

Red Cross calls for FDA to drop ban on gay blood donations

Policy unfairly impacts gay and transgender communities

by Mark Smith

WASHINGTON, D.C. — In early March the Food & Drug Administration met to hear arguments from leading national blood centers that want the government to revise guidelines on its 23-year-old policy prohibiting gay men from donating blood solely on the basis of their sexual orientation.

In a joint statement, the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), America's Blood Centers (ABC) and American Red Cross (ARC) called the current lifetime deferral for men who have sex with men (MSMs) "medically and scientifically unwarranted."

The organizations went further to recommend that deferral criteria be modified and made comparable with criteria for other groups at increased risk for sexual transmission of transfusion-transmitted infections. Currently presenting blood donors judged to be at risk of exposure via heterosexual routes are deferred for one year while men who have had sex with another man even once since 1977 are permanently deferred.

Current testing methods allow detection of HIV-infected donors between 10 and 21 days after exposure. Beyond this window period, there is no valid scientific

reason to differentiate between individuals infected a few months or many years previously.

The statement also added that the FDA's current policy is seen as "unfair and discriminatory" and has "resulted in negative attitudes" regarding blood donation.

"It's very encouraging to have the leading national blood centers echo what the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community has known for years: There is no sound, scientific basis for the current lifetime ban on blood donations from gay identified men or men who have sex with men," said Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality. "We applaud the American Red Cross for joining the coalition of voices lobbying for a ban revision."

"This is also a victory for the transgender community," Keisling added. "In blood donation centers around the country, transgender people have been routinely denied the opportunity to take part in the civic and humanitarian responsibility of blood donation. When a blood center technician learns of a potential donor's transgender identity, that donor — regardless of his or her sexual orientation — is often inaccurately categorized as MSM and excluded by the same homophobic policy."

Center for American Progress names Winnie Stachelberg Senior VP for External Affairs

by Daniella Gibbs Leger

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Center for American Progress (CAP) President and CEO John Podesta announced that Winnie Stachelberg has joined the Center as Senior Vice President for External Affairs.

Stachelberg joins CAP after working 11 years at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest gay civil rights organization.

"We are very pleased to have Winnie join us at the Center," said Podesta. "With her hire, CAP is now poised to reach out to a much broader audience with our progressive messages of innovation and collaboration."

In her last year at HRC, Stachelberg was vice president of the HRC Foundation, where she helped build a think tank and launch a religion and faith program. For nearly a decade as political director, Stachelberg developed new allies, broadened HRC's reach on Capitol Hill and in political circles around the country.

"This is a great opportunity to help promote progressive policies and ideas among elected officials from members of congress

to state and local elected officials, state, local and regional organizations, corporate allies and other advocacy organizations and think tanks," said Stachelberg. "It is essential that CAP's great work is translated into action on

Capitol Hill and beyond the Beltway. I'm very excited to join such a talented and hard-working staff."

Stachelberg established HRC as a key member of the progressive political coalition. She grew HRC's legislative portfolio from two bills in 1996 to more than a dozen bipartisan measures in 2004. Stachelberg also created and executed an innovative agenda around tax and benefits issues at HRC.

Prior to her work with HRC, Stachelberg worked at

the Office of Management and Budget in both the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations, formulating and reviewing health care policies and budgets for the Department of Health and Human Services.

A native New Yorker, Stachelberg Taught at George Washington High School after graduating Georgetown University. She received a Masters in Public Administration from George Washington University.



After more than a decade at HRC Winnie Stachelberg moves to the Center for American Progress.

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