



Parents, Families & Friends  
of Lesbians And Gays

# PFLAG WEAVER

## Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians And Gays/Dallas

April, 2003

### Our Mission

PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons, their families and friends, through *support*, to cope with an adverse society; *education*, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and *advocacy*, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights.



PFLAG provides the opportunity for confidential dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.



**NATIONAL WEB SITE**  
www.pflag.org



**DALLAS WEB SITE**  
www.pflagdallas.org



**PFLAG/Dallas**  
(Newsletter and all correspondence)  
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**Newsletter Deadline:**

April 10, 2003  
by mail, fax or e-mail

### Next Meeting

April 10, 2003  
Second Thursday, 7-9:30 p.m.  
Midway Hills Christian Church  
11001 Midway Road, Dallas

### Distress calls: the U.S. needs soldiers

Gays are responding. Will the ban be lifted? Don't ask

by Will Doig  
Metro Weekly

Even as the latest in smart bomb technology steams toward Iraq with Old Glory in tow, the U.S. military's homophobic corps is still finding time to squeeze in a little gay bashing.

Between Jan. 1 and March 1, the SLDN (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network) received a record 170 calls for assistance – a 30 percent leap over the same period in 2002. The spike in requests comes in what many believe are the final days before the launch of a U.S.-led war with Iraq.

Steve Ralls, Director of Communications for SLDN, attributes the increase to a rise in anxiety on the part of gays and lesbians who may not be able to seek help once they're engaged in combat.

"If you're deployed in the middle of the desert, it's very difficult to get help if you're harassed," says Ralls. "If you're serving on the front lines in active duty, a wartime discharge can be very hard."

The number of Don't Ask, Don't Tell-related discharges generally decreases during times of war, but so far, every branch of the armed forces has elected to keep the policy intact. In times of conflict, the military sometimes issues "stop-loss orders," which suspend certain discharges temporarily. So far, only the Marine Corps has issued such an order, and it does not suspend Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

Ralls considers it "very, very unlikely" that any branch will suspend that policy. During Operation Enduring Freedom, none of the stop-loss orders included gays. And last fall, seven Arab linguists were discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, despite the critical shortage of Arab speakers faced by the military.

SLDN, which has only two attorneys and one legal director on staff, has an open case-load of 130 to 150 cases at any given time. A war with Iraq would be the largest military mobilization since the organization was founded 10 years ago.

Recently, Secretary of State Colin Powell

defended the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy in an interview with *Teen Ink* Magazine.

"I'm an advocate of that policy," he said. "I helped put that policy in place and I'm accused, therefore, of supporting homophobia. But I think it's a different matter with respect to the military because you're essentially told who you're going to live with, who you're going to sleep next to."

Powell is both a politician and a military general. Which of these positions most heavily influences his support for Don't Ask, Don't Tell is up for debate. Jamie Fellner, Director of the U.S. Program of Human Rights Watch, thinks age is a factor.

"He warns about things like men sleeping in bunks next to each other, reflecting that stereotype of predatory gays," she says. "I think people who are 35 and younger have a much better comfort level with gays than people from his generation."



But even some politicians have come out against the ban, including Senator Mark Dayton (D-MN), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Fellner believes that the military "permits and even encourages" homophobia, even as the rest of society moves on.

"I hear people say, 'I don't want to have to worry about getting hit on in the foxholes.' As if people are going to be hitting on each other in combat zone foxholes. I mean, really."

The rise in calls to SLDN also coincides with a study published in the current issue of *International Security* that criticizes Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Entitled "A Modest Proposal," the study identifies a shift in the argument for the gay ban from one of military effectiveness to concern for the privacy of heterosexual soldiers.

"The 'privacy' rationale has been around for a long time, but since the 'effectiveness' rationale has been shown to be without merit, opponents of gays in the military are now drawing more on the privacy argument," says Aaron

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# News Briefs

## *School's reign of terror over gay student*

by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff

Jacksonville, AR – Thomas McLaughlin, 14-year-old Arkansas teen outed by his high school to his parents, forced by a principal to read Bible passages condemning homosexuality, and ordered not to discuss his sexuality on school property is threatening to take the local school board to court.

"My school forced me out of the closet when I should have been allowed to come out to my family on my own terms and when I thought it was the right time. And now the school has been trying to shove me back into it ever since," said McLaughlin.

"I'm through with being silenced, and I don't want this happening to other gay kids at my school."

The American Civil Liberties Union is representing the teen. In a letter to officials at Jacksonville Junior High School, ACLU has demanded that the school stop violating the student's rights and remove all unconstitutional disciplinary actions taken against him from his record by March 21 or face legal action.

McLaughlin's troubles with the school began last year, when a school official called McLaughlin's mother to tell her that her son was gay. McLaughlin, who at that point had only come out to a handful of close friends at school, wasn't ready to tell his parents.

