

## Gabbard: The Man Behind the Mailings

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University. He first moved to Hawai'i in 1977 as a tennis professional, then returned to Samoa. Moving back to Hawai'i in 1983, he worked as headmaster of a private K-12 school and later as owner of a vegetarian restaurant, the Natural Deli.

It was in this latter position that Gabbard broke through to the public's consciousness.

In January 1992, gay-rights activists started a minor media furor by picketing the Natural Deli. Gabbard had attracted the wrath of gay-rights advocates with a radio program, "Let's Talk Straight, Hawai'i," launched in November 1991. After telling a caller on-air that he would, all else being equal, prefer a heterosexual applicant over a gay or lesbian worker, members of the Gay and Lesbian Education and Advocacy Foundation began handing out leaflets outside the deli, decrying Gabbard's "potential for discrimination."

Gabbard, on his part, says the discrimination charge was "blatantly untrue" — that the deli did not inquire about sexual orientation in hiring, while the protests interfered with his right to free speech.

For the next two weeks, marches were held day and night in front of the deli, pressuring Gabbard to cease his radio program. Gabbard claims he was threatened with bodily harm and customers were

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even visited them. Furthermore, our archives would motivate members of our community to work harder to achieve our political and cultural goals, because they will be shown proof that our community has a history that they can be a part of.

Finally, an archive makes our own beauty more accessible to us. We can use our own historical materials to create works of art. I saw proof of that hanging on the wall of a banquet hall on the night of March 27, 1999.

The RU12? Community Archives Project would be an integral part of the Community Center we are working towards assembling in Burlington. Nothing showed me more eloquently that such a project is essential to each of us than the bits of crumbling newsprint I brushed onto my pants after handling some of the documents we'd made copies of to mount for the Archives Installation.

In another 20 years, a lot of this stuff won't even exist for us to make copies of. Mould and water and the press of time make the revolutionary works of generations into stuff that makes you sneeze. Oh, yes, in the long term memories die as civilizations die, but it is your choice; you, holding this paper that will soon be dust, can choose to help preserve your pride and passions into history. This preservation requires will, imagination, bricks and bank accounts. RU12? One of the people whose struggles will be remembered? ▼

harassed. By February, with his livelihood "going down the drain," he says, Gabbard closed the deli.

Gabbard maintains he has continued working as a small businessman, but he declined to give the *Weekly* the source of his livelihood. "How do I survive? ... For obvious reasons, I won't give you any specifics, because if word gets out, homosexual activists will simply target me once again," he says.

### Krishna and Dogma

Though he has been misrepresented as a Christian activist, Gabbard is a devotee of the Hindu god Krishna and a student of Jagad Guru ("teacher of the world") Chris Butler.

Butler, once a disciple of Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami, leader of the Krishna movement in Hawai'i, broke away in the early 1970s to lead an independent group called Honolulu Mantra Meditation Hawai'i.

On homosexuality, Butler evokes the Bhagavad-Gita, which states that marriage is for procreation and thus between only a man and woman. Gabbard follows that scripture, too, as well as similar passages in the Bible.

"Homosexual marriage activists simply cannot produce any scriptural evidence that supports their cause," Gabbard charges. He views those who choose a homosexual lifestyle as embracing a "false identity," one that gives into base desires rather than suppresses them. Similar desires, Gabbard says, lead to heterosexuals cheating on their lovers, or to the consumption of meat, which Hindus abhor.

"The reality is we are not our desires," says Gabbard. "Our true nature is spiritual, and controlling our desires is what makes us human beings and sets us apart from animals."

Gabbard further argues there is no conclusive evidence that "so-called sexual orientation" is genetic; therefore, he holds, homosexuality is unacceptable.

Nonsense, say medical professionals. "Homosexuality is as natural as anything else," says Milton Diamond, a professor at the University of Hawai'i's John A. Burns School of Medicine and a well-known expert on sexual development. "We're talking about a wide spectrum where there are all sorts of ranges in terms of human sexuality," the professor says.

