

Moms and Dads Go To Washington

March 19-20, 1996

**A National Project of
Parents, Families and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG)**

and

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

to lobby Congress for the passage of ENDA–Employment Non-Discrimination Act

Organized by PFLAG Houston

MOMS & DADS GO TO WASHINGTON

We're heading North - we can't be stopped
This bus is full of Moms & Pops,
You ask us why we're on this bus
I'll tell you why we're in this rush.

Houston, Texas - Baton Rouge -
New Orleans, Mobile, too
Mile after mile from South to North,
We can't be stopped
We must go forth.

We're moms and dads and we're on our way.
We've come to speak,
We'll have our say.
We've come to protect our children's rights;
we're rising up to capitol heights.

P-FLAG parents speaking out,
And we've chosen a very difficult route.
Atlanta, Georgia and on to Charlotte
Freedom, Freedom - hear us shout it!

Awesome - Awesome we've just begun!
We love our kids - each daughter and son.

We've come to knock upon some doors,
And see some people called Senators

Greensboro - Durham,
finally D.C.
We demand you set our children free!
Give them the rights
they've been denied!
Only then will we be satisfied.

Jane B. Smith,
A P-FLAG mom

THE BIRTH OF AN AMERICAN IDEA

By Gail Rickey, Project Coordinator

The foundation for Moms & Dads Go To Washington was laid when the executive director of the Lesbian Gay Rights Lobby of Texas (LGRL), Dianne Hardy-Garcia, invited three Texas P-FLAG parents to become members of LGRL's Board of Directors for 1995. As one of those parents, I was very honored, and I threw myself wholeheartedly into the work of LGRL. Our top priority in 1995 was working to pass a Hate Crimes Bill in Texas.

P-FLAG Houston got very involved in working for the passage of the bill. From the beginning, Dianne recognized a resource that LGRL had never tapped--parents lobbying as a group for gay rights. She called upon us to testify at hearings and to lobby in person. Back at home, we wrote, called, faxed, and in general, made our presence known to our legislators. Surprisingly to us, they noticed! They listened to us. They responded. On LGRL's Lobby Day, we parents were there in full force. Dianne divided us into team and sent us out to legislative offices. At the end of the day, everyone, especially gays and lesbians who had lobbied for years, were amazed at the response we parents had gotten.

Sadly, the Texas Hate Crimes Bill lost--actually, it was tabled, by a vote of 70 to 68. Prior to the vote, we parents stood at the entrance to the House Floor, forming a mini-gauntlet that legislators had to pass through. Some of the legislators who had once wavered on the issue told us that they were going to vote for the bill.

Despite our loss, something important happened that day. We parents were empowered to speak up for our children in a new way. "We have been silent too long," one mom, who had never dreamed of calling on legislators, told her Representative. And LGRL had discovered a new resource, right at its fingertips.

When the legislative session ended a few days later, and we were trying to recover from our wounds, we parents began thinking about where to focus our newfound commitment for speaking up to elected officials. Let me note that in P-FLAG Houston we had certainly worked on a variety of advocacy projects prior to this time, but never in such a concerted, unified way. And never before had we positioned ourselves in such a visible way as parents and family members of gays and lesbians.

The Texas Legislature would not reconvene until January, 1997. Meanwhile, ENDA had just been introduced to Congress. So, the idea of going to Washington to focus national attention on ENDA was born. We called the Human Rights Campaign to ask whether they thought such a project would be helpful to the cause, and we asked the advice of political experts across the country. We wanted to go to Washington, that much we knew, but when? Some P-FLAGers suggested that we wait until the 1996 National Convention in October, when other gay-related events, especially the Quilt, will be in D.C. Frankly, that scenario sounded enticing, since we as a chapter would not have to expend any energies organizing or developing it. But increasingly we heard from veterans to this cause: "Lobbying during the National P-FLAG Convention is fine. But Members of Congress are going to look at it as, Oh just those gays in town. Wait till next week and they'll be gone."

And that's when our vision began to take form. Go to Washington as moms and dads, families, and allies, with the message that non-gays have joined together to call attention to discrimination against their children, family members, and friends. In our view, this project is unique. It's not a protest. It's not a march. It's not even a rally. Instead, it's a message that we are taking to our nation's Capitol, and we want to speak it to fair-minded people across the country. It's really a simple message, one that Americans believe in their hearts: When one member of our society is diminished, so are we all.

PFLAG Houston Participants
in *Moms and Dads Go to Washington*

Rev. Susan Quinn Bryan

Ann Chapman

Terrie Cooney

Don and Donna DeCamp

Peter de Michele

Dick and Norma Graves

Mary Kay Jones

Mary Lou Kurtz

Penny Leuchtag

Linda and Ken Markert

Edna Martin

Myrtle Meaux

Gail and Pat Rickey

Rev. Dr. Don Sinclair and Kathy Sinclair

Irv and Jane Smith

Sherry Stephens

Susan Upchurch

Blake and Gordon Weisser

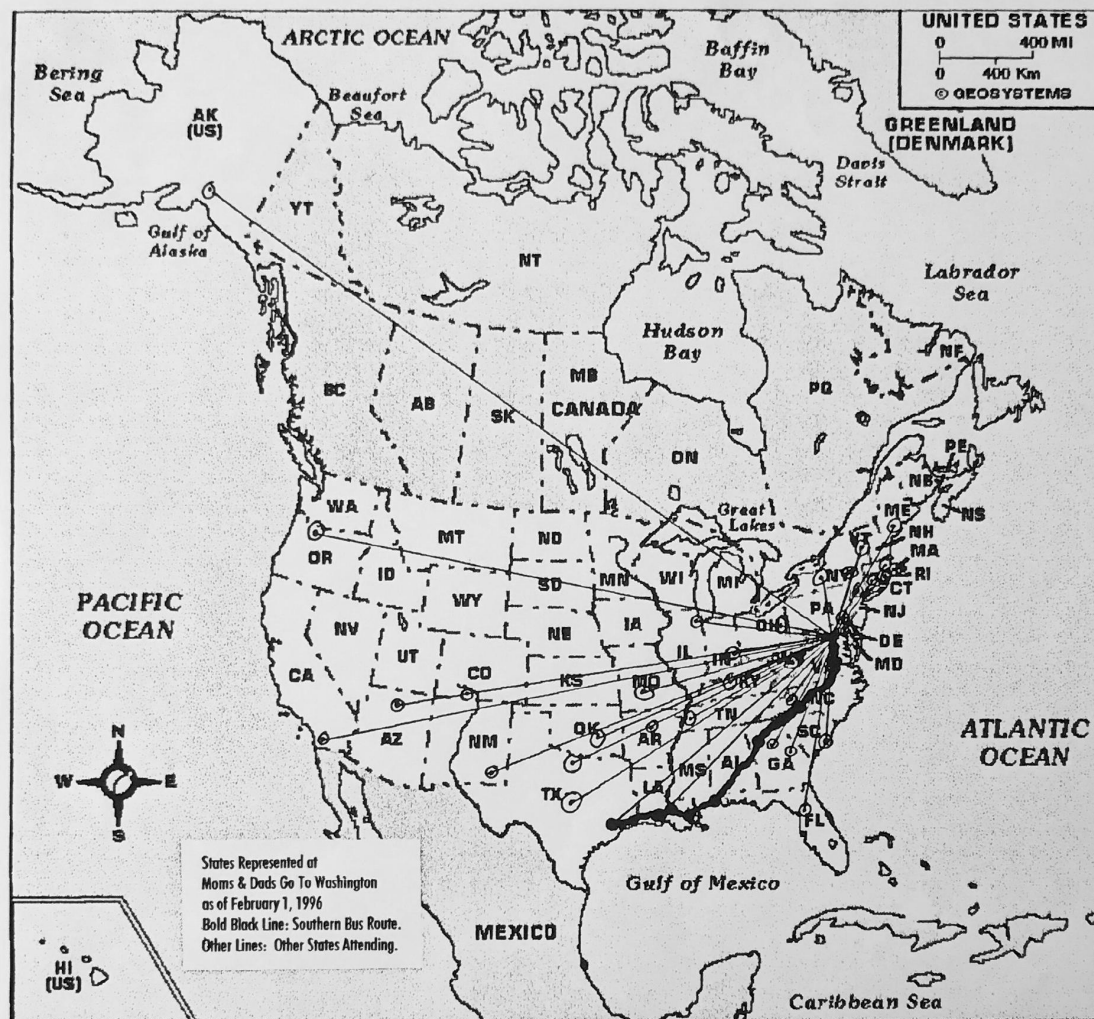
Kathy Whitmire

Alice Wilson

Fred and Rosemary Wilson

Barbara Winston

The *Moms and Dads Go to Washington* bus started in Houston and wove through southern states to pick up passengers as well as to interact with other PFLAG chapters. PFLAGers from across the nation joined us in Washington.



All along our trip we passed out red flyers
to the people whose paths we crossed.
Not only were we going to Washington to talk to legislators.
We wanted to encourage as many people as we could
to speak up for ENDA.