Fortunately for McLaughlin, his parents were accepting and understanding.

"Students should not be punished for being honest about their sexual orientation," said Leslie Cooper, staff attorney with the ACLU's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project. "It's shameful how Jacksonville Junior High School has trampled on Thomas McLaughlin's constitutional rights to intimidate and silence him from being honest about who he is. If this were civics class, the school would be failing."

Once, a teacher called a conference with McLaughlin's parents and the principal because she objected to his being open about being gay. The meeting was the first time his parents found out he was gay.

On another occasion, a different teacher ordered McLaughlin not to discuss his sexual orientation, saying that she found it "sickening," and later called his mother to complain about his homosexuality.

When the student disagreed with yet another teacher for calling him "abnormal" and "unnatural," he was ordered to read aloud from the Bible passages that some Christians believe condemn homosexuality.

He was then suspended for two days for telling other students about being made to read the Bible in school. The principal and assistant principal also told McLaughlin that if he told any of his friends why he was suspended, they would recommend that he be expelled.

In January he was disciplined for talking between classes with a female friend about a boy they both considered "cute." He was disciplined; his friend was not.

"Thomas McLaughlin's school has completely overstepped the boundaries of the law in the way it has treated him," said Rita Sklar, Executive Director of the ACLU of Arkansas.

"School officials have no place trying to convert a student's religious beliefs to their own, and they certainly have no place using religion as a way to punish students."

(Ed. note: I thought Arkansas finally "got it." I was wrong.)

## *Naked City (excerpt)*

Edited by Mike Clark-Madison

Austin Chronicle

Sen. Jeff Wentworth, R-San Antonio (whose district includes much of South Austin), has added to a growing pile of anti-gay bills at the Legislature by filing SB 630, the Texas Defense of Marriage Act, which would prohibit same-sex marriages.

The state already bans such unions, but Wentworth and 20 Senate co-sponsors (all of the chamber's Republicans plus two Democrats) say SB 630 will add more teeth to existing law.

The TX-DOMA is also seen as Wentworth's attempt to prove his right-wing, pro-family mettle; he has been seen as unacceptably moderate on social issues by party activists and came under brutal attack in last year's GOP primary.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on State Affairs, one of whose Democratic members, Sen. Kenneth Armbrister of Victoria (whose district includes Bastrop and Caldwell counties), has also endorsed it.

In the House, Rep. Warren Chisum (R-Pampa) filed a similar bill earlier in the session, as he has every session for a decade. His HB 38 boasts nearly 40 co-signers.

The Lesbian Gay Rights Lobby of Texas held a rally to address these and other bills beginning March 16 on the steps of the Capitol. Check [www.lgrl.org](http://www.lgrl.org) for more info.



## *Sweden's embassies may wed gay couples*

Reuters

STOCKHOLM (Reuters) – Sweden wants its embassies around the world to marry gay couples, a union that is banned in many countries, the foreign minister said on Friday.

Of Sweden's approximately 100 embassies, 21 are authorized to marry men and women if one member of the couple is a Swedish citizen. The government wants those embassies to extend their authority to homosexual marriages.

"It is very important for Sweden for civil servants who officiate at weddings to be authorized also to officiate at the registration of partnerships," Foreign Minister Anna Lindh said.

Sweden calls gay marriages "registered partnerships," but gay couples have the same legal rights as married heterosexuals in a country with a reputation for tolerance.

"Once we have established that a country accepts partnership registration, we will begin to authorize our civil servants at those embassies," Lindh said. France, Israel and Portugal were likely frontrunners, she added.

Sweden's embassy in Riyadh is one where heterosexual marriages can take place, but Saudi Arabia – where homosexuals may face the death penalty – would naturally not be among the eight states to be approached in the first wave, a Foreign Ministry official said.

Soren Andersson, president of Sweden's biggest gay lobby, said Lindh's comments, made during a debate in parliament, marked an important step toward equal rights for homosexuals.

Sweden, one of only a few countries to give gay couples the same rights as married heterosexuals, became the first nation in Europe to let homosexual couples apply for the right to adopt children from abroad.

# Random Everyday Ethics

by Randy Cohen  
Chicago Tribune

Q. As ob/gyns in a not-for-profit clinic, we gratefully accept donations for our underserved community. A patient offered a machine, to be used first in treating her own infertility, with one contingency – that it never be used for lesbian inseminations.

We found this condition abhorrent and did not accept the machine.

Were we wrong to reject a gift that, while excluding a minority, would benefit the vast majority?

– Scott Resnick, M.D., and Shanti Mohling, M.D., Taos, N.M.

A. You did the right thing. As you put the question, however, it almost sounds like an innocuous case of someone wanting to give a high-tech hair dryer beneficial to many but useless to a few bald guys.

