

GLBT DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS GEARING UP - GOP GROUP SAYS AMERICA NOT READY FOR TRANSGENDER ISSUES

by COLIN MURPHY Senior Staff Writer

St. Louis native and queer activist Keith Boykin once said that we do not have a monolithic, homogenized, sterilized gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community. His words ring true. For in fact, we run the gamut; both progressive and conservative as seen in last year's presidential election.

According to exit polls, Republican President George W. Bush received 23 percent of the GLBT vote — roughly the same he grabbed from Vice President Al Gore in 2000. Many politicians argue that 25 percent of the GLBT community is in the Republican camp. Hence, St. Louis' gay community now boasts two politically partisan groups — one Democrat, one Republican — to reflect that diversity.

But Log Cabin Republicans of Greater St. Louis (LCRGS) mirrors only part of our community, choosing to exclude the "T" in the GLBT acronym. That's one of the major difference between LCRGS and The Gateway Stonewall Democrats (GSD); Log Cabin Republicans do not recognize transgender status in their official mission for GLBT equality. According to LCRGS President Charles Stadlander, it is for two reasons: Progressive gay legislation would be hindered by including gender identity and the American Medical Association considers transgender a medical disorder.

"We believe right now that the country is ready to accept gay and lesbians as equal citizens," explained Stadlander. "But I don't think we're quite there yet to say that the American people are ready to accept transgender people. That doesn't mean me personally, but that I think the American people."

Mara Keisling, Executive Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality disagrees. While Keisling admits that the American Psychiatric Association still lists gender disorder in the The Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Volume 4 (DSM4) as a disease, she points out that the DSM was the document from which sexual orientation was removed in the 1970s. Currently there are efforts underway to revise the DSM to deal with transgenderism appropriately.

"I think there's pretty much an understanding that we're in it now like gay people were in the 1960s," said Keisling. "That being said, I'm hoping that Mr. Stadlander is not saying that people with either physical or mental disabilities are not worthy of their rights or that they're not worthy of the efforts of the gay rights community to champion. But the national Log Cabin Republicans have been very interested in learning more about the transgender part of our movement."

According to Stadlander, the GOP gay group was in a semi-dormant state for many years, but no more. What was once a gathering of gay Republicans for socializing and drinks has now given way to making inroads and lobbying with some of the biggest names in Jefferson City.

The mission of the Log Cabin Republicans, which similarly has a chapter in Kansas City, is to work within the Republican Party to advocate equal rights for all Americans, including gays and lesbians. Log Cabin's mission derives from the firm belief in the principles of limited government, individual liberty, individual responsibility, free markets and a strong national defense. LCR emphasizes that these principles and the moral values on which they stand are consistent with the pursuit of equal treatment under the law for gay and lesbian Americans.

"Our objectives right now are to become a leading and powerful lobbying voice within the Republican for gay and lesbian rights and equality," said Stadlander. "We have recognized that before we can go out and

start making demands and standing up and hollering for certain pieces of legislation, certain laws and equal protections, the first thing we have to do is develop civil relationships with Republican lawmakers."

LCRGS recently hosted a dinner where Rep. Carl Bearden (R-St. Charles) spoke on a variety of issues including GLBT equality. Bearden was one of many Republican legislators who voted in the recent early morning session to ban Gay/Straight student alliances and has had a poor record on GLBT rights. Nevertheless, Stadtlander feels that creating a dialogue with Bearden and other GOP legislators on GLBT issues is paramount in moving such legislation forward in Missouri. Furthermore, Stadtlander says that the group takes a broad view when interpreting a politician's record for their political endorsement.

"If someone comes out that says I can change my mind or made a mistake," Stadtlander said of the process. "Or if they voted for the marriage amendment for X, Y and Z for religious reasons but say, 'however I want to sponsor a civil unions bill,' I cannot see Log Cabin Republicans legitimately withholding our endorsement for a candidate who voted for the amendment but then turned around and supported the Missouri Non Discrimination Act [which would ban discrimination against GLBT individuals in housing, employment and public accommodation.]"