Gabbard sees no range. In an unsolicited missive to the *Weekly* he states: "Nature tells us that it's not a good idea to be inserting penises (or other foreign objects) into the anus/rectum because these excretory organs are designed specifically for eliminating things, not putting things into them."

He continues, "Putting aside AIDS for the moment, public health stats reveal diseases like gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis A and B, cytomegalovirus, amoebic bowel disease and herpes occur at much higher rates in homosexuals than in the general population. Unfortunately, when out of genuine concern and compassion for others, we bring these facts up and say that anal sex is unnatural, unhealthy behavior that should be discouraged in society, homosexual activists and their supporters point their fingers at us, venomously saying, 'Hatemonger, homophobe!'"

Diamond, in contrast, sees nothing "unnatural" about varying sexual practices. "The same neural endings in your genitals are the same as those in the anus, and this can be erogenous," he explains. "So can a person's shoulders, or ears, or wherever. Gabbard is misinformed and unschooled."

Gabbard remains skeptical. "Only the press, and a few researchers, primarily homosexual activists, falsely claim in sound bites that they've found the 'gay gene,'" he says.

### Godly Government

Gabbard first became active in local politics with his support of former Maui state Sen. Reed. Reed often made headlines — as when he said in 1985 he supported concentration camps for HIV-positive patients. Reed also once introduced a bill to prohibit school-teachers from teaching alternative sexual lifestyles.

Additionally, Reed was linked to a Chris Butler-influenced group called Independents for Godly Government, a short-lived political party that actually fielded a few candidates in the late 1970s.

Like Reed, who left Hawai'i in the early 1990s, Gabbard feels religion should not be entirely ignored by government.

"The problem I've seen when [separation of church and state] is brought up is that many times people who have deeply held religious and moral beliefs are treated like second-class citizens," he adds. "That somehow, their point of view is not legitimate or bona fide. The fact is, on public policy issues, all ideas should be brought to the table and welcomed during discussions and debates."

And if those who espouse gay rights are silenced or disempowered during this process? Gabbard sees this as checks and balances in action.

"When the governor or legislators make bad decisions, we can vote them out of office the next election," he says. "When judges make bad decisions ... the only recourse voters have is to amend the Constitution."

This, of course, raises the issue of civil rights — rights that are protected regardless of mass sentiment.

"What Gabbard fails to remember is that our country has been engaged in a long battle to bring the United States to a place and a time where diversity and tolerance are fluid, not only in principle but in practice," comments Vanessa Chong, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, Hawai'i chapter. "Gabbard wants government to prefer a religious viewpoint, but that's prohibited by the First Amendment."

"Gabbard would like church and state to fuse together as one," Chong holds. "That's dangerous and divisive, and that's why the government must remain neutral. A majority should not be able to push around a poor, powerless or unpopular minority."

### Traditional Alliances

The Alliance for Traditional Marriage-Hawai'i was formed in July 1996 as a political action committee. An organization without members, but with supporters from all islands, ATM bills itself as a "nonsectarian, multireligious and multi-ethnic group" dedicated to the goal of preserving and pro-

tecting traditional marriage.

Gabbard formed the PAC, he says, out of frustration in dealing with politicians who seemed unresponsive to concerns about same-sex marriage. Were the state to openly accept homosexual relationships, says Gabbard, a "Pandora's Box" could be opened.

"Once the state gives approval to that idea or world view, all sexual desires would have to be recognized and approved, not discriminated against," he says. "This would undercut the entire concept of morality, which is the basis for civilization."

Though founder and chairman, Gabbard says that he is neither paid nor supported by ATM, though he does "call the shots."

Indeed, he implements ATM's agenda. Gabbard and his supporters were instrumental in targeting key legislators seen as gay-friendly.

"It was at this time that Gabbard really came onto the scene," says Honolulu attorney Dan Foley, who represents three same-sex couples who first filed for marriage rights in 1991. "He pinpointed certain election districts with mass mailings, because these people opposed his views on gays."

Foley believes the '96 election was a turning point, not only for the same-sex marriage issue but Gabbard's public profile.

Gabbard's successful targeting certainly drew the attention of state politicians.