But imagine your donor had offered medical equipment with the stipulation that it not be used by African-Americans. You'd more aptly phrase the question: Can I cooperate with racism? The answer would be obvious, as should the answer to this question: Can I cooperate with homophobia?

What's more, as I, a non-lawyer, understand it, public accommodations law in several jurisdictions forestalls your offering separate (and, as it happens, quite unequal) facilities for gays and straights.

It is frustrating to reject this equipment. But that's the tricky thing about moral reasoning based on the greatest good for the greatest number: It has a discomfiting way of allowing a majority to bully a minority. And it can bring us into conflict with our fundamental values.

We might find that hanging an innocent guy in the town square each day deters crime, a fine thing for the honest majority of the community, but the hanged man is likely to object. People can be so selfish.

. Do you have ethical questions? Send them to [ethicist@nytimes.com](mailto:ethicist@nytimes.com), or *Everyday Ethics*, New York Times Syndicate, 122 E. 42nd St., 14th floor, New York, NY 10168.

## 'Project' supporters prevail

by Elizabeth Putnam  
Wausau Daily Herald

About 100 counterprotesters and observers overshadowed eight members of a Kansas church who traveled to Wausau on Saturday to preach an anti-gay message. Counterprotesters lined the street in front of the University of Wisconsin Marathon County and demonstrated to members of the Westboro Baptist Church through signs, songs and lit candles that they do not support hatred toward gays.

Across Seventh Avenue and behind a barricade stood the Westboro members bearing signs and singing "God hates America. The fagots' [sic] home." to the tune of "God Bless America." With at least six police officers nearby, the group calmly held their signs for about an hour without confrontation from those across the street. The Rev. Fred Phelps, the church's pastor who originally said he would attend, was not one of the eight. All were Phelps' family members.

The Westboro group came to protest the final night of UWMC's production of "The Laramie Project," the true story of 21-year-old Matthew Shepard of Laramie, WY, who in 1998 was beaten, tied to a fence and left to die because he was gay. The 7:30 p.m. pro-

duction was sold out, and the school set up a video feed so those on a waiting list could watch from a nearby room.

The church group's first stop Saturday was the Wausau Police Department on Grand Avenue and Thomas Street. The eight members picketed six churches the next day.

It was 14-year-old Isaiah Phelps-Roper who caught the eye of most counterprotesters and observers because of his youth. Phelps-Roper stood near the barricade clutching his sign "Matt is in Hell." "I believe that God is angry at this nation," Phelps-Roper said. "Fags are vile, filthy sinners."

Sarah Nielsen, 17, of Wausau, who came to see the school's production, stood with two other Wausau West High School classmates and watched Phelps-Roper in disgust. "It absolutely sickens me," Nielsen said. "To drag little kids into this, that's horrible."

Among the 100 counterprotesters were people from Madison, Green Bay and Stevens Point, who came to support "The Laramie Project" and Wausau's gay community.

UW-Madison student Lilia Williams, 20, brought at least seven other members of the Queer Student Alliance with her.

"When Phelps and his group came to protest in Madison there were people from all over the state there," Williams said. "We came here to support the cast." And the cast felt the support, said play director Sarah Rudolph, who stood among the counterprotesters and observers.

"I think it's telling that Rev. Phelps didn't show up," Rudolph said. "With this whole thing there has been an outpouring of support and thanks for doing the play."

## Colin Powell's teen act

by Nat Hentoff  
Washington Times

Although continually beset with decisions that can affect the history of this country, and the world, Secretary of State Colin Powell took time Dec. 12 to be interviewed by three teen-age reporters from *Teen Ink*, a national magazine with a circulation of 4.5 million readers, including its distribution in thousands of schools and those who visit it at [www.TeenInk.com](http://www.TeenInk.com).

A teen-ager told Mr. Powell that homophobia was more of a problem in her school than racism and religious intolerance. Since helping to institute the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in the military, Mr. Powell said, he has been accused "of supporting homophobia. But I think it's a different matter with respect to the military, because you're essentially told who you're going to live with, who you're going to sleep next to."

But, he emphasized, "out of a military environment, in a school, I think any act that suggests someone should be discriminated against or in some way stigmatized because of racial background, ethnic background or sexual preference is not appropriate."

"Here in the State Department, sexual preference makes no difference; we have gay ambassadors and employees throughout the department. I don't know who they are and it's none of my business, as long as they do their jobs."

## Mark your calendar!

"School's Out: Anatomy of a Gay High School in Texas" premieres April 17 at 9 p.m. on MTV's True Life series. The documentary about The Walt Whitman Community School was shot last year and features several of the students with the school serving as a backdrop. MTV will air a special 90-minute episode of the show focusing on the school, and you might be able to catch promos for it currently on MTV.

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### From the President

Hey Puddin's,

Happy Easter!

Speaking of sugar-coated candy, and sugar-coated religion ...

