

# 1994: A Very Good Year...

By Tim McFeeley

Considering the progress we've made in the past 12 months, 1994 may go down in history as one of the most productive years since the beginning of the modern movement for lesbian and gay equal rights. Despite some setbacks and disappointments, 1994 produced many more victories than defeats for the lesbian and gay community on the national political scene. Along the way, we have shown ourselves to be more sophisticated and effective in educating the general public about our issues and building support for equal rights.

Among the advances we made in 1994 were:

**Major wins against our foes.** We kept anti-gay initiatives off ballots in eight states, and defeated those that appeared in Idaho and Oregon. We were instrumental in denying Oliver North a seat in the U.S. Senate. In Congress, we beat anti-gay legislation introduced by Sen. Jesse Helms that targeted gay youth for discrimination in schools and restricted access to condoms in high school health clinics. We also shot down an attempt by anti-gay extremist Rep. Bob Dornan (R-CA) to summarily dismiss HIV-positive servicemembers from the military.

**Progress toward equal rights.** The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a

new federal bill to prohibit anti-gay job discrimination, gathered more cosponsors in four months than the Gay Civil Rights Bill did in the previous 15 years. ENDA put on track the long-term strategy that will bring about equality under federal law. The Senate held its first hearing ever on legislation that would extend any form of civil rights protections to lesbian and gay people.

**A place at the table of the civil rights movement.** Mrs. Coretta Scott King spoke at the introduction of ENDA, calling the bill a priority for the civil rights movement. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which is the nation's largest and oldest civil rights coalition, invited the Human Rights Fund (HRCF)—the largest national lesbian and gay equal rights organization—to serve on its executive committee.

**Broader support among non-gay Americans.** A series of polls on public attitudes showed consistent, bipartisan support for equal rights and against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Majorities of Republicans, Democrats and independents polled this year said that no one should be singled out for discrimination, particularly in the workplace, merely for being gay, lesbian or bisexual. Retired Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) and Gov. Barbara Roberts (D-

OR) co-chaired HRCF's Americans Against Discrimination program to defeat anti-gay ballot initiatives.

**Achievements from the Executive Branch.** President Clinton issued a letter condemning discriminatory statewide ballot measures; signed the Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act into law, thereby strengthening federal penalties for bias-motivated crimes—including gay-bashing; and appointed Deborah Batts as the first openly lesbian or gay federal judge. The Justice Department issued a temporary waiver of the HIV immigration ban for athletes attending the 1994 Gay Games in New York.

Unprecedented visibility and involvement. More than 250 National Coming Out Day events were held in all 50 states, generating an unprecedented level of media coverage. To lobby at the federal level, HRCF enlisted more than 4,000 local activists in all 50 states through a new Federal Advocacy Network. A traveling computer generated more than 60,000 letters to Congress, and messages sent by participants in our Speak Out program topped the 1.2 million mark.

**Cooperation on a national scale.** The five largest gay, lesbian and gay-supportive organizations in the country pooled their resources for the first time ever and raised funds nationally

to defeat state anti-gay initiatives. A people of color summit held at HRCF brought together more than a dozen groups representing African-Americans, Latinos and Latinas, Asians, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans to discuss strategies for countering the radical right. More than two dozen lesbian health professionals gathered in Washington for the first-ever "Lesbian Health Roundtable," bringing formidable expertise and knowledge to bear on lesbian health issues.

The list goes on. Taking stock of our accomplishments is not about taking credit and feeling good. As we enter a new era of unprecedented challenges, we need to know exactly where we stand. An assessment of 1994 shows that we can face adversity and win, find new allies for our cause, and build the groundwork necessary to advance from a position of strength. As I leave my position as the head of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, I see a future full of hope and confidence for our movement and our community.

*Since 1989, Tim McFeeley has served as Executive Director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund. He retires from that post in January.*

# ...Or Maybe Not So Great

By Arlene Zarembka

Several gay male commentators have taken pains to proclaim that the November elections really weren't so bad for gay men and lesbians.

Tim McFeeley — outgoing executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund — was quoted in the November 11 *Washington Blade* as saying now that Republicans are in control of Congress, they will be inclined to curtail anti-gay legislation "to prove that Republicans have something positive to do other than taking potshots at gay kids." Hastings Wyman, Jr., in his November

18 commentary, stated that, "...[G]iven the Idaho and Oregon results, the new Republican establishment isn't likely to push any anti-gay measures."

Chicago writer Paul Varnell wrote in his election commentary in the *St. Louis News-Telegraph* that the replacement of Democratic congressional leaders "by Republicans, especially in the south, represents little loss for gays." Richard Mohr wrote in his election commentary in the *News-Telegraph*, "...lesbians and gays need not worry too much that we are losing the political wars, for we continue to win the cultural ones."