Moms & Dads Go To Washington
March 19-20, 1996

Why We Came To Washington
From Cities and Towns Across the Country

- ◆ To Speak to the Nation As Moms and Dads,
Brothers, Sisters, and Grandparents
of Persons Who Are Gay and Lesbian
(Our numbers include other non-gay persons from our hometowns
who support the dignity and value of gays and lesbians.)
- ◆ To Proclaim the Fundamental Right of Gays and Lesbians
to Employment Without Discrimination
- ◆ To Call The Attention of Fair-Minded Americans to
ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act

How You Can Help

- ◆ Contact Your Members of Congress to urge their support of ENDA.
- ◆ Join with P-FLAG
(Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
in working toward a society that respects human diversity.

Moms & Dads Go to Washington is a project of P-FLAG chapters & the Human Rights Campaign.
Contact the national office of P-FLAG, a grassroots organization,
at 1101 14th St. NW, Suite 1030, Washington, DC 20005; 202-638-4200

Baton Rouge, Louisiana
We stopped at the home of Pat Rickey's mom, age 91,
who hosted a gathering of local PFLAGers.



Mobile, Alabama
The local PFLAG chapter treated us to dinner
at the Episcopal Church.



Atlanta, Georgia
We picked up two local PFLAGers and were
interviewed by the local FOX TV.



After dinner, Southern Comfort, a local gay country
western dance group, led us in line dancing.



Winston Salem, North Carolina



Dallas, North Carolina
Joyce and Dub Rankin served us a
wonderful barbeque dinner in their home.



Our hostess, Joyce Rankin,
with Gail Rickey



Winston Salem, North Carolina
We picked up one rider from Winston Salem
and another from Mount Airy.

Richmond, Virginia
Here we picked up our last
bus rider and then headed to D.C.



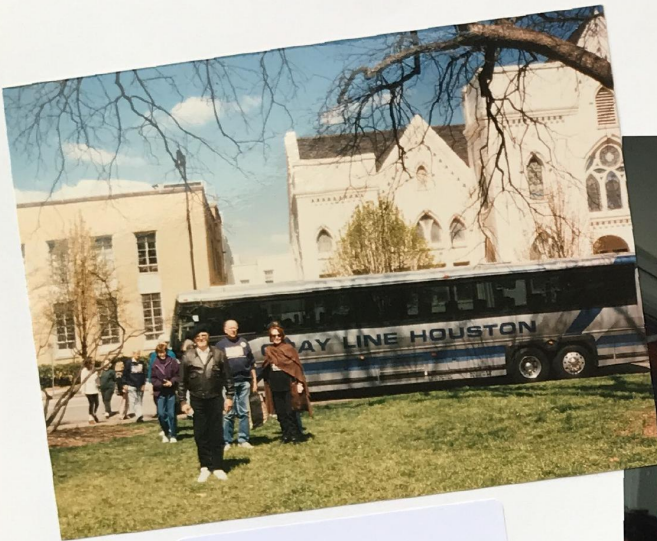
Throughout the journey, we invited those we met to sign our scrolls.



The Bus Ride

Over 3,000 miles of travel by bus, with multiple stops along the way to pick up more PFLAG riders and interact with local PFLAG chapters

FUN along the way



The Bus!



Our wonderful bus driver Dino, with Jane Smith



Washington Reception



Press Conference



On left, Elizabeth Birch,
Executive Director of Human Rights Campaign

Four years later, Birch became the first leader of a LGBT organization to address a national political convention when she delivered a speech at the Democratic National Convention.



Welcoming Reception
officially "The White House," but in Old Executive Office Building, Indian Treaty Room





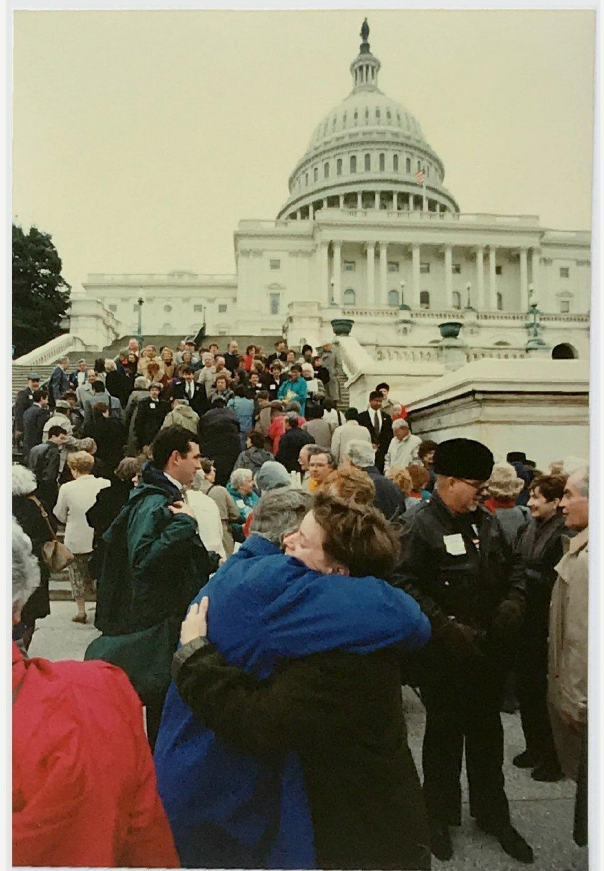
Interacting with Candace Gingrich in Washington

We enjoyed our opportunities to interact with many well-known people in D.C.— members of Congress as well as leaders of Houston Rights Campaign (HRC).

We especially enjoyed Candace Gingrich, half-sister of Newt Gingrich, who was then working for HRC.



Candace with
Rosemary Wilson,
Houston PFLAG



From Candace's book *The Accidental Activist*: "In March, HRC helped members of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) lobby Congress on ENDA during their "Moms and Dads Go to Washington." Milling around with the group's members outside Congress, I spotted Newt looking down on the scene from the balcony of his office, where one year earlier he had called me a "sinner" of front of television cameras. With his bad vision, I couldn't tell if he recognized me from afar. I waved anyway. He waved back. He then disappeared into the interior of his office, back to leading the country. As far as Newt was concerned, I was, once again, out of sight, out of mind."



**Moms and Dads and Aunts and Uncles from 27 states
across the United States rose up with one voice:
End Employment Discrimination Against Our Children.**



New Orleans

On the way back home, we celebrated with the New Orleans PFLAG chapter.



HOME!





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PARENTS IN WASHINGTON, DC LOBBYING FOR ENDA

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 **Administration Releases
1997 AIDS Budget**

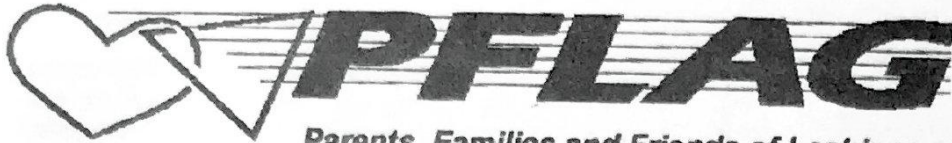
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Trip Report
from Metropolitan Washington DC Chapter



*Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
of the Metropolitan Washington DC Area*

THE FLAGPOLE
MAY 1996

MOMS AND DADS GO TO WASHINGTON — THE WRAP UP

By Karen Solon

Well, we did it! More than thirty Metro DC PFLAG members joined at least 200 PFLAGgers from 27 states for the Houston PFLAG's project on March 19 and 20. All contributed to the success of this two-day lobby effort for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). We stood together to educate legislators and fair-minded Americans about the impact of job discrimination on our families and friends. Many new and old friendships were celebrated and a powerful message of the real meaning of "family values" and love was delivered.

PFLAG visibility was one of the goals. Tremendous media coverage was accomplished with print and television news stories here in Washington and around the country. We made the front page of *The Washington Blade* (March 22 edition), with photos, and the *Washington Post* reported in the Reliable Source column the same day an item about Sen. Jesse Helms' elevator encounter with Houston PFLAG minister, Don Sinclair and his wife Kathy.

Visibility in DC began at the Doubletree Hotel Park Terrace — project headquarters — where a large MOMS AND DADS logo greeted all hotel guests. A table in the main lobby displayed information about the project, and a large open PFLAG scroll invited written comments. Logo tee-shirts and sweatshirts were worn proudly everywhere, attracting attention and interest from passerbys. Houston PFLAGgers described a process of increasing empowerment with each mile of their three day bus trip from Texas as families shared experiences with each other and with people they encountered at stops along the way.

At the early morning **White House Reception** on Tuesday, in the Old Executive Office Building, our group was welcomed by Marsha Scott, Deputy Assistant for Political Affairs to President Clinton, and Congressman Gerry E. Studds from Massachusetts and his partner, Dean Hara. Human Rights Campaign (HRC) staff offered tips to PFLAGgers on lobbying strategies.

A group photo taken on the steps of the Capitol Building found its way onto the World Wide Web via HRC's Home Page. And thanks to skillful negotiations between HRC's David Smith and the security officers, the group was able to display for cameras and the press a large MOMS AND DADS GO TO WASHINGTON logo banner as well as a sign stating "Straight or Gay — we're all OK."

At the Dirksen Senate Office Building, a **lobby training and press conference** prepared us to meet our respective legislators. Senator Jeffords (R-VT), who along with Senator Kennedy (D-MA) introduced ENDA to the 104th Congress, spoke to us and was greeted by a standing ovation. Congressman Peter Torkildsen (R-MA) also addressed the PFLAG group and announced that his Small Business Committee will hold hearings on ENDA this summer.