It is very common for people to come to PFLAG confused because their religion tells them that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered is evil. It's not. Not at all.

God is supposed to be all loving. God is supposed to give you that wonderful feeling you have when you eat chocolate candy! Wonderful! Some people tell us that God is supposed to hate people who are not straight. It's all mixed messages.

I am not an expert on the Bible and I'm so not gonna go there. I can tell you first-hand that I've seen religion tear families apart. Some churches say one thing, and do another. More mixed messages. It reminds me of the saying, "People who are religious are afraid of going to Hell. People who are spiritual have already been there."

People who come to PFLAG with religious issues have been living in fear, not facts. They're afraid because their religion has taught them to be afraid. They know that their child or friend is not evil. So they come to PFLAG to figure it all out. The process becomes spiritual.

I'm not talking religion ... I'm talking authenticity. A good feeling. The kind of feeling you get from chocolate. It's good. It doesn't judge. It is embracing, not suffocating. There are churches that have grasped this concept, and sadly there are churches that haven't. I think Jesus was spiritual. He saw the person, not the label. He didn't sugar-coat his message. He was to the point. He didn't try and scare people into believing anything.

Sugar-coated religions promise spirituality, but never achieve it. It's like biting into a candy and you think it's one thing and yuck! ... it's something with some kind of cashew or something. PFLAG is where we look past fear, and look at truth. Religion can be scattered and confusing. Spirituality is centered. It is the ability to look past labels and fear and see the person for who they are. It's authentic love.

PFLAG is about love.

Now that's something to sink your teeth into.

*Pat Smith*

### From the editor

In preparing your newsletter, I depend strongly on Fenceberry, a compilation of newspaper and magazine stories by two out lesbians about gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons. They post every day, up to six times a day, with up to eight stories in each posting.

It's fascinating to read what's happening where. It's not all applicable to a Dallas newsletter, or course, but patterns emerge as I read.

Did you know South Africa recognizes gay rights? Or that Sweden encourages its embassy personnel to perform gay marriages? The news from Australia is always interesting, if baffling. I'm always struck by how much progress is being made in so-called third-world countries compared to the homophobia exhibited by our various leaders.

There's much I can't use that you'd probably enjoy reading. E-mail me at <ladye\_sparks@ev1.net> for information on how to sign up for this fascinating (but LARGE) list.

*Ladye*

### *Texas judge grants same-sex divorce*

BEAUMONT, Texas (AP) – Texas may not recognize gay marriages, but that didn't stop a judge from granting a same-sex divorce.

Judge Tom Mulvaney signed a divorce decree recently for Russell Smith, 26, and John Anthony, 34, a Beaumont couple granted a license of civil union in Vermont in February 2002.

No state sanctions gay marriages, but the Vermont Legislature approved civil unions in 2000, giving domestic partnerships many of the benefits of marriage.

Mulvaney said the case was a first for him, and others in the legal profession said they thought it was the only such divorce in the state.

Smith said he had to get a legal divorce for financial reasons. He told the Beaumont *Enterprise* that getting the union dissolved in Vermont would have required Smith or Anthony to live in that state for at least a year before a final divorce hearing.

Richard Carlson, a law professor at South Texas College of Law in Houston, said that because both parties agreed to the divorce, appeals are unlikely. But if an appeal was made to a higher court, Carlson said he would expect that court to simply not recognize the marriage as binding.



### **Gays in the military**

*From page 1*

Belkin, co-author of the study and director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM) in Santa Barbara, CA.

The study argues that the gay ban actually infringes more on the rights of straight soldiers, citing the extensive investigations conducted by the military to confirm sexual orientation.

"The military wants to ensure they're not discharging straight people who are using the gay excuse as a Get Out of Jail Free card," he says. "Sometimes they interrogate 25 friends, lovers, and relatives of the person being investigated."

Belkin also argues that much of the same-sex coupling occurs between straight soldiers. He says that the military knows this, and points out a little-known federal law as proof. This law, known euphemistically as the "Queen for a Day" law, allows soldiers caught in same-sex encounters to avoid a discharge if they can prove that they are straight.

"If the military kicked out everyone who has same-sex sex, they'd be kicking out a lot of straight people," says Belkin. "They don't want to do that, and so the Queen for a Day law lets soldiers have same-sex encounters – as long as they're straight."

SLDN expects the influx of calls for help to continue increasing, projecting a record 1,100 calls in 2003. The group estimates the number of gays and lesbians currently on active duty at eight to 10 thousand.

"We know from private-practice attorneys who were involved in military law during the Persian Gulf War that there were hundreds of calls per day from gay and lesbian troops seeking assistance," says Ralls. "We don't know for sure what will happen this time, but our legal team will certainly be very busy in the coming months."

### *Our condolences*

to Pat Smith on the loss of her grandmother.