Collectively, these arguments boil down to this: 1) the Oregon and Idaho anti-gay initiatives were defeated; 2) all 13 U.S. senators who co-sponsored

ENDA (the pro-gay Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 1994) and were up for re-election won, 110 of 120 co-sponsors of ENDA in the House were re-elected and 11 newcomers have pledged to co-sponsor ENDA; 3) a record 39 openly gay candidates were elected to public office; and 4) the GOP "Contract with America" makes no mention of gays. Let's examine these assertions.

**1) Anti-gay initiatives.** The Oregon and Idaho initiatives were more overtly anti-gay in their language than was Colorado's Amendment 2. Yet only 51 percent voted no on Oregon's Measure 13 this November, down from a 56 percent no vote in 1992, probably because Measure 13 was less virulently anti-gay than had been 1992's Measure 9. In Idaho, the margin of victory was fewer than 3,000 votes. It is questionable whether either state would have defeated the initiatives if they had been merely Colorado-style, "no civil rights" initiatives.

In Alachua County, Fla., voters not only repealed a local ordinance prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination (by a 57 percent majority) but adopted an ordinance prohibiting any future inclusion of sexual orientation in civil rights ordinances (by a 59 percent majority). Moreover, according to Nadine Smith, executive director of the Human Rights Task Force of

Florida, the attorney defending the validity of the "no civil rights" ordinance in court is attacking all civil rights laws, including the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act.

**2) Support for ENDA.** The fact that the numbers of senators and representatives co-sponsoring ENDA held steady is a major achievement. But translating that fact into victory for ENDA seems unlikely. Incoming House Speaker Newt Gingrich believes that employers should be allowed to discriminate based on sexual orientation. Nancy Kassebaum, slated to chair the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, which has jurisdiction over not only ENDA but also AIDS legislation, has only a 20 percent rating from the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

**3) Openly gay elected officials.** While the increase in the number of openly gay office holders is a matter worth celebrating, increased visibility alone is a slim defense for the attacks of the radical right. There was a visible gay and lesbian community in Germany in 1933, but that certainly did not stop the Nazi takeover, nor save gay men (and every other group despised by the Nazis) from the concentration camps.

**4) The Contract with America.** The Contract states what House Republicans plan to accomplish in the first 100 days of the new Congress. As Republican Rep. Steve Gunderson admitted in an

interview with the *Blade*, "After the first 100 days, there's no question that they intend to have a second agenda," and that social issues, including gays, are likely to be part of the second agenda.

But even the first Contract includes thinly-disguised attacks on gays. Item 4 of the 10-point Contract is the "Family Reinforcement Act." The Act speaks of "strengthening rights of parents in their children's education," among other things. Does anyone want to guess the Republicans' view on diversity curricula or teaching about homosexuality in the schools, particularly if a parent objects?

In an April interview with Chandler Burr in which he professed "tolerance" for gay men and lesbians, Gingrich proclaimed that it is "madness to pretend that families are anything other than heterosexual couples," and that it is "fundamentally and profoundly wrong" to "educate kindergartners in understanding gay couples." According to the *Seattle Gay News*, Gingrich promised Lou Sheldon that he would hold hearings on the "homosexual agenda as it is relevant to the public schools."

It will not be easy to figure out the best strategies to take in the new climate. But we should at least stop kidding ourselves about the threats we face.

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## Conservatively Speaking

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voices in this, as in all our other conflicts, will be those of moderate straight allies, the fact that this fight is over family bonds may render even their advocacy all the more pervasive, fervent, and compelling.

Unlike the gays-in-the-military fiasco, which caught our national groups off-guard and whose perilous straits the ill-equipped Campaign for Military Service proved unable to navigate, the battle over gay marriage is essentially local. The

Constitution's provision regarding "full faith and credit," stipulating the mutual respect which states should grant each other's official acts, suggests that the states will be the battleground on this issue. Each state will decide for itself how much respect it pays gay marriage certificates stamped in Hawaii.

How the Hawaii decision holds up is soon to rest in all of our hands. Whether each state grants credit to gay marriages from Hawaii or thumbs its nose at them — and, by extension, the Constitution itself — is very much our responsibility. It is we, lesbians and gay men, who

must lead the fight for recognition.

The issue will also set another acid test of integrity for conservatives, who have been granted unprecedented influence in scores of state legislatures in the wake of last month's elections. Will Republicans live up to their oft-trumpeted support for small government, state's rights, and family values? Or will they go down the mean-spirited and hypocritical path of interfering in the states' affairs, of forcing our families into the legal closet, and intensifying discrimination against us?

The seriousness with which we take up our task of local organizing around gay marriage may well

dictate the future of gay civil rights legislation in general. We can no longer hold back and leave the work to or overstretched activist brothers and sisters. We can no longer hang out in the video bars and the dance clubs, wasting our lives and forfeiting our future. We can no longer step out of the closet solely at the prompting of our hormones and then retreat until the next stimulation. Gay marriage is an issue which every lesbian and gay man can support. The battle will take place in our state legislatures. The stakes are high. It is the beginning of our acceptance as full and equal citizens of the United States.