The **Candlelight Vigil** originally planned for the steps of the Capitol Building metamorphosed into a very moving "flashlight" ritual held indoors. On Tuesday evening, at the very last minute, the event was cancelled due to rain, wind, and cold. Father Downing of St. James Episcopal Church (home to the Lesbian and Gay Chorus of Washington) graciously offered his sanctuary. A Houston PFLAGger volunteered to brave the weather in order to direct participants from the Capitol steps to the Church (only blocks away), and the hotel guests were transported on Houston's chartered bus. The Lesbian and Gay chorus sang for us and joined in a very moving "claiming" and testimonial service planned by a team of ministers from Texas.

A tour of the **Holocaust Museum** Wednesday morning was preceded by a special presentation by the Museum curators with emphasis on the experience of homosexual people during the Holocaust. It was significant to many in our group that homosexuals were rescued later than non-homosexuals, and were not even aided by their families. This fact had been noted during the candlelight vigil when PFLAGgers not only publicly "claimed" their gay loved ones by name, but also "claimed" a Holocaust victim, as a public commitment that gay people will not be abandoned again.

And finally, on Wednesday evening there was the **Reception**, hosted by our chapter. KUDO's to chapter member Mark Gustafson for planning this wonderful closing social event at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Dupont Circle. And special thanks to **Cafe Luna, P & S Catering, and W. Millar & Co.** for donating delicious food and beverages. The plentiful food and drink and a warm and cozy room provided exactly what Houston PFLAG had requested from us — an opportunity for closure, sharing experiences and hugs, and to say "See you in October!"

The Washington Blade

THE GAY WEEKLY OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL



by Clint Stelb

North Carolinians Rosalie Witbeck, Lala Satrazemis, Flora Isassi, and Shelby Nichols paid a visit to the office of Sen. Jesse Helms. A Helms staffer met with three of them.

Parents fan out over Hill

by Wendy Johnson

Adorned with rainbow buttons, red ribbons, and stickers bearing the command, "Protect our gay children," members of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) swept across Capitol Hill on Tuesday, March 19. Their mission: to educate lawmakers about the importance of passing the Employment Non-Discrimina-

tion Act (ENDA), a bill pending in Congress that seeks to prohibit discrimination against Gays in employment

"We parents have been silent for too long," said Gail Rickey, head of the Houston PFLAG chapter, which organized the monumental trip. It marked the largest organized effort by parents to lobby for Gay

Continued on page 25

Moms, dads, families, friends all fan out

When parents spoke of a long journey, they weren't talking about the bus ride

Continued from page 1
civil rights legislation.

In the process of advocating for the equal rights of their Gay children, the D.C. visit was a turning point for the parents, many of whom said they had "never dreamed" they could transform their fear of "coming out" as the parent of a Gay child into a source of great pride, much less a political action.

"This trip has changed us," said Rickey, whose chapter also organized a two-day bus tour through the South, during which the bus stopped in sleepy towns to inspire the floundering, closeted PFLAG chapters there. During the trip, Rickey said she witnessed a transformation among the parents who had rarely talked to other people about their Gay child.

Each parent spoke of a "long journey," one measured by years instead of miles, and often marked by pain and regret.

"Mile after mile, people found their voices and told their stories," Rickey said. "Each voice added a different experience."

The voices belonged to people like Kathy and Don Sinclair of Houston, who learned 16 years ago that their 20-year-old son Stanley was Gay after they received a phone call from the police informing them Stanley had been murdered.

"Our grief kept us in denial about his homosexuality for a long time," Kathy Sinclair said. During the years following the unprovoked stabbing, the Sinclairs would come to know their son through the faces and stories of other Gay men they eventually befriended.

"It is for my Joshua that I am here today," said Catherine Tucker, of Washington, D.C., a parent who recalled during a candlelight vigil Tuesday night how she subjected her pre-pubescent son to years of psychotherapy because she feared he might be Gay.

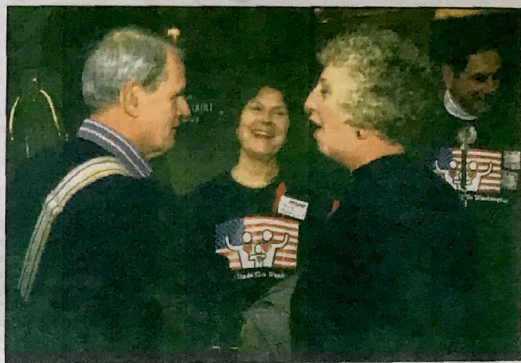
"I was not there for my Joshua then, but I am here for him now," she said.

One of the voices also belonged to Nita Pierce, a mother from Waco, Texas, who echoed the sentiments of other parents when she described her pilgrimage to D.C. as a tribute to all of the times when she remained either silent or indifferent about her son's homosexuality.

The voices also belonged to grieving parents who traveled to D.C. on behalf of their Gay children who had died from AIDS complications. And there were parents like Arthur Saffir of Portland, Ore., who came to D.C. for all of the Gay "children" who have been rejected by their own parents and who clamored for "parental hugs" from PFLAGers at annual Gay Pride marches.

Although sentimental, the parents were not wide-eyed idealists. When it came to anti-Gay legislators, the parents remained clear on their mission. They came not to inspire a change of heart in lawmakers, but rather to let them know that Gays come from the same loving families as their straight siblings.

Perhaps none of the PFLAG parents kept their mission as clear as Rosalie Witbeck of Arden, N.C. Witbeck visited the offices of her Republican senators, Jesse Helms and Lauch Faircloth. Recalling how her "stomach was in knots," Witbeck said staffers for the



Wearing their navy blue "Moms and Dads Go To Washington" sweatshirts, PFLAG members piled off the bus in Washington on Monday night in good spirits.

By Clint Stubb

two anti-Gay conservative senators told her that her son "chose" his homosexuality and could be "cured" from it. "I really didn't expect any other kind of response," Witbeck said. "But I know that my son isn't the one who needs to change. Let me tell you, there's nothin' worse than a pissed-off mama!"

Nicknamed "Moms and Dads Go To Washington," the trip grew out of an attempt by the Houston PFLAG chapter last year to help pass a hate crimes bill in the Texas legislature, a bill which didn't pass. The parents found that the response they received while lobbying state lawmakers was different than the one received by lobbyists from the Lesbian Gay Rights Lobby of Texas (LGRL), the group which asked PFLAG for help.

"We saw what a difference it made for parents to be also be talking with legislators," Rickey said. "The same hateful things that were said to the Gay and Lesbian lobbyists had not been said to us. It was infuriating, but it also showed us that we had a voice that would be heard. We had never gone in as a group and said, 'We are parents of Gays and Lesbians.' It moved us to another level."

Houston PFLAG moved to an even higher level in June, when ENDA was introduced in the current Congress. Parents saw the national legislation as a chance to broaden their newly discovered influence and enthusiasm.

"I was once a homophobe, but I have come full circle in my journey," said Louis Loeser, a Colorado physician and father of an HIV-antibody positive son. Loeser said that if he and other parents could change their views on homosexuality, lawmakers and others could, too. It is with this so-called idealism that "Moms and Dads" made their way to Washington.

"Imagine if every parent, grandparent, neighbor, and coworker of a Gay person spoke up and said 'I support them,'" another Colorado father said. "That would probably turn out to be the entire population of the United States! Then there would be no more discrimination against Gays."

After several days of lobbying and sharing their stories with other PFLAG members from across the country, each of the 200 or so D.C. visitors packed up their navy blue "Moms and Dads Go To Washington" sweatshirts, exchanged warm hugs, and headed back to their respective states.

"The journey has been long," Rickey said. "I regret so much that I wasn't there for my daughter when she was coming to terms with herself six years ago. When Gays and Lesbians come up to me now, crying and saying 'thank you,' I feel so unworthy of that gratitude. I'm ashamed that it took my having to feel [the homophobia] personally to recognize this oppression. I have only now begun to reach out." ▼

Parents lobby Helms, Faircloth

Staffers for two anti-Gay senators this week told parents of Gay people that their children had chosen their sexual orientation and referred the parents to "ex-Gay" organizations.

Among dozens of visits to Congressional offices on Tuesday, March 19, members of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) met with staffers of Sens. Jesse Helms and Lauch Faircloth, both North Carolina Republicans. The parents wanted to show members of Congress that Gays come from loving families. The Human Rights Campaign reported that the visit to Helms's office is likely the first time his staffers met with the parents of Gays. One parent complained that the meeting with a staffer for Helms left her in discomfort.

"My stomach was in knots," said Rosalie Witbeck, who along with two other North Carolina parents met on March 19 with Paul Jimenez, Helms's legal adviser on family issues.

Witbeck said she showed Jimenez a picture of her family and pointed out that her Gay son does not have the same legal protections as his two siblings.

"I said that, with true family values, all members of a family are treated equally," Witbeck told the *Blade*. "[Jimenez] asked me how I knew for sure that my son was born Gay, and he said that the feeling on Capitol Hill is that being Gay is a choice."

Witbeck said she then asked Jimenez when he "chose" to be heterosexual.

"He was taken aback by the question," she said. "He just said, 'Unless you've been living in a cave, you know how Sen. Helms feels [about Gays].'" Jimenez did not take any notes during the meeting, Witbeck said.