"He's dogmatic, hardworking and methodical in his approach," comments state Senator Matt Matsunaga. "He represents a segment of the population that is fearful of something they just don't know, afraid if gays had similar rights as nongays. His point of view — that homosexuality is provably wrong — well, if you believe that, then everything [he does] follows logically."

Matsunaga calls Gabbard "the X-factor" in the 1998 same-sex ballot initiative. "He motivated his followers to go out there, hold signs, to vote. Gabbard was initially quiet as the '98 campaign developed, letting others do most of the talking. A massive advertising campaign by both sides intensified the issue. By election night, it was Gabbard who emerged triumphant."

"I told the media that night, 'Shame on you, Mike Gabbard,' because I deplore the kind of politics where the ends justify the means," says POC's Young. "He's a zealot who thinks that he has a mandate, as if he himself was elected last November. He does not want to support anything that honors somebody else's differences — in this case, sexual orientation."

But Gabbard categorized the same-sex marriage ban as a victory for democracy, demonstrating that the system works.

"What I've noticed is that homosexual activists talk down to people," he says. "They don't respect the feelings of the people in this community. ... Homosexual marriage advocates were calling us bigots, uneducated, gay-bashers, stupid, backward, or haters."

### Force of Nature

Gabbard says his religious and intellectual understanding of the "true nature" of homosexuality motivates him to fight and defeat the "homosexual agenda." But some critics wonder if there is more to Mike Gabbard than Hinduism.

"I don't know what drives him," says attorney Foley, "but he seems obsessed with homosexuality. I've never seen anything quite like it." Foley adds that he thinks

Gabbard has peaked in influence, and that this influence will gradually decline.

Carolyn Golojuch, president of the Hawai'i chapter of Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, is perplexed by Gabbard's commitment as well. She sat in on a radio program during a call-in show last August. When Golojuch, who is Hispanic, linked racial discrimination with sexual-orientation discrimination Gabbard forcefully objected on air.

"He is so angry," Golojuch says of Gabbard. "There's something behind him that we just don't know about. Why else would he devote his life to denying human rights to a segment of our population?"

Others do not see anger or mystery in Gabbard, however. Richard Fried, a Honolulu trial lawyer, who's played tennis with Gabbard for 15 years, calls Gabbard "the fairest person I know... Yes, he's competitive, but he's really rather quiet, even mellow. He's not the wild, raving madman that is sometimes depicted in the media."

Another friend, attorney Jim Hochberg, says Gabbard has more integrity than any of his opponents.

"This is a man who put his family's socio-economic status on the line to speak out on what he feels is right," says Hochberg, one of two dissenting members of Governor Ben Cayetano's 1995 Commission on Sexual Orientation and the Law. The commission's majority report determined that sexual orientation was worthy of equal protection under the law in regards to marriage benefits.

"Mike knows his views are correct," says Hochberg. "He's worked through the issues, all the research, and made a careful determination. This is a man who believes what he says."

Though weary of the time and energy he has spent in his campaigns against homosexuality, Gabbard would not appear to be ending his crusade anytime soon. Cayetano's statement in his December inaugural that he would seek to establish domestic partnerships is Gabbard's next battleground.

"If Gov. Cayetano tries to push the equivalent of same-sex marriage down the throats of the people of Hawai'i, disguising it as domestic partnerships or whatever, he and legislators who support him will find themselves politically in hot water. ... Marriage and families are the bedrock of civilization," he observes. "Government and society show their appreciation for the nuclear family and relatives by offering them special benefits."

Gabbard claims to have no interest in other agendas, and says he would like to have more time for a personal life: "spending time with my family, playing music, surfing, playing tennis and teaching meditation and bhakti-yoga." He also brushes off queries into possible personal explanations for his views on homosexuality.

He does, however, offer a perspective on enemies who would analyze his motives.

"Some frustrated homosexual activists and their allies in the media ... are saying that those who are fighting against the social approval of homosexual behavior are doing so because they are closet homosexuals or ... they have homosexual tendencies, and they're trying to repress them," he says.

His response? By this reasoning, "those who are the most anti-Mike Gabbard, in fact, in the core of their hearts ... really want to be like me." ▼