

Students' homophobia increasing Editorial

by Jim Anderson
Special to Q-Notes

NEW YORK—The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) expressed alarm at the results of a survey conducted by Who's Who Among American High School Students. The poll, which surveyed over 3000 16- to 18-year-old students, revealed that 48 percent admit they are prejudiced against gay people. This represents an increase of 19 percentage points from last year's survey.

"This startling increase is a wake-up call for administrators and teachers who believe they are doing enough to teach their students the values of diversity and respect," said GLSEN executive director Kevin Jennings. "These numbers suggest that homophobia is one of the last socially-accepted prejudices, especially in our schools."

Though the findings are worrisome, Jennings says the increase is not entirely surprising. Political leaders and sports stars, such

as Rep. Trent Lott and Reggie White, respectively, participated in one of the most public anti-gay crusades ever last summer. "Students live up to the standards we set for them. When role models say that accepting diversity isn't important, students take the message to heart," he continued.

GLSEN notes that the failure of schools to address these prejudices contributes to:

- 18 percent of male college students claiming they have used violence against their GLBT peers;

- GLBT youth being four times as likely as others to be threatened with a weapon in school;

- GLBT youth being five times as likely to have skipped school once a month due to feeling unsafe.

"Prejudice prevents children from accessing the education our country promises to all. When we tolerate that prejudice, we ensure that divisiveness and hatred will continue to be part of our national fabric," Jennings declared. ▾

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final week of campaigning by the anti-gay Gabbard had an extremely negative impact on Hawaii's reputation and he was intent on restoring Hawaii as a tolerant place.

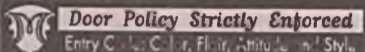
The battle against the constitutional amendment was a professionally executed, valiant effort. The strategy was sound and attracted new allies in our long-term efforts. Hawaii's civil rights community is profoundly grateful to the Human Rights Campaign, which provided a massive investment (\$1.4 million) and incredible energy and skill. We are equally grateful to Tim Gill, Robert Wilson and the many people across the country that contributed to the effort. The campaign that you funded actually created the political space for a likely victory in Hawaii on solid political and legal ground that could be a platform from which future battles are waged to secure equal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships nationally, and ultimately full and equal marriage rights. We might have lost this time at the ballot box, but we are

well on our way to winning the broader fight for equal treatment under the law for lesbian and gay people in this country. And the noble campaign to defeat this amendment will be seen as a step toward our ultimate success.

Now that the burden of crisis-driven ballot fights is for the moment lifted, we must renew our efforts today, to educate this country on why it is fair, just and right for gay people to be granted the freedom to marry. Moving public opinion is the largest challenge before us.

We must continue to engage non-gay people patiently and persistently in every corner of the country with our eyes on the prize: full equality for gay and lesbian Americans, including the freedom to marry. Other states should do what we have done this year in Hawaii — identify and approach diverse opinion leaders, clergy and groups, educating them on gay lives and marriage. As Evan often says, you don't get half a loaf by asking for half a loaf. Nor, as we move forward, should gay people settle for anything less than full equality, even as we get there step by step. ▾


— Dan Foley, Honolulu, HI



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