The three parents also met with Heide Wood, a social issues adviser to anti-Gay Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.). Witbeck said that Wood referred the parents to an ex-Gay ministry, which purports to "cure" their Gay children.

Meanwhile, a different group of PFLAG parents ran into Sen. Helms while waiting for the Capitol subway.

Sandy Lane of Albuquerque, N.M., said she handed Helms a flyer that contained information about ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, for which PFLAG had come to D.C. to lobby. ENDA would outlaw job-related discrimination based on sexual orientation.

"I said, 'Mr. Helms, I am the mother of a Lesbian daughter and I want her to be treated fairly,'" Lane recalled.

Lane said that Helms answered, "I'm sure you are fine ladies," but added that he could not support Gay civil rights legislation. When Lane persisted, Helms turned to her and said, "Look ladies, do you want my sympathy?" Lane recalled.

Unruffled, Lane said she felt "exhilarated to have spoken face-to-face with someone who has discriminated against my daughter."

— Wendy Johnson



TOM MURRAY/Special to The Observer

Joyce Rankin hosted a group of parents and friends of gays headed to Washington to back an anti-discrimination bill.

Meal sends message on gays' jobs

By CHIP WILSON
Staff Writer

DALLAS — Joyce Rankin doesn't fear her son will lose his job because he's a gay man, but she knows parents who do.

"It doesn't matter how qualified they are or how they perform on their job," she said. "A person can be fired just because they are gay. It's outrageous."

Rankin did a small part to bring job security to gays and lesbians Sunday night when she hosted a busload of about 50 people traveling from Texas and Louisiana to Washington today to lobby Congress for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

The bill, which was introduced in June with the support of President Clinton and at least 160 co-sponsors in the House and Senate, would make it illegal for large employers to fire workers because of their sexual orientation. It won't apply to religious groups, the military or small businesses.

The buffet dinner Rankin hosted at her northern Gaston County home is only her latest effort on behalf of gay rights. For nine years, she's also been a leader in Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays — a national support group with a Gaston County chapter.

See **SUPPORT** / next page



TOM MURRAY

Joyce Rankin, whose son is gay, provided food and support to a group of parents and friends of gays who stopped in Gaston County on their way to lobby for an anti-discrimination bill.

Welcome greets gay-rights lobbyists

SUPPORT

From preceding page

Rankin's involvement with PFLAG came after she learned her son, Gordon, is gay. She said the campaign for the nondiscrimination act goes beyond a question of gay rights.

"Most people, whether pro-gay or anti-gay, believe that jobs should not be at risk," she said. "Overall, Americans are very fair-minded people and feel that the security of a job should not be taken away because of who you sleep with. It's a private matter and should remain a private matter."

Rankin said she joined the bat-

"Most people, whether pro-gay or anti-gay, believe that jobs should not be at risk."

JOYCE RANKIN
PFLAG

tle even though her son's openness about being gay hasn't prevented him from having a successful career. Still, she didn't reveal where he works or what he does for a living.

"My impression is, he's had

nothing but a positive reaction," she said. "But he's not out there waving a flag."

Rankin and her husband, Alvin, rose to local and national leadership in PFLAG, serving on its board and chairing its 1991 national convention in Charlotte. They are now devoting their efforts to the Gastonia/Western Piedmont chapter they formed two years ago.

Marcia Solomon, a former board member for PFLAG's Charlotte chapter, said one of the most important things Joyce Rankin has done for PFLAG is her public stand in a small town like Dallas.

"She is undoubtedly a pioneer," Solomon said. "She has

been extraordinarily courageous. Not only did she publicly acknowledge that she is the mother of a gay son, but also that she would not condone the injustices of society" against gays.

"She is one of those people who was able to get outside herself to be concerned about others."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

PFLAG's Gastonia/Western Piedmont chapter meets on the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 258 W. Franklin Ave. For more information, call 922-9273, anytime.

LOUISIANA MOMS GO TO WASHINGTON

BY TRACY SCHAFER

A group of mothers in the Houston chapter of P-FLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) returned from the halls of the Texas legislature last year with a feeling of accomplishment. They had just spoken in support of passing legislation against hate crimes toward gay men and lesbians. Shortly thereafter, a national bill outlawing job discrimination caught their attention in the same way.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) is aimed at protecting gay men and lesbians from being fired based on their sexual orientation. The bill, which would extend the same protection from bias in the workplace that currently exists for sex, race and religion, was issued in June of 1995 and backed by President Clinton.

The Houston women considered going to Washington, D.C. to lobby for the bill, and what originated as a small idea turned into a national gathering. On Tuesday, March 19 approximately 200 members of P-FLAG from across America will arrive in Washington to support ENDA.

"We had seen what could happen in the name of the parents," said Gail Rickey, a member of the Houston chapter of P-FLAG and event coordinator. "We spoke about the hate crimes, they listened, and we felt empowered."

Rickey and other members contacted the Human Rights Campaign to help organize a week-long bus trip across the nation that will pick up chapter members from close to 30 states. Once in Washington, the parents will be welcomed by a reception at the White House, and from there continue with a day of lobbying that will end with a candlelight vigil on the steps of the Capitol.

Although most of the participants will be mothers and fathers, there are a few riders who aren't members of P-FLAG.

"The heartening thing to me is that there will be people on the bus who just believe in this issue," said Rickey. "That's the future to me."

After leaving Texas, the bus will stop in New Orleans to pick up Louisiana riders.

New Orleans resident Clare Katner will be one of two P-FLAG mothers to board the bus when it stops in New Orleans. Two of Katner's 10 children are gay, and she was encouraged by her son to join P-FLAG.

"It's been a very rewarding experience," says Katner. "It's not so much for us, because we are very accepting of our children, but we find we can help other people — other parents."

Vol. 21, Number 6, March 15-78
1996

Katner's primary reason for embarking on the Washington trip is to have the opportunity to show support for ENDA. Like many other parents in P-FLAG, Katner is concerned about fair treatment of her children in the workplace.

The New Orleans women will be ready to discuss issues about their own children and their concerns about fairness in employment. They will receive lobby training while in Washington and will have chances to discuss issues at several news conferences.

"I'm anxious to lobby my congressman. I think it's important for them to see the faces of the straight parents — we're the constituents," Katner said. "It's important for them to see that we're ordinary people with gay children. We back our children and we expect them to."

Upon returning to New Orleans, the parents and board members of the local chapter will host an informal reception for the group. According to Sandra Paillet, president of the chapter, there will be a pot-luck dinner and an opportunity for the group to share their experiences in Washington.

"We're hoping that there will be high energy and adrenalin. This is a chance for the group to unwind and share," Paillet said. "This is a big step forward, a real educational tool."

Although currently New Orleans is the only city to represent Louisiana on the trip, Paillet feels that is enough to promote local attention.

"New Orleans has a large support system," she said. "Sometimes people don't participate, but even those people who can't be a part of it know it's happening."

That awareness, says Paillet, is what P-FLAG is all about.

Gay adults' moms push bill ending job bias

By **BRUCE ALPERT**
Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — They traveled two days on an uncomfortable bus to lobby for anti-discrimination legislation, hoping congressional members would accept a message from "straight" parents that they'd probably reject from their gay children.

"We know as moms and dads that we're treated with more respect than our gay children," said Claire Katner, 65, of New Orleans, one of 35 parents and friends of gay men and lesbians who caught the chartered bus as it traveled from Houston to the Capitol earlier this week.

Katner and Betty Morgan, 61, both part of the 120-member New Orleans chapter of PFLAG, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, said they haven't given up hope for a bill ending job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

They noted that President Clinton recently endorsed the bill and that even the conservative chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Bob Livingston, R-Metairie, agreed to "study" their arguments.

"It is incredible to me that everyone in America has rights except gay people," Moynan said during a meeting with about 200 PFLAG members, including her

34 bus mates. "I just hope we can get the point out that we're not asking for special preferences, only that people shouldn't be fired or lose out on a job simply based on their private sexual preferences."

Moynan, who works at Lazarus House in New Orleans, a hospice for AIDS patients, said her two sons, one a nurse at Touro Infirmary and the other an electronics worker in the Washington, D.C., area, are proud that she joined the fight for gay rights.

"Everyone who is gay or the parent of a gay son or daughter knows that you can be fired immediately because some people consider a gay person as being totally without morals, which is not right," she said. "Our young people are educated. They are productive. They are loving and wonderful. And we need to get that word out."

Some PFLAG members from outside Louisiana complained that their congressional members refused to meet with them.

But Moynan and Katner said they were able to schedule sessions with all three congressional offices they contacted, getting a half-hour with Livingston in his Capitol office and meetings with aides to Louisiana's two Democrat U.S. senators, J. Bennett Johnston and John Breaux. And

all PFLAG members were invited to the White House for a reception with Clinton aides.

After his meeting with the two New Orleans parents, Livingston, one of the House's more conservative members, said he promised to review the written material they provided on the nondiscrimination bill but could make no commitments.

Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-Chackbay, who was not asked for a meeting with the PFLAG representatives, said most congressional members, whether conservative or liberal, are sympathetic.

"Nobody wants anybody to be discriminated against in our country, but I think the general feeling across our society is that we have enough civil rights laws on the books already," Tauzin said.

