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URI Symposium Support Under Attack

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Nichols, Holly J., "URI Symposium Support Under Attack" (1997). *Newspapers and Publications (Misc)*. Paper 12.

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OPTIONS

Rhode Island's
Lesbian & Gay
Newsmagazine

FREE

VOL XVI, NO. 3 ▼ APRIL 1997

Teachers Learn About Their Legal Rights

▼ DEE BIRD

Thirty Rhode Island teachers gathered at the Lincoln School in Providence on a warm evening in March, to listen to a panel discussion on gay, lesbian and bisexual teachers' rights. Three experts had been brought together by the Rhode Island chapter of GLSTN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Teachers' Network). The discussion opened with Mary Bonauto, the Civil Rights Director of Boston's GLAD (Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders). She fought the first case of sexual harassment under Massachusetts law, in which a Provincetown teacher was denied tenure on the basis of his sexual orientation. She filed a landmark lawsuit in federal court in New Hampshire, challenging the broadest anti-gay curriculum in the country. And she

defended the producers of a photography exhibit entitled "Love Makes a Family," who were prevented from displaying the exhibit at elementary schools.

Ms. Bonauto's presentation focussed mainly on public school teachers, whose rights are protected by the US Constitution of the (as distinct from private school teachers who do not have this protection.)

Bonauto acknowledged that while law is a useful tool for leverage, the challenge facing lesbigay teachers is to build a positive environment for change without recourse to the law. It is necessary to change attitudes and to convince administrators and colleagues that it is beneficial to the entire school system for teachers to be who they are.

According to the US Supreme Court, schools fulfill two functions. One is as a "marketplace of ideas" in which there is no orthodoxy and people are free to explore. The other is to inculcate community values. The interpretation of this varies depending on the community, such that there may be hostility in a homophobic society. The result of this dichotomy is tension in the courts, and Bonauto was not sure that this would ever go away as she believes there will always be the need to defer to officials to

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Pisaturo Introduces Marriage Act

State Representative Michael S. Pisaturo (D-Cranston) announced that he has introduced a bill that would allow all Rhode Islanders equal access to marriage. "It is clear that special interest groups are intent on attacking decent, hard working gay Rhode Islanders by pushing for a ban on marriages for people of the same sex." Such legislation was introduced in the House on February 4 by Rep. Susan Iannitelli (R-Smithfield). "My bill responds... by saying... that intolerance and bigotry are not welcome in our state," Pisaturo said.

Rep. Pisaturo, the state's only openly gay elected official, says his bill

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Challenging Sodomy Law

▼ JOHN BLAKESLEE

Judge Robert Rayhill of District Court heard arguments from defense lawyer Donna Uhlman in March that the statute prohibiting soliciting from a motor vehicle law is unconstitutionally vague. Representing a victim of an undercover arrest at River Road, Uhlman and Prosecutor Steve Catalano, were asked to submit briefs regarding the law. Uhlman said that the law forbids soliciting for indecent acts but standards for what constitutes indecent are not spelled out in any RI law. Catalano held up RI's sodomy law and the Bower Vs Hardwick decision as authority for prosecuting the soliciting charges. If the judge rules on the constitutionality of the law, appeals will inevitably be filed. ▼



Left to right: Steven Hartley, Lee Daniels, Michael Pisaturo and B. B. Hayes at Imperial Court Meet the Candidates Night. See story page 12.

Perspectives in Progress:

3rd Annual LGBT Symposium at URI

The Committee to Eliminate Homophobia and Heterosexism (H&H) is sponsoring "Perspectives on Progress," the Third Annual Symposium on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Issues, April 10-12, 1997 in the Galanti Lounge of the University of Rhode Island Library (Kingston Campus). The purpose of the H&H Committee is to eliminate oppression, harassment, and discrimination directed towards LGBT people. This symposium is one program geared toward that goal. This year's symposium promises to be educational, enlightening and entertaining. Included are presentations as diverse as Campus Climate, Health Care, Music, Race, Religion, Community Organizing and Genetics (to name a few). There will also be a display of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, fiction reading, poetry reading, an art exhibit, and mini film festival.

