

Equality Begins At Home is Here

Flags Fly in Connecticut, Pigs Fly in New Hampshire, and People Rally Everywhere

WASHINGTON, DC—March 22, 1999—In Hartford, Connecticut the rainbow flag flew over the state capitol on Monday, raised as a powerful symbol of equality for the state's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community. Voices calling for GLBT equality were raised throughout the country this weekend to mark the start of Equality Begins at Home (EBAH), one of the largest grassroots mobilizations in the history of the GLBT rights movement.

Equality meanwhile, as tens of thousands of people rally throughout the country this week for equality, a number of major pro-GLBT rights bills could see action. In Alabama, a bill to add sexual orientation to the state's hate crimes law will be presented to the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday. In Maryland, a civil rights bill will likely be voted Begins at Home is the first-ever campaign of actions in all 50 states to focus attention on the battle in state legislatures over GLBT rights. More than 350 events addressing issues of anti-gay discrimination, violence, and prejudice are taking place March 21-27. Major events were held throughout the country this weekend, including Texas, California, Washington, DC, Alabama, and Massachusetts. on by the full House on either Tuesday or Wednesday. Governor Parris Glendening has been lobbying hard for the bill, and Maryland activists are hopeful about its passage.

In New Hampshire, the bill to repeal the state's anti-gay adoption and foster care ban may see more movement. The House last week passed the measure, and the Senate is likely to vote on it soon. Prospects for passage are good, and Governor Jeanne Shaheen has already announced she will sign the measure into law. Brendan Denehy of Out and Equal in New Hampshire reports that the House vote to pass the repeal of the ban was a highly emotional and moving event. Activists who tried 12 years ago to stop the ban from being enacted had tears streaming down their faces as it became clear the repeal would pass. In the words of one of those witnesses, "The hate has finally left the State

House." Denehy added, "They said that pigs would fly before this bill passed the House. Well, there's pork in the treetops in New Hampshire today!"

Proclamations in honor of GLBT equality were read at many of the actions this past weekend.

In New Jersey, Republican Governor Christine Todd Whitman's proclamation recognized and commended Equality Begins at Home, stating, "we must remain vigilant against the bigotry that continues to denounce gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and encourages violence against members of this community."

The Cambridge, Massachusetts City Council adopted a proclamation in honor of Equality Begins at Home, and activists in Lander, Wyoming have asked their city council to adopt a similar resolution. The proposed resolution would state that the city "would foster a community that respects and celebrates the diversity of human expression and identity." The Lander City Council has not yet taken action.

For the District of Columbia, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton entered into the Congressional Record an official statement on Equality Begins at Home and the right to D.C. self-determination. Holmes Norton also introduced federal legislation to end the congressional review of the DC budget and laws. Congress has repeatedly used this review in an attempt to curtail GLBT rights.

In Chicago on Friday, a letter in honor of Equality Begins at Home from Mayor Richard Daley was read at a very emotional and upbeat pre-EBAH rally that drew more than 400 people. Even more people are expected at a rally and lobby day in Springfield later in the week. A civil rights bill is before the Illinois House, and for the first time all executive officers of the state, including the governor and lieutenant governor, have signed on in support of the measure.

Last week in South Carolina, the State Senate voted in favor of a hate crimes bill. The measure now goes to the Senate. In a bold assertion of their right to equality, a contingent of 25 GLBT people,

including NGLTF's Urvashi Vaid, marched in the South Carolina St. Patrick's parade on Saturday. A right-wing religious fundamentalist marched alongside the contingent passing out literature and screaming, "Homosexuality is a sin, it's an abomination." According to Vaid, while the abuse was hard to take, everyone in the contingent kept their cool, smiled and waved and chanted, "Happy St. Patrick's Day, Equality Some Day."

In Washington, D.C., approximately 200 people braved a steady pouring rain to tell Congress, "Hands off DC." The D.C. city council has been largely supportive of GLBT equality, only to have Congress block these laws. Congress has repeatedly tried to prohibit adoption by unmarried couples and blocked implementation of the city's domestic partnership policy, city spending for needle exchange programs, and a vote tabulation of a ballot measure last November on medical marijuana. Speakers at the rally included openly gay City Councilman Jim Graham and National Organization for Women president Patricia Ireland.

In Alabama, people gathered on the steps of the capitol building to take a stand against hate crimes. Joining them were State Representative Alvin Holmes, the sponsor of a bill to add sexual orientation to the state's hate crimes bill. In Texas, hundreds of young people rallied against discrimination in education and on Sunday, more than 8,000 marched and rallied in support of GLBT families. In Nashville, Tennessee hundreds rallied at the first-ever statewide rally for GLBT rights in Tennessee. Attendees hailed from all over the state and participation by GLBT youth was especially high.

In Tallahassee, Florida, on Sunday, Barney Frank got a hero's welcome from hundreds of people at a rally at the state capitol. In Oregon 200 young people convened for the state's very first by-youth for-youth conference on GLBT issues. Hundreds more attended a rally at the capitol. In Nevada, former State Senator

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