Moynan couldn't dispute Tauzin's analysis, but said polls indicate that most Americans aren't aware people can be legally fired in 42 states, including Louisiana, just for being gay or lesbian.

Their current good relationships with their gay children don't mean it wasn't traumatic for Moynan or Katner, a chemist, to learn of their children's sexual orientation. Moynan has two gay sons, and two of Katner's 10 children are gay.

"You're thinking it is some-

thing that you did personally that made your son gay, but that isn't true," Moynan said. "But I didn't know that in fact it is a gene

thing, and isn't about choice or environment. And that's what makes me so angry. It has nothing to do with choosing a partic-

ular lifestyle, yet people turn away our gay children simply because of who they are."



THE BANNER

P. O. Box 15515, New Orleans, LA 70175
895-3936 or 581-2749

April 1996, Vol. 15, No. 4

HOUSTON - D.C. BUS BRINGS EXCITEMENT !!

Saturday, March 16, the "Moms and Dads Go to Washington" bus made a coffee stop at Betty Moynan's home to pick up two of our chapter's moms, Betty M. & Clare Katner. Other N.O. chapter folks came to see them off & to meet the crew from Houston & other points west. All were excited at the prospect of lobbying congressmen & senators about the Employment Non-Discrimination Act & speaking out for their gay/lesbian children & friends. Thirty-five parents & friends were on the bus, including three ministers. That visit was inspiring as well as fun, but it was nothing compared to the evening of their return almost a week later. Two of our members, Dee & Harold, had arranged for us to use facilities where they work, a dining room, off-street parking, even security guards, & many chapter members came with dishes for a potluck. (Here in New Orleans, we always eat!) The busload of newly-minted lobbyists were on a real "high" which was highly contagious! Irrepressible Sandy Lanes from Albuquerque told of cornering Jesse Helms, giving him one of their brochures, and - when he said he could not vote for 'special rights', she made it clear that all we want is equal rights. When he said the PFLAG parents wanted his "sympathy", Sandy assured him that PFLAG parents celebrate their gay/lesbian family members and need sympathy from no one! Our N.O. moms, Betty and Clare, succeeded in contacting Rep. Livingston, Chair of powerful House Appropriations Committee, & talking to him for a half-hour. Betty promised to send him a packet of PFLAG information which he said he would study. They also spoke with aides of LA senators. Thanks to Betty's initiative (& chutzpah), some of the group also got a tour of the White House. The Human Rights Campaign had arranged a reception which was in the Executive Office Bldg. part of the White House complex. The "real" White House was visible from the windows, so Betty found an official-looking young man and asked about passes to get in, whereupon he gave her a card with a note, & she, Clare, & a half-dozen more walked into the White House, by-passing a long waiting line. Next fall, when in D.C. for the PFLAG convention, they plan to contact this helpful fellow again. Betty & Clare were interviewed by the N.O. daily paper and the gay paper, so PFLAG's trip to D.C. had lots of publicity.

Moms out to secure rights for gay sons

Trio from Waco to join D.C. in lobby effort

By MICHELE BRINKMANN
Tribune-Herald staff writer

Three mothers of gay sons left Waco today on a journey to Washington, D.C., to convince legislators to pass a bill they say is long overdue.

The trio, all members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), are meeting moms and dads from across the country with the same goal — equal opportunity for their gay sons and lesbian daughters.

On Tuesday, they will meet with lawmakers to discuss the Employment Non-discrimination Act, a federal bill

introduced in June that would prohibit job discrimination against homosexuals.

"A lot of people are unaware that gays and lesbians can be fired from their jobs or evicted from their apartments just because they are homosexual," said Nita Pierce, one of the three mothers from Waco going to fight for her son's rights. The families of the other two women asked that their names not be revealed for fear it may hurt their working environments.

"We have a hard time understanding why this discrimination should be allowed," Pierce said. "Gays and lesbians and their families are not asking for special treatment — they just want to be treated as everyone else in America. Isn't that what we all want?"

The Employment Non-discrimination Act does not create any special rights for homosexuals. The bill explicitly prohibits preferred treatment and quotas, Pierce said.

"It does not affect the military and the bill will not make businesses have quotas that would require them to hire three homosexuals a year or something to that effect," said Bruce Ball of Waco, a 30-year-old PFLAG member who serves on the board of directors. "Any time you fail to have a law that protects someone's right to earn a living is a pretty tragic thing."

The moms joined the Houston chapter of PFLAG today for the "Moms and Dads go to Washington" bus trip. About 200 people from 30 states are expected to participate in the trip, said Gail

Rickey, the event coordinator in Houston.

In addition to lobbying U.S. representatives, PFLAG will have a press conference with the Human Rights Campaign political organization and a candlelight vigil on the steps of the Capitol.

"These women are our heroes," said David Eddleman, president of the Central Texas PFLAG chapter. "They represent the nameless gays and lesbians who can't share with co-workers who the love of their life is for fear of losing their jobs."

Eddleman said the fact that these women fear "coming out" and using their names in the newspaper is the whole basis for why they are traveling 1,500 miles and spending six days on a

Please see MOMS, Page 6C

WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD

SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 1996

WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD

MOMS

Trio pushing for rights measure

□ From Page 1C

bus with 42 other people.

"They want to change society so they will not have to fear retribution for being a parent of a gay son," Eddleman said.

The area PFLAG chapter, founded three years ago, will have several fund-raisers to help the three women pay for expenses, Eddleman said.

Pierce said she would have gone no matter what the cost.

"We are just three moms out of thousands who have gone through the heartbreak of knowing what our children have had to endure, and we want to make a difference," said Pierce, a divorced mom who has struggled with her son's homosexuality and her religious beliefs. Pierce's father was a minister in the Church of Christ.

"I have to speak out," Pierce said. "As long as people are being treated wrong for a reason beyond their control I have to speak out. If I can keep one teen-ager from going through the fear, secrecy and isolation that my child went through, it will be worth it."

Opinion

Out of closet

I would like to thank Bob Lott and the Tribune-Herald for the excellent coverage on March 16 and March 20 concerning the trip to Washington by three Waco moms to lobby for equality for gays and lesbians. As the one who originally chose not to be identified, I feel it is now time to open the door and step out of the closet.

It's extremely traumatic for families of very fundamentalist religious beliefs to find out that they have a homosexual child. However, it's not the end of the world. When your child is gay or lesbian you develop a different perspective about homosexuality. This is just a small part of who they are. It doesn't fill their entire life.

Most of the gays and lesbians are educated, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. What goes on in their bedroom is nobody else's business. No one should be discriminated against or live in fear of being fired from their jobs or evicted from their apartments because of their sexuality. Homosexuality is not a choice that can be made. It's a God-given trait just as size, stature, eye color, etc.

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) is available to help those who are confronting this issue. Confidentiality is practiced, and while we are not counselors or therapists, we've walked in the shoes of those who have just become aware of the homosexuality of one or more of their children and can share our experiences.

Again, thank you for not brushing our trip under the rug.

Jody Cochrum
Waco

WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD

March 29, 1996

Parents lobby for their gay, lesbian children

By BOB DART
Cox News Service

WASHINGTON — The mamas from Texas confronted Jesse Helms on Capitol Hill Tuesday and asked the conservative Republican senator from North Carolina to vote to outlaw discrimination against their gay and lesbian children.

"He said 'I know you're nice women. Do you want my sympathy?' " said Blake Weisser of Houston. "We said 'No, we don't want sympathy. We're proud of our children. We just want them to have equal rights.' "

They had come on a bus that started in Houston and rolled across the Bible Belt —

picking up parents of gay men and lesbians all along the way.

Many were strangers to politics, the sort of folks who go to Wednesday night prayer meetings as well as Sunday church services and who spend their autumn Friday nights at high school football games. Several conceded they had given little thought to the rights of homosexuals until their own sons and daughters came out of the closet.

"Most people don't realize that people can be fired or lose their jobs just because they are gays or lesbians," said Valerie Fallas of Waco. "When they find out, they say, 'That's wrong.' People just need to be informed."

The self-proclaimed "Southern Route Bus" was part of a national caravan that brought more than 200 parents from 27 states to lobby for passage of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act — a bill that would outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Supporters said it extends the same federal workplace protection to homosexuals that is already provided based on race, religion, gender, national origin, age and disability.

On such a divisive and emotional issue as gay rights, however, the cause can be helped by down-home lobbying.

Please see GAY, Section Back

GAY

Waco women join rights lobbyists

□ From Page 1A

"Getting our message from families to members of Congress is critical," said Michael Roybal, chief legislative counsel of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest national lesbian and gay political organization.

Of course, the mamas and daddies — members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays — came to demand fairness for their daughters and sons. They fretted about hometown homophobia and rejoiced about accepting and loving neighbors.

"It's been a great support group," said Nita Pierce of Waco. In smalltown America, "we're taught homophobia so thoroughly all our lives" that it's going to take personal crusades as well as federal protection to guarantee the rights of gays and lesbians.

The three women from Waco personified the problems of parents of gays and lesbians. Indeed, one of the Waco women did not want her name in the newspaper.

"My husband is away a lot and he's afraid I'll get harassing phone calls," she explained.

The women laughed at the notion that they are the only parents of gays and lesbians in Waco's populace of more than 100,000, but they knew of no others who are out in the open. Even — or perhaps especially — in churches, they acknowledged, tolerance and understanding are some-

times scarce when conversation turns to gays and lesbians.

