democratic side whose record shows both a willingness and capacity to fight head on the other side's ugly campaign to use same-sex marriage to wedge the electorate."

According to exit polls, the gay and lesbian vote comprises at least five percent of the general election vote and traditionally votes heavily (70 percent) Democratic, making the gay community the party's third most loyal bloc of support behind the African-American and Jewish communities. With the electorate being so evenly divided, both parties agree that turning out their bases is critical. Many see President George W. Bush's public call for an anti-marriage U.S. constitutional amendment as an overt play to energize and turn out

evangelical Christians who made up 40 percent of his vote in November 2000.

Foreman said that Sen. Kerry's statement that he — while opposing amending the U.S. Constitution to forbid same-sex marriage — might support amending the Massachusetts Constitution to do just that, has caused consternation in the LGBT community and the vice presidential nod could go a long way in either healing or exacerbating the rift.

"Picking someone like Sam Nunn would send a terrible message to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people," Foreman said.

Collectively, the prospective candidates are most supportive of sexual orientation non-discrimination laws, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, inclusive hate crimes laws and, to a lesser degree, domestic partnership. Although they oppose marriage equality for same-sex couples, four oppose the *Federal Marriage Amendment* (the positions of Bob Graham and Sam Nunn on the amendment are not clear).

The full report and a chart summarizing the positions of the prospective V.P. candidates can be downloaded from the Task Force website at www.TheTaskForce.org/electioncenter.

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