

G/L/B Vets First National Group To Affirm Transgender Rights

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, 12 February, 1994. Delegates to the 1994 National Convention of Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America in San Antonio, took a historic step this past week, amending their National Constitution and By-Laws to include recognition of the rights and concerns of transgendered Americans. Delegations from GLBVA chapters around the nation voted unanimously to include the terms transgender and gender identity throughout the text of their basic organizational documents, making GLBVA the first national organization to do so on a formal basis.

Gene Barfield, President of GLBVA's Vermont State Chapter and a leader in the debate to adopt the measure, said "This debate preoccupied our delegates for much of the three-day convention, and some heated exchanges occurred. Our people demonstrated the complete range of issue awareness, from immediate understanding of transgender concerns, to never having been openly exposed to the basic concerns - and even the identities - of transgendered Americans. We haggled over inclusive language, changing the name of GLBVA, everything. In the end, we left our convention fiercely proud to have dealt with an issue that has existed for a long time, but which has never been given the consideration it deserves."

number of us knew intuitively, but had long failed to acknowledge - that transgendered Americans have served and are now serving in the military in numbers roughly equal to those of us who identify ourselves as lesbian, bisexual or gay. Their rights are the same as all other people have, and their issues are our issues, those being a person's inherent, fundamental and irrevocable right to define the terms of their own identity."

The debate over transgender inclusion, in the Preamble, Statement of Purpose and Mission Objectives for the newly-reorganized National GLBVA, dominated the three-day event. The gathering also included a constitutional overhaul for GLBVA, discussion of long and short-term goals for the United States' first national g/l/b/t vets group, and elections of national officers: Nancy A. Russell of Texas, a retired Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army, was elected National President by acclamation. (GLBVA continues to be the only national mixed-gender veterans organization that has ever been headed by a woman.) Barfield, who previously held the positions of National Secretary and Acting National President, was returned to the National Secretariat, also by unanimous vote of the delegates. ▼

While the text of GLBVA's national constitution was amended at the 1994 National Convention, decisions on re-naming the organization were deferred for consideration at the 1995 National Convention, which has not yet been scheduled.

Tere Frederickson, a transgender activist from San Antonio, who is also an Armed Forces veteran, spoke passionately and eloquently in favor of inclusiveness, according to Barfield. "She made reference to something a

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Burlington College
Chassman & Bem
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Craftsbury

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