"There's so much talk now about family values," Pierce said. "Well, we value our families — including our gay children."

The moms were surprised when their sons came out of the closet.

"You just don't know," said Fallas, whose son, Gary, came out more than a year ago and now lives in Boston. "He was certainly not stereotypical. You just can't say who is and who is not (by just looking)."

Pierce said her son, Todd, was married before coming out in August.

President Clinton supports the legislation, and the women from Waco were at a White House briefing when some of their group ran into Helms boarding an underground tram to the Capitol. Helms is a leading opponent to their cause and after their chance meeting, the mothers were exuberant.

"We just went right up to him and gave him a flier," said one mother, showing the red paper that said "Moms and Dads Go to Washington" and explained their mission. "He said he wasn't in favor of granting special rights. We said we don't want special rights for our children, only equal rights. He was mumbling when we left him."

The women from Waco attended strategy sessions Tuesday and said they would meet Wednesday with staffers in the offices of U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, and U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Waco.

Rocky Mountain News

Denver, Colorado

March 20, 1996

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Denver, Colorado

Wednesday, March 20, 1996

PARENTS OF GAYS LOBBY CONGRESS
SUPPORTERS PUSH FOR BAN ON JOB DISCRIMINATION
By Elizabeth Schwinn Hearst Newspapers

Washington - Two hundred parents and friends of gays and lesbians visited Congress on Tuesday to ask for a federal law making it illegal to discriminate against homosexuals in the workplace. Mitzi Henderson, national president of Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG, in Menlo Park, Calif., said, "When your child is gay or lesbian, their fundamental right to earn a living can be denied."

Henderson said her son James, a 38-year-old lawyer in Denver, has been shut out of some law firms because he is openly homosexual. "We think all of our kids ought to have the same opportunities to earn a living," she said.

However, lawmakers and gay-rights activists told the group that opposition in Congress makes it unlikely that a pending gay-rights bill would win approval this year. The measure, introduced by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., in 1994, would bar employers from taking sexual orientation into account when hiring, firing or promoting workers.

Under federal law, it is illegal to fire or deny employment to people based on their age, gender, race, religion, disability or country of origin. There is no comparable law barring job discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign, a gay-rights group that staged the rally with PFLAG, urged the parents to be persistent in pushing their cause.

Monday, March 18, 1996

High Point Enterprise

AREA NEWS

Group plans trip to urge passage of gay rights

by Craig Miller
STAFF WRITER

Gay rights and family values don't exactly walk hand in hand on most politicians' agendas.

Yet the two aren't opposite values, according to a Triad family support group. The organization is helping sponsor a lobby trip called "Moms and Dads Go To Washington."

The trip is a joint project of the local chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, and the Human Rights Campaign.

The groups will attempt to persuade legislators to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act which would extend employment protection to lesbians and gays.

An election year might seem a tough time to lobby for a gay rights bill. But the Greensboro facilitator of PFLAG says the timing is right.

"I think the election makes it even better," Reata Gray said. "So many

people are hearing ugly, bigoted remarks being made in the name of religion.

"They are being terrified of what Pat Buchanan and the people who support him are expressing. I believe there is going to be a large backlash against what people are saying in the name of religion."

A bus chartered by the sponsors will make a swing through the South starting in Houston. It will make stops in Raleigh, Greenboro and Durham.

Gray will not disclose the locations because the groups don't want to attract anti-gay and lesbian harassment.

Seventy-four percent of Americans oppose job discrimination against gay people, according to a Lake Research Inc. poll distributed by the HRC.

But 80 percent are not aware that such discrimination is legal, according to the poll.

The ENDA legislation would prohibit

employers, employment agencies and labor unions from considering sexual orientation in employment decisions. It would also

- Provide the same remedies—such as injunctions and damages—as permitted by the Americans and Disabilities Act.

- Exempt small businesses as do existing civil rights laws.

- Exempt religious organizations.

- Prohibit preferential treatment including quotas based on sexual orientation.

- Not require an employer to provide benefits for the same-sex partner of an employee.

- Apply to Congress with the same remedies as provided by the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and ADA.

"This is not an attempt to ask for anything not granted to other people automatically," Gray said.

PFLAG raises red flag for gays

Seeks to end employment discrimination

By MARY TOLAN
Community News Editor

A person has a good job, does well for her company. She gets a promotion because of her respected performance. A few months later, she's fired.

Because she's gay.

And it's not illegal. Many men and women across the country lose their jobs every year because of their sexual orientation.

"It's the basic unfairness of this that I protest," said Bill Shirley, a member of a Flagstaff gay and lesbian support group. "Our country is theoretically based on fairness. And we're certainly not treating this group fairly."

Shirley and his wife, Molly Lind, are members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG, a national civil rights group that promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, their families and friends. PFLAG has more than 50,000 members, and the Flagstaff branch has about 15 — and is open for more people.

The Flagstaff couple were among about 200 PFLAG members who traveled to Washington, D.C., to try to talk senators and congressmen into supporting a bill that bans job discrimination against homosexuals. Shirley and Lind, who hopped a train to the nation's capital, said they were the only PFLAG representatives from Arizona. They met at their home with two other PFLAG members Tuesday to talk about the Washington trip.

Two years ago in Arizona, Jeffery Blain worked in sales for Golden State Container, a Phoenix-area manufacturer. According to court records, during the first six months of 1993, Blain reportedly received a 37.5 percent raise. He was fired a few months later for being "a fish out of water."

Blain went to court, protesting that he was fired for being gay. The Superior Court Judge told the jury that "an employee is not wrongfully terminated if he is fired solely for being a homosexual." The Arizona Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

Arizona is one of 42 states that has no law against discrimination against homosexuals. Under



Sean Openshaw/Arizona Daily Sun

Bill Shirley and his wife, Molly Lind, are members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG, a national civil rights group that promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, their families and friends.

federal law, it is illegal to fire or deny employment to people based on their age, gender, race, religion, disability or country of origin. But there is no similar federal law banning job discrimination based on sexual preference.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) has been around since 1994, but has never made it to the House or Senate floor, Lind said. Currently it's in the Senate Labor and Human Resource Committee, and is one vote away from making it out of committee to the Senate floor. Versions of the bill also sit in four House committees, Lind said, adding that the bill excludes the military, religions and small businesses with fewer than 15 employees.

Last October, President Clinton endorsed ENDA, becoming the first U.S. president to endorse legislation to ensure equal rights for lesbian and gay Americans. Retired Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) also endorsed ENDA.

Retirees Shirley and Lind talked with aides of Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., and Congressman J.D. Hayworth, R-

Ariz., while in D.C.

ENDA is co-sponsored by several congressmen, including Arizona Congressmen Jim Kolbe, R-Tucson, and Ed Pastor, D-Tucson.

"We told them we want our family values respected," said Lind, whose foster grandson is gay. "They can fire you for even thinking you might be gay. That's wrong."

She said while the three aides didn't seem to know much about the proposed bill, she and her husband passed on the message that most Americans want job security for everyone.

"Polls they've done all over the country show that most people — 60 to 80 percent — are in favor of equal rights for gays and lesbians," Lind said. "Yet there's no law to guarantee that."

Most PFLAG members are parents of homosexuals, while some are friends.

One Flagstaff PFLAGer said she joined the group because of her strong belief that people have a right to be who they are.

"Because of my association with gay and lesbian people I've known, it's lead me to believe that

this is not a matter of choice for them," said Ruthanne Hassing, an artist and former nurse. "Our society would be healthier if we could all be who we are."

Hassing said if gays and lesbians could feel society accepted them, personal calamities would be lessened.

"A lot of tragedies could be prevented if gay people could admit it instead of going against who they are — even getting married," Hassing said. "Gays or lesbians in a heterosexual relationship is a tragedy for the heterosexual spouse and the for them."

"For the rest of the community, if one person can't be him or her self, it's a tragedy for the rest of us," put in Lind.

One PFLAG member said homophobia is particularly hard on teen-agers.

"Gay and lesbian teens are two to six times more likely to commit suicides than other teens," said Steve Finger, a Flagstaff therapist.

Finger hopes PFLAG will help families going through the shock after learning someone in the family is gay.

"When a gay person comes out, the family often goes into the closet," Finger said. "We help the family develop road maps on how to handle this adjustment. It's a tremendous adjustment for the family and for the gay member who's confided. We help the family transition so the family doesn't end up rejecting that family member."

Finger's consciousness about homosexuality was raised as he watched one of his one family members suffer for being gay.

"He's been gay-bashed — beat up by two men in Chicago and left for dead," said Finger. He added that his gay relative was also physically ill for years before he made peace with being gay, and declared himself a homosexual.

"After he came out, his physical illnesses disappeared, and he's one of the healthiest people I know now," Finger said. "Because of the stigma around being a homosexual, and the shame that gay and lesbians feel, a great deal of suffering goes on, silent suffering," Finger said.

The Flagstaff PFLAG group meets on the second Sunday of the month at the Federated Community Church, 400 W. Aspen Ave., at 3 p.m. For more information, call Lind or Shirley at 773-9441.

