

Changing of the Guard at the Human Rights Campaign

BY JUANITA L. LERCH
OITM Staff Writer

There has been a changing of the guard, so to speak, at HRC (Human Rights Campaign), with Robert Appel becoming the new executive director. Selected by the commission to serve a five-year term, Appel comes to HRC with a background heavy in law, having served as the Defender General for eight and a half years. Prior to that, Appel worked for the Civil Rights Union, with offices in St. Johnsbury, VT.

Appel contends that this position "gives me an opportunity to work on issues that are important to me," as stated in an interview with Out In The Mountains. "I've spent my entire career in the law. Gone back and forth between civil rights and defense."

School harassment is a primary concern for the new executive director, as well as housing and access for all public accommodations. Appel, "Would like the commission to take the position that government services must be of a non-discriminatory practice." Although a recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll showed increased acceptance of gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans, HRC, however, expresses concern that discrimination and violence remain persistent problems.

"We need to get the word that that we [HRC] are a viable enforcement authority. The commission needs to provide a better leadership role; raising the consciousness in areas of concern, like school harassment and the perceptions of homosexuality."

As America's largest gay and lesbian organization, the Human Rights Campaign provides a national voice on gay and lesbian issues. The HRC effectively lobbies congress; mobilizes grassroots action in diverse communities; invests strategically to elect a fair-minded Congress; and increases public understanding through innovative education and communication strategies.

HRC is a bipartisan organization that works to advance equality based on sexual orientation and gender expression and identity, to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community.

Robert Appel brings with him to the HRC a history that is rich in the protection of those in need and a staunch belief in civil rights for all people. "Insuring that civil rights are protected. Dignity and respect for what the person is...not what they perceive them to be." We all need to make an effort to, "value and recognize the humanity in each of us."

For more information on the Human Rights Campaign and the wealth of info they have to offer, log on at: <http://www.hrc.org>.

HIV-AIDS "Make a Wish" Grants Available

The Butterworth Foundation, Inc., of Orange, Mass., announces the continuation of its 'make-a-wish' grant program for people living with HIV/AIDS in specified areas of Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire. A wish is defined as something that the individual wants but has never had the time or resources to attain since contracting HIV/AIDS - generally a one-time occurrence or need. It should be something primarily for enjoyment.

Applicants must be able to document their HIV/AIDS status and must reside in Cheshire County, NH; Windham County, VT, Franklin County, MA, and the following towns in Worcester County, MA: Ashburnham, Athol, Barre, Gardner, Hardwick, Hubbardston, Petersham, Phillipston, Royalston, Templeton and Winchendon. The residential and status requirements are strictly enforced.

Guidelines and an application form are available from HIV/AIDS agencies in the specific geographic area or by writing to: Butterworth Foundation, Inc., PO Box 653, Orange MA 01364

Montreal Wins Bid for the 2006 Gay Games VII

On October 25, The Federation of Gay Games announced Montreal, Canada as their selection for host of the Gay Games VII in 2006. The games have not been held in North America since 1994 when New York City hosted the fourth edition. Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles also made bids to host the 2006.

"We are proud to name Montreal as host for Gay Games VII in 2006," said Gene Dermody, male co-president. "Montreal's team demonstrated an overall knowledge and keen understanding of what it takes to make the Gay Games a successful event and we look forward to our partnership in the years to come."

Conceived by Dr. Tom Waddell, an Olympic decathlete, the Gay Games was first held in San Francisco in 1982 with 1,350 participants. Participation has increased significantly with an expected 14,000 participants traveling to Sydney for the VI games in 2002.

Mark Tewksbury, honorary co-president of Montreal 2006 said, "We are delighted and honored to be chosen by the Federation of Gay Games as host city of Gay Games VII. We believe that Montreal, working with the Federation, will host a spectacular Gay Games and take the movement and its values of participation, inclusion and personal best forward in the years leading up to 2006."

Proposed Constitutional Amendment

The proposed "Federal Marriage Amendment" states as its purpose to: "strengthen American families and reintegrate the role of a strong father figure." Most interpretations of the specific wording point out that in achieving these lofty, patriarchal goals, the rights of gay people and any other groups to choose a civil union or marital status would be non-existent. The passage of this amendment would diminish the minimal levels of equality only just now being realized.

The July 2001 amendment to the Constitution would add two sentences: "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman."

"Neither this Constitution or the constitution of any state, nor state or federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried couples or groups."

The actual reading is more complex and speaks to the rights of individual states versus the control of federal government regarding marriage laws as they relate to 'other than heterosexual' relationships. Further information is available through the ACLU, Vermonters for Civil Union and HRC.

Mississippi State Board of Health vs. Goldstein-Perdue

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"No comment," was the official response from Public Relations Director, Nancy Kay Wessman, State of Mississippi Board of Health, concerning their office's refusal to produce a birth certificate for Taliesin Phillip Charles Goldstein Perdue, son of Martha Holly Perdue and Cheri Lynn Goldstein.

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund on behalf of Perdue and Goldstein have filed suit against the State of Mississippi Board of Health for refusal to issue a birth certificate for their adopted son, Taliesin.

Goldstein and Perdue complied with all legal requirements that apply to interstate adoptions, and the child has lived continuously with his parents since placement eight days after his birth. On April 18, 2000, the Washington District Probate Court, State of Vermont, Hon. George Kendrick Belcher presiding, granted the petition to adopt and a copy of this order was sent to the Branch Director of Vital Records Certification in Mississippi.

Sanford R. Horton, Jr., attorney for the State Department of Health, informed Kurt M. Hughes, then attorney for Perdue and Goldstein that an amended birth certificate would not be issued due to the state's policy concerning adoptions by same-sex couples within Mississippi.

Pursuant to Mississippi law, the State Board of Health is required to issue birth certificates to persons born within the state and adopted outside the state. By refusing to do so, they have subjected this child and his parents to adverse treatment. By refusing to honor adoption orders by out-of-state courts on behalf of children adopted by parents of whom they disapprove, while honoring others of whom they approve, the State of Mississippi has created two classes of Mississippi born children adopted out-of state.

This clearly violates Mississippi's own law and deprives the adopted child the security, benefits and convenience a state-issued certificate of birth provides and that other persons born in the state of Mississippi enjoy as a matter of course. Singling this child out for different treatment not only creates an unlawful exception to Mississippi's own state laws and regulations, but it also violates the guarantees of equal protection of the law under the Mississippi Constitution.

For more information, log on at: <http://www.lambdalegal.org>.