

Activists call for change in Boy Scouts of America's anti-gay admission, leadership policies

by David Elliot
Special to Q-Notes

BALTIMORE, MD—On July 5, more than 100 activists from Baltimore, Washington, DC and throughout the Atlantic Coast region rallied in front of the Baltimore Boy Scouts' headquarters and called on Boy Scouts of America to end its policy of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Groups sponsoring the rally included Maryland Free State Justice; the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Baltimore and Central Maryland; the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and Scouting For All. The rally followed last week's 5-4 US Supreme Court decision, which upheld the legal right of Boy Scouts of America to discriminate.

"We call on the Boy Scouts of America to end discrimination," said NGLTF Executive

Director Elizabeth Toledo. "We are asking our friends and family members, co-workers and classmates to contact their local Boy Scout troops and tell them that intolerance is a sad and failed relic of the past. And we will be prepared to go to the polls in November to support candidates who believe it is government's role to enforce civil rights laws that are intended to end discrimination. The Court's latest 5-4 decision vividly shows us what is at stake this November."

At the rally, Rev. Ken South, United Church of Christ minister and NGLTF organizer of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable, announced he is returning his Eagle Scout medal to the Boy Scouts of America in protest of BSA's discriminatory policy.

Just before Wednesday's rally, organizers received a letter of support from Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening. Glendening wrote that

he shares "your outrage at the Boy Scouts of America and their decision to ban gay men from positions of leadership."

"If we saw headlines reporting that the Boy Scouts of America had decided to ban African-Americans or Muslims or Jews from serving as scoutmasters, the public would react with justifiable outrage," Glendening wrote. "BSA's officially sanctioned policy of discrimination against homosexuals is just as outrageous and just as divisive."

The Baltimore rally is just the beginning of a summer of protest against Boy Scouts of America. Scouting For All has planned a National Day of Protest for Monday, Aug. 21. Members of Scouting For All and their supporters will be protesting both in front of Boy Scouts of America's national headquarters in Irving, TX, and in local communities throughout the US. ▼

London mayor voices support for gay civil unions

by John Hunt
Special to Q-Notes

LONDON, ENGLAND—Despite overcast skies, the July 1 GLBT Pride March through London was both colorful and well attended. Afterwards marchers dispersed: some to communal picnics and entertainment in Hyde Park; some gravitating to the bars of Soho; and others making their way to Finsbury Park, (where the cost of tickets apparently reduced attendance to an estimated 57,000, instead of the 85,000 organisers had hoped for). Festival crowds heard an address by London Mayor Ken Livingstone.

Speaking just one day after the conviction of David Copeland for the three London nail bombs, Livingstone expressed his determination to rid London of homophobia, and spoke of the possibility of establishing a civil register for gay and lesbian couples to record their mutual commitment.

Livingstone's support for gay weddings and his pledge to use the mayor's £3.5 billion budget to try to end anti-gay discrimination caused controversy during his election campaign.

He told the thousands gathered in Finsbury Park, north London, "As mayor, I want to make certain this city is free from homophobia. We are going to talk to lesbian and gay people about a civil register of gay couples. It would not have the force of law but we value all loving relationships as equal. I want a civil ceremony where gay couples can demonstrate their commitment."

It is thought by some that the new Human Rights Act, coming into force in October, may force clergy to perform gay marriages.

During the festival, gay couples were able to have their relationships blessed by clergy, including spiritual leaders from Bournemouth's Metropolitan Community Church.

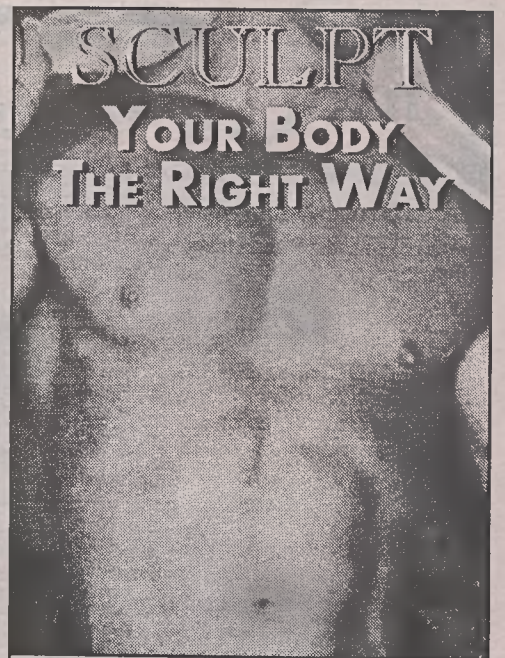
After appearing on stage with Australian pop

star Kylie Minogue, Livingstone gave his support to the Mardi Gras festival and said he would back its growth in coming years.

"Everywhere in the world great cities have events like this. The Mardi Gras in Sydney is probably the biggest tourist attraction on the planet," he said. "This one is small in comparison. But I want to talk to the organisers about building it up and perhaps in three or four years people will be flying in from around the world."

The seven-hour Mardi Gras 2000 followed the earlier Pride March and Parade.

A member of the Metropolitan Police's Positive Action Team was on the force's recruitment stall at the festival. He said, "We are looking for a police force that represents the diversity of London. We are targeting under-represented groups, like women, ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians. We have got a long way to go but we have got to make people understand that we are sincere about what we are going for." ▼



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