Arizona Daily Sun

Flagstaff, Arizona

March 28, 1996

page 2



FLAG-BEARERS. Parents of gays and lesbians from the Southwest stopped here yesterday en route to Washington, final destination of their crusade to end discrimination against homosexuals. They met at Metropolitan Community Church with the local chapter of Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays.

Families and friends support gay cause at stops on bus tour

BY PETER BACQUÉ

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Dr. Don Sinclair was sitting in his office at Houston's Bering United Methodist Church one day in 1991 when, he says, a young man eight blocks away was beaten to death because he was a homosexual.

In 1979, Sinclair's 21-year-old son, Stanley, who was also gay, was stabbed to death by two men.

With the 1991 killing, Sinclair joined with a group of other ministers to speak out against violence directed at gay men and lesbian women.

"We decided it couldn't happen again," the trim, silver-haired Texas pastor said, "but it has."

With about 40 other members of Houston's Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays chapter, Sinclair whistle-stopped in Richmond yesterday to buck up the tiny — 27 members — Richmond PFLAG chapter and call for an end to discrimination against homosexuals.

All but one person on the bus trip from Houston, billed as "Moms and Dads Go To Washington," were heterosexuals.

For straight parents who have a gay son or daughter, a critical issue is "knowing that your child is vulnerable," said Gail Rickey of Houston, "subject to discrimination, to bashing . . ."

"To murder," finished her husband, Pat, a research scientist with Exxon. The Rickeys' 30-year-old daughter is a lesbian.

Members of the Houston contingent made it a point to refer to "my lesbian daughter" or "our gay son."

At first, Gail Rickey said, "We hoped it wasn't true, because we were ignorant."

But having learned about their daughter's sexual orientation, they now believe "it's a natural part of sexuality," she said.

"I was probably the last person to expect my daughter to be a lesbian," said Carol Spruill, Richmond PFLAG's president. "It was . . . a shock."

"I realized I was homophobic," said Spruill, the director of an international education program, "but it was somehow different when it was my own child."

Learning that their children are lesbian or gay typically affects parents in the same way as if their children had died, the PFLAG members said.

"They go through a lot of feelings, they go through a lot of guilt, anger," Spruill said.

Her own experience "made me realize the importance of a support group," she said, so she started the Richmond PFLAG group.

The thoroughly middle-class bus riders from Houston were on their way to lobby lawmakers to support a proposed Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

The anti-discrimination proposal would extend to sexual orientation the employment protections now provided to Americans on the basis of race, religion, sex, national origin, age and disability, the group said.

Small businesses and religious organizations would be exempted from the proposed law, according to information from PFLAG.

Preferential treatment, including quotas, based on sexual orientation would be prohibited, and the law would not require employers to provide benefits to the same-sex partner of an employee.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, a homosexual lobbying organization, a 1995 national survey showed that 80 percent of Americans are not aware that gay people are not covered by existing civil rights laws. At the same time, the survey said, 74 percent of Americans are in favor of preventing job discrimination against gays.

Estimates of the percent of lesbian women and gay men in the United States' population vary from a low of 1 percent to as high as 10 percent, depending on the source and the definition of homosexuality.

4/1/96

POLITICAL SCENE

By SCOTT MacKAY, RUSSELL GARLAND and JOHN E. MULLIGAN
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writers

Providence Journal

Rhode Island

Parents of gays

Two Tiverton mothers were among the 200 members of Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays who descended on Capitol Hill last week to lobby for a bill that would ban job discrimination against homosexuals.

Shirley Smith said one of her two gay daughters, a Washington, D.C., lawyer, left her firm about a year ago after experiencing "a really bad situation" at work. Smith said her daughter decided to attend the firm's Christmas party with her lesbian partner and subsequently found herself an outcast in the office.

Smith's other daughter, a Vermont psychologist, has suffered slights and insults because she is gay, Smith said.

But Smith's lobbying cohort, Darlene Van Straten, has had a somewhat brighter experience, which may indicate that times are changing for the better. Smith said Van Straten's gay son, a Columbia University undergraduate, is thriving in the tolerant atmosphere of the New York school.

Smith also takes heart from the fact that all four members of the Rhode Island congressional delegation support the proposed amendment to the Civil Rights Act that would ban job discrimination against gays. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and Sen. Jim Jeffords, R-Vt., are co-sponsors of the bill.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 1996

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Parents ask lawmakers to protect gay children

Cox News Service

WASHINGTON — The mamas from Texas confronted Jesse Helms on Capitol Hill Tuesday and asked the conservative Republican senator from North Carolina to vote to outlaw discrimination against their gay and lesbian children.

"He said 'I know you're nice women. Do you want my sympathy?'" said Blake Weiser of Houston. "We said 'No, we don't want sympathy. We're proud of our children. We just want them to have equal rights.'"

They had come on a bus that started in

Houston and rolled across the Bible Belt — picking up parents of gay men and lesbians all along the way. Many were strangers to politics, the sort of folks who go to Wednesday night prayer meetings as well as Sunday church services and who spend their autumn Friday nights at high school football games. Several conceded they had given little thought to the rights of homosexuals until their sons and daughters came out of the closet.

"Most people don't realize that people can be fired or lose their jobs just because they are gays or lesbians," said Valerie Fallas of Waco, Texas. "When they find out, they say

"That's wrong.' People just need to be informed."

The self-proclaimed "Southern Route Bus" was part of a national caravan that brought more than 200 parents from 27 states to lobby for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act — a bill that would outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation. Supporters said it extends the same federal workplace protection to gays and lesbians that is already provided based on race, religion, gender, national origin, age and dis-

Please see GAY, Page A-3

GAY

Continued from Page A-1

ability.

On such a divisive and emotional issue as gay rights, however, the cause can be helped by down-home lobbying. "Getting our message from families to members of Congress is critical," said Michael Roybal, chief legislative counsel of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest national lesbian and gay political organization.

Of course, the moms and dads — members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays — came to demand fairness for their daughters and sons. They fretted about hometown homophobia and rejoiced about accepting and loving neighbors.

"It's been a great support group," said Nita Pierce of Waco. In small-town America, "we're taught homophobia so thoroughly all our lives" that it's going to take personal crusades as well as federal protection to guarantee the rights of gays and lesbians.

The three women from Waco — home of Baylor University, a Baptist institution, and a community of churchgoers — personified the problems of parents of gays and lesbians. Indeed, one of the Waco women did not want her name in the newspaper.

The women laughed at the notion that they are the only parents of gays and lesbians in Waco's populace of 110,000, but they knew of no others who are out in the open.

Monday, May 13, 1996

In My Opinion

To have your opinion considered for this special feature, please include a photo, brief biography and a telephone number. Mail your submissions to: Journal Editorial, P.O. Box 4689, Atlanta, Ga. 30302.

Let America celebrate diversity

The Editors: My husband and I participated in the Moms and Dads Go to Washington Project sponsored by Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). More than 200 parents from 28 states lobbied for our gay sons and daughters and the Employment Non-discrimination Act, a bill to prohibit job discrimination, quotas or preferential treatment on the basis of sexual orientation.

We visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum and were graphically reminded of the horrors of Nazi Germany, when 6 million Jews were victims of systematic genocide. Also in Adolf Hitler's purification plan were homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies, the physically and mentally handicapped, political or religious dissidents and any others Hitler hated and denounced as inferior. It was a sobering and frightening experience; we could see how this could happen in our country. Religious political extremists scream as loudly as they did in Nazi Germany, and the National Rifle Association wants the whole country armed.

The similarities are there, along with politicians who fall in line with these ideas, accept huge amounts of money from religious political extremists to further their stay in Washington, and even lie about upright leaders who give their best for the country. People of good will, with love in their hearts and a sense of fairness, hopefully will have courage and take a stand to help our nation become not just tolerant of people different from themselves, but able to celebrate this diversity.

If you visit the Holocaust Museum, take plenty of Kleenex.



Marceline Haver is a retired music teacher. She volunteers with PFLAG and Advocates of Special Citizens. She loves to read and enjoys art projects. She has lived in Atlanta 36 years.

MARCELINE HAVER, Atlanta

Southern Voice

March 14, 1996

Southern Voice - LGBT newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia

Parents of gay kids lobby Washington

by WALTER WOODS

Atlanta—A Clayton County couple will travel to Washington later this month with hundreds of other parents of gays and lesbians to ask Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, Sen. Paul Coverdell, and other lawmakers to support a bill to protect their children in the workplace.

Marceline Haver, a retired South Atlanta piano teacher, said she and her husband, a retired science teacher, will meet a bus to Washington, D.C., on March 17, to go to the Capitol with other parents of gay men and lesbians. The Havers, who are active in the South Atlanta chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), have a gay son.

In D.C., the Havers and couples from many other states will meet with their elected representatives in Congress March 19 and 20 to lobby for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or ENDA, which would make it

illegal to fire or harass someone on the job simply because they are gay.

"We have appointments with Rep. John Lewis, as well as Sens. Nunn and Coverdell, who may or may not meet with us," said Mrs. Haver. "We will let them know what we think."

The Havers and other parents are going to the Capitol as part of Moms & Dads Go to Washington, an effort by PFLAG and the Human Rights Campaign to put a face on the importance of ending job discrimination against gays.

Moms & Dads Go to Washington grew out of a strong PFLAG chapter in Houston, which has seen a number of brutal murders of gays and lesbians, as well as violent assaults, harassment and vandalism.