Stadtlander, like many in LCR is keenly aware that the Republican Party is currently dominated by the "religious right" — what former U. S. Senator John Danforth called the "political arm of the Republican party." But Stadtlander is of the belief that most Republicans don't subscribe to such dogmatic, party doctrine.

"One of the main reasons why I'm sticking with the Republican party and working to make this organization great is because I believe the Republican party does not like being part of the radical right and I believe there is going to be a big shift in the Republican party in 2008," said Stadtlander who admits that he was misled by George Bush's feigned support for civil unions. "Once we make it through these four years of hell, there is light at the end of the tunnel."

LCRGS is currently advocating civil unions and looks forward to working with PROMO on gay-positive legislation.

"There may be an amendment in the constitution which says that same-sex couples cannot get married," said Stadtlander. "But that amendment does not say that same sex couple cannot have the same protection under the law as heterosexual couples have."

Democrats gathering forces

The Gateway Stonewall Democrats is a newly formed chapter of the National Stonewall Democrats. Stonewall is America's only grassroots Democratic GLBT organization focusing on creating change in three ways: educating the GLBT community about the differences between the political parties; mobilizing the GLBT community to get out to vote on Election Day for fair-minded Democrats; and standing up when Republicans attack gay families and civil rights while leading the Democratic party to continue improving its record on issues important to the GLBT community.

"The Gateway Stonewall Democrats is dedicated to the equal rights of all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity," explained GSD Communications Director, A.J. Pupillo, of the organizations mission. "Gateway Stonewall Democrats support the Democratic party and Democratic candidates toward our mission."

GSD was officially incorporated on May 8. The first gathering of the group was held in March at the urging of local activist Perry Nelson. The organization recently elected their first board of directors with St.

Louisan Gaile Elble serving as chapter president and openly lesbian State Representative Jeanette Mott-Oxford being named honorary board member.

"[At] our first meeting Jeanette Mott-Oxford showed up and explained the advantages of what we could do versus PROMO [(Personal Rights Of Missourians), Missouri's' only statewide GLBT advocacy group] in terms of endorsing candidates and getting more involved with the Democratic party," said Pupillo.

Just three months into its inception, GSD's primary goal is to get the word out. The organization has purchased an ad in the Pride Pages and will have a float and booth at this year's PrideFest, and looks forward to increasing its membership. Presently, they have around 30 members. Kansas City also has a Stonewall chapter.

Looking ahead to next year's off-year election, the group is eyeing candidates to run against freshman Sen. Jim Talent as well as backing other candidates for the Missouri General Assembly. The GSD also plans to work in concert with PROMO on GLBT issues in Jefferson City.

As for gay marriage, the organization realizes that the issue is dead for a while here in Missouri, but is divided as to whether to focus on "marriage" or "civil unions."

"That's really tough, because we want equality," explained Pupillo. "The fight over marriage right now is over for awhile, but basically we want equality. As far as whether civil unions are the way to go, there's not a firm agreement among everyone. I think some people feel it's going to come down to a court ruling, some people think civil union is the way to go. I mean we're smart enough to know that there's no point to fight for marriage right now in Missouri."

Nevertheless, the group is more than prepared to fight on the national level if the Federal Marriage Amendment is introduced in Congress at the urging of President George W. Bush and his conservative supporters on the Hill.

Still, GSD's true work will be done here at home at the local level.

"We do plan to work with other groups, Pride St. Louis, Black Pride, PROMO," said Pupillo. "We want to be inclusive and represent a very even and diverse representation of the St. Louis GLBT community and actually get out there and be a part of the community as well."

Both the Gateway Stonewall Democrats and the Log Cabin Republicans of Greater St. Louis will have booths at PrideFest, June 25-26. For more information check out www.stlouislcr.org or www.stonewalldemocrats.org.

You can e-mail Colin Murphy at colin_murphy@sbcglobal.net.