The keynote speaker this year is Karen Marshall, executive director of the highly successful San Diego Lesbian and Gay Men's Community Center. Ms. Marshall has been instrumental in bringing The Center from an annual budget of \$50,000 to \$1.9 million and the volunteer staff from 40 to 600. In her keynote address (April 10 at 7:30PM in White Hall Auditorium) which is entitled "How Do We Organize a Diverse Group of Communities to Move Our Movement Forward," Ms. Marshall will share with us what steps must be taken in order for the LGBT community to attain equality in a way that is healthy for all of us, including our need to celebrate and utilize our diversity. Ms. Marshall will also offer a workshop (Saturday, April 12 at 1PM in the Galanti Lounge of the URI Library) entitled "Creating Change Through the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Communities." This one-hour workshop will answer questions such as: how do we motivate people to continue working to maintain our rights when we're not in crisis; how can we be in control of our movement, rather than being crisis respondent; and how do we keep the energy moving forward as the radical right moves miles ahead?

The past two conferences have been extremely successful in providing members of the LGBT and "straight" communities the (all too rare) opportunity

to share research, artistic expressions, personal experiences and entertainment. This year's conference promises to do the same.

The symposium opens at 9AM on Thursday, April 10 with remarks by the University of Rhode Island's President

Robert Carothers and ends on April 12 with a reception at the Multicultural Center on Upper College Road at 5PM. Thanks to many campus, community and corporate sponsors, all events are free and open to the public. For a copy of the symposium schedule or more information call Lois Cuddy (874-4784) or Bill Bartels (874-4784); e-mail Holly Nichols, Conference Chair (hnic7063@uriacc.uri.edu); or visit our web-site at <http://www.uri.edu/news/symposium.htm>. ▼

URI Symposium Supporter Under Attack

▼ HOLLY J. NICHOLS

American Airlines has recently come under attack from radical right wingers for their strong support of lesbian and gay pride events and organizations.

As proof of their support locally, American Airlines has donated two round-trip tickets to the URI's Third Annual Symposium on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues as raffle prizes. These tickets are currently being raffled for \$5 each (only 500 raffle tickets are being sold) and the drawing will be held at the reception on Saturday, April 12 (sometime after 5PM) in the Multicultural Center, Upper College Road, Kingston. Tickets will be available at the April 1 Suede Concert at 7:30PM in the URI Memorial Union Ballroom. Or call Lois Cuddy 874-4671 or e-mail Holly Nichols, Symposium Chair (hnic7063@uriacc.uri.edu) for info.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, "American Airlines is the leading airline supporting the gay and lesbian community through significant investment in sponsoring organizations including Human Rights Campaign, American Foundation for AIDS Research, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and many more." It also notes that "they are recognized as the first major U.S. airline to include non-discrimination on sexual orientation in their employment policies."

Now American Airlines has come

under attack by right-wing conservatives. According to a letter from a coalition of groups including the Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, American Family Association and Coral Ridge Ministries, "American's sponsorship of homosexual 'pride' events constitutes an open endorsement of promiscuous homosexuality." They also claim that "American's pursuit of the gay travel market constitutes official company support of homosexual behavior. Neither action benefits the person with homosexual tendencies who may be considering a change in behavior." As a result, American Airlines has been flooded with hateful and homophobic e-mails and phone calls.

American Airlines, however, is standing behind their marketing and employment decisions and are "disappointed and surprised" at the coalition's reaction.

To show support for American's courageous actions, they can be called at 817-963-1234 (hit "0" and ask to speak with their executive offices). You can also e-mail them at WebMaster@amrcorp.com. Let them know if you have or are planning to purchase a ticket on their airline. Members of the lesbigay and supportive straight communities should jump at the opportunity to reward a company such as American Airlines. They have gone out of their way to support our events and organizations (even right here in Rhode Island!) Let's return the favor! ▼