

September 11 GLBT Impact Continues

By PAT ROBINSON
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Sept. 19, 2001: Maj. James P. Cassela of the assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs office made the following statements regarding the stop-loss order issued by the Pentagon for the second time in a declared war. The first time, George Bush Sr. was President.

"First, Gays and lesbians would be allowed to serve during any war, just as they do now, as long as they remain in compliance with the homosexual conduct policy." Maj. Cassela went on to add, "consistent with past practices, administrative discharges (medical, hardship, suitability) could continue."

Steve Ralls of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, an advocacy group for homosexual troops explained it this way, "The stop-loss order is an explicit acknowledgement by the Pentagon that gays and lesbians can serve their country. It also sends the unfortunate message that while there are gay men and women who put themselves in harm's way, who risk their lives for the country, they can expect to be fired from their jobs once the conflict is over."

Oct. 1, 2001: The weekly news and entertainment magazine PEOPLE recognized the heroes of United Airlines Flight 93. Ahead of CNN, in an interview with Alice Hoglan, Mark Bingham was acknowledged as a "happy gay man" and serious rugby player.

"I knew before I heard the news that Mark, if he were at all able, would try to keep the hijackers from killing innocent people on the ground." Alice Hoglan continued, "I am so honored to have been his mother."

Oct. 15, 2001: Traditionally a fair journalist, Matt Lauer, co-host of NBC's Today Show failed to ask the real questions of Lothar Machtan and the research done for his new book, *The Hidden Hitler*. NBC has made the LGBT community invisible in its coverage of the terrorist attacks, its LGBT victims, heroes, and families. Mr. Lauer said the following in a teaser for the interview, "There have been 120,000 books give or take a few, written about Adolph Hitler since his death. The newest one claims the Hitler was actually gay, and that his homosexuality was at the root of his evil." Mr. Lauer's interview with Mr. Machtan can be seen at: <http://www.glaad.org/org/publications/documents/index.html?records=2871>.

In a press release, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation is providing the following for anyone interested in expressing their opinion to NBC. Andrea Smith, Literary Editor, Today, NBC Television Network, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY. 10112-0002; fax: 212-664-2914; email: today@nbc.com.

Oct. 22, 2001: Robert Dodge, President of the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association issued a statement regarding the limited coverage the LGBT community is getting. From the Open Letter to U.S News Organizations from NLGJA, Mr. Dodge has these words, "Since the September 11 attacks, many of us have been touched by countless accounts of heroism. Americans learned about how ordinary people became extraordinary in a moment.

We know about these people because jour-

nalists in print, online and broadcast have told their stories. We know much about their lives, families and friends and what made them special because those details were revealed in newspapers, magazines and on the air.

At least we know much more about the heterosexual heroes and victims.

Some journalists may embrace outdated ideas that identifying openly gay and lesbian heroes will cast a negative image on their memory. This decision is based on a presumption that being gay or lesbian is wrong, a bias that works completely against news objectivity. Withholding relevant details about these lives, their partners and families is unfair and hurtful to the people they loved. In our mission as journalists, it also denies readers and viewers information about the true identity of those who are in the news. It is the same as withholding information about the spouse, children and other features about the heterosexual heroes.

What about legitimate concerns about "outing" someone, or disclosing the sexual orientation of someone who preferred privacy? We suggest more and better reporting.

Instead of asking whether the victim was married, it might be better to ask if he or she had a partner. This basic question may open the door to find out more about the subject of your story - including the chance that they were heterosexual and had a significant, romantic relationship outside of traditional marriage.

Denying and obscuring the existence of gay and lesbian people is a form of discrimination.

Withholding the sexual orientation of these individuals, especially when inconsistent in equal coverage about heterosexuals, will leave readers and viewers with only the negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians. News organizations that do so may find themselves having taken a biased editorial position that affirms those stereotypes.

I invite you to call on NLGJA as a resource; you may reach me at 202-661-8414 or

Pamela Strother, NLGJA's executive director, at 202-588-9888 ext. 11. NLGJA website: <http://www.nlgja.org>.

Oct. 24, 2001: The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force announced a series of plenarys, workshops and panels, and in particular, "Terrorism, War, and Democracy: What Does it Mean for LGBT People" to be held at the Creative Change Conference in November in Milwaukee.

Oct. 30, 2001: Elizabeth Birch of the Human Rights Campaign issued a press release regarding the September 11 Relief Funds and HRC's Advocacy on behalf of the LGBT community.

OVERVIEW

The Human Rights Campaign is actively working at the federal level and with private relief agencies. Already, we have been able to assist some families who have had difficulty receiving the proper benefits from the Red Cross. HRC is advocating for GLBT families, working directly with: a) relief funds such as the American Red Cross to ensure GLBT-inclusive policies and procedures; b) federal agencies to promote inclusive treatment of GLBT partners and children affected by the Sept. 11 tragedy; c) Congress to attempt to have GLBT families included in any benefit

packages.

PRIVATE RELIEF EFFORTS

HRC is actively engaged in the education of private agencies involved in the distribution of relief to family members of victims of the attacks on Sept. 11. As a direct result of our efforts, the American Red Cross has confirmed in writing that it will use an inclusive definition of family in dispersing funds and offering assistance.

We understand that some families have faced difficulties in getting the assistance that they need and deserve. When cases were brought directly to our attention, the Red Cross responded immediately to HRC's request to correct the problems. We are working with Red Cross management at the highest levels to ensure that individual cases are handled appropriately and to develop policies and procedures so that these problems can be avoided in the future. If you or anyone you know is having problems with the Red Cross, please contact HRC at (202) 628-4160 right away so that we can help correct the situation.

FEDERAL AGENCIES

HRC has an ongoing effort to ensure that our families are treated equitably in all federal and state policies, particularly in the areas of tax, survivor benefits and employee benefits. The events of Sept. 11 have only heightened our resolve and made it more clear that GLBT families are not treated equally under current federal, state and private benefit systems. As a result, we have stepped up our efforts to make sure that relief agencies are inclusive of all families. We will continue to work with our allies in Congress to monitor and modify all federal efforts, both legislative and regulatory, so that our families are accounted for.

Several federal agencies are involved in the Sept. 11 relief efforts and we will work closely with those agencies to support GLBT families. Our efforts will focus on established relief programs, such as those administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as well as newly established programs enacted in response to the Sept. 11 attacks. These new programs include a public safety officer benefits fund administered by the Department of Justice and the September 11 Victims Compensation Fund included in the airline bailout bill.

We continue to engage with members of Congress and relevant federal agencies.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

As you can see, we have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us advocating for our families and we need your help. The most effective action you can take right now is to call your U.S. senators and representative and urge them to support all efforts to make federal relief funds available to all families affected by the Sept. 11 attacks. This message from constituents will be enormously helpful as HRC and our allies in Congress work with the Bush administration to ensure the fair treatment of our community.

To send an e-mail to your senators and federal representative, logon to HRC's Action Center at www.hrc.org/actioncenter.