"We want people to know that people like us have a gay son," said Mrs. Haver. "I also have a lot of gay cousins on my mother's side. I guess it runs in my family."

Either Hillary Clinton or Tipper Gore is expected to greet the parents at the White House, Mrs. Haver said.

from Ohio

GAY PEOPLE'S CHRONICLE

An Independent Chronicle of the Ohio Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community

Volume 11, Issue 20 ■ April 5, 1996

P-FLAG lobbies Congress to pass ENDA job rights bill

by Daniel R. Mullen

"We want to make the workplace safe for our children," said Gail Rickey of P-FLAG Houston, who, with the Human Rights Campaign, coordinated a national lobbying effort in Washington March 19 and 20 to gain congressional support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

More than 100 parents from 27 states—members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays—traveled to the Capitol to meet with members of Congress on behalf of ENDA, a bill that would protect Americans from job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

During the two day "Moms and Dads go to Washington" lobby, P-FLAG members accompanied by HRC representatives met with members of Congress or their aides to inform them about ENDA and to tell what it's like having gay and lesbian children and wanting the best for them.

"We just told our story, that we didn't want our children to be discriminated against, that this was a basic issue of fairness," said P-FLAG member John Larson of Pittsburgh. He and the president of the Pittsburgh chapter met with an aide to Rep. Ron Klink, D-Pa.

HRC provided P-FLAG members with the knowledge and skills they needed for effective lobbying, said Larson.

Kyle Young, the project's media coordinator, said parents felt these meetings were a good way to educate representatives on the issues, that "it isn't a special right" to be protected from job discrimination.

"Getting our message to members of Congress is critical to ENDA's chances," said Michael Roybal, HRC's chief legislative

counsel. "Our polling has shown that most people are not aware that people can be fired from their jobs just for being gay or lesbian, and that most Americans think that is unfair."

ENDA, which President Clinton endorsed last October, would prohibit discrimination, quotas, and preferential treatment on the job, based on sexual orientation. It would not apply to religious organizations, small businesses or the military. Observers give it slim chance of passage in the present Congress.

Elizabeth Birch, executive director of HRC, told the *New York Times* that Clinton's backing was an "excellent move."

"While others continue to be engaged in the politics of division, I feel that he's staking out some moral high ground," she said.

Early on Tuesday, March 19, Elizabeth Birch and Mitzi Henderson, P-FLAG national president, spoke to over 200 at a White House reception for the "Moms and Dads" project.

Following that ENDA co-sponsor Sen. James Jeffords, R-Vt., addressed participants at a press conference.

Continued on page 8



FOCUS POINT

Vol. 2, No. 43 Issue 95

PHOTO: Academy Awards

— page 12 and 13

Hate crimes report — page 6

Gender conference — page 9

March 20 - March 26, 1996

Washington, D.C.

PFLAG supports ENDA

by R. Scott Gerdes

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Nearly 200 moms, dads and allies of gay men and lesbians from coast to coast traveled to Capitol Hill last Tuesday to lobby for an employment bill to prevent discrimination in hiring, firing and promotion based on sexual orientation.

Human Rights Campaign (HRC) chief legislative counsel Michael Roybal, said that the parents—members of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)—congregated in Washington from 27 states to specifically lobby Congress members over two days on behalf of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

"Getting our message from families to members of Congress is critical to ENDA's chances," Roybal said. "Our polling has shown that most people are not aware that people can be fired from their jobs just for being gay or lesbian, and that most Americans think that is unfair."

The parents also took part in a welcoming reception at the White House and a congressional briefing with officials from HRC, PFLAG and members of Congress. HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch told participants at the reception that ENDA is a "family issue" and that the families in attendance are "leading the way."

Other activities included a candlelight vigil on the Capitol steps and a tour of the Holocaust Museum.

Last October, President Clinton endorsed the anti-discrimination bill, making Clinton the first president in history to support a national bill to include gays in basic legal protection from discrimination.

If passed, ENDA would prohibit discrimination, quotas and preferential treatment on the job. However, it would not apply to religious organizations, small businesses or the military.

25 March 1996

FACING JESSE

by Sandy Lane

Now that I have returned to my serene surroundings, I have time and peace in which to consider the "D.C. Event" of encountering Senator Jesse Helms at the tram. I would like to understand the fierceness of my emotions and the lack of compassion I felt. What an opportunity! There he was, vulnerable and available. He was a decadent symbol of the bigotry which oppresses the gay community. Reason forsook me. Passion ruled. I must ask myself how different was my anger from the anger of the bigots. How consumed was I by this anger? Could I have approached him differently? Were there questions I could have asked which would have caused him to reconsider his position?

I savored my newly acquired notoriety for days, repeating my story again and again. But each time the story poured out, somewhere in the back of my mind was an uneasiness, a realization that confrontation hinders, not helps, one's cause. Was Senator Helms any closer to listening to reason after our encounter? I think not. So perhaps, I blew my chance to really make a difference.

On the other hand, the incident certainly added energy to our entire group. The possibility existed that reaching Senator Helms was impossible. In that case, raising the energy level of moms and dads and friends was an honorable result. Standing up for my daughter spoke loudly to all who heard. **I LOVE MY DAUGHTER JUST THE WAY SHE IS. I DON'T WANT HER TO HAVE SPECIAL RIGHTS - JUST EQUAL RIGHTS. I WANT AMERICA TO BE A COUNTRY WHERE DIVERSITY IS CHERISHED. I BELIEVE IN AN AMERICA WHICH EMBRACES EVERY CITIZEN.** This message speaks to the gay community as well and says **I TREASURE YOU AND SUPPORT YOUR RIGHT TO BE HONEST INTEGRATED PERSONS.**

So what is the next step? I suppose I will write to Senator Helms, state my case less passionately and with more care and be ever grateful that I was given the opportunity to address him face to face. I thank the rest of the group for their willingness to voice similar convictions. I thank all those who cheered my boldness. I thank the waiters of Cafe Luna for the mouth-watering chocolate volcano, the heart-topped espresso and their heart-warming hugs. I thank the Bus Bunch for their patience and willingness to hear the story told again and again and again. I thank Susan Upchurch for enthusiastically and lovingly embracing me even before she met me. I especially thank Gail Rickey and the other Houston PFLAGers who had the vision and perseverance to give birth to a new era of parental involvement in the politics which will set our children free.

My Lesson: Standing up for your beliefs is empowering and feels GOOD!!

The Reliable Source

The Washington Post
March 22, 1996

By Ann Gerhart and Annie Groer

NOW YOU KNOW. . .

■ A group of parents of gay men and lesbians spent two days this week on the Hill, lobbying for a bill to prevent employment discrimination. The Rev. Don Sinclair and his wife, Katherine, who had traveled by bus from Houston, were delighted to find themselves in a Senate elevator with Jesse Helms (R-N.C.).

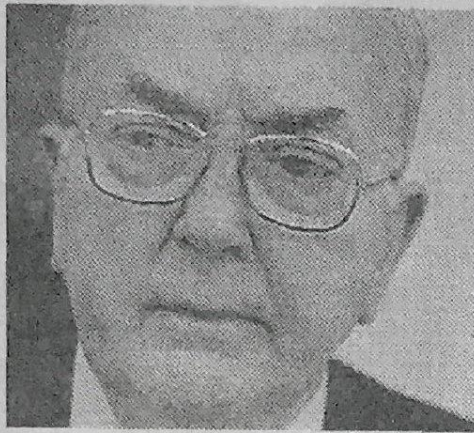
"Senator," said Sinclair, 66, a Methodist minister, "you might want to know you are getting on an elevator with a group of parents of lesbian and gay children, and we love them very much."

According to Sinclair, Helms then responded: "Well, there have been some strange groups around here this week." But the staffer who said he was with

Helms when the exchange took place told The Source, "I have to differ with the story."

The staffer, who did not want his name used, said the senator did not understand the name of the couple's organization (Parents, Families and

Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG), did not recognize its orientation and then said: "This has been a real busy week, real crowded."



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sen. Helms: Pardon?

Dayton Daily News
Dayton, Ohio

PARENTS OF GAYS RALLY: Mothers from Texas confronted Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., on Capitol Hill on Tuesday and asked him to vote to outlaw discrimination against their gay and lesbian children. The self-proclaimed "Southern Route Bus" was part of a national caravan that brought more than 200 parents from 27 states to lobby for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act — a bill that would outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

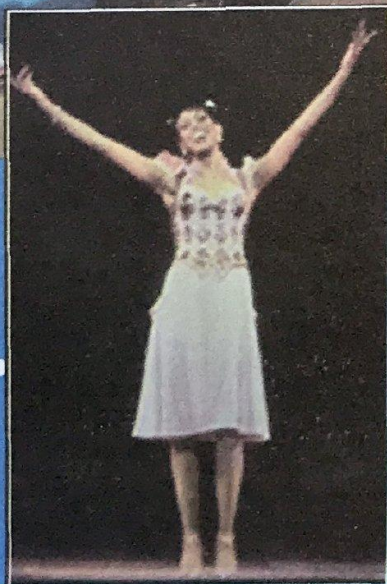
Volume 3 ▼ Issue 2

March 15 - April 14, 1996

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OutSmart

HOUSTON'S GAY & LESBIAN MONTHLY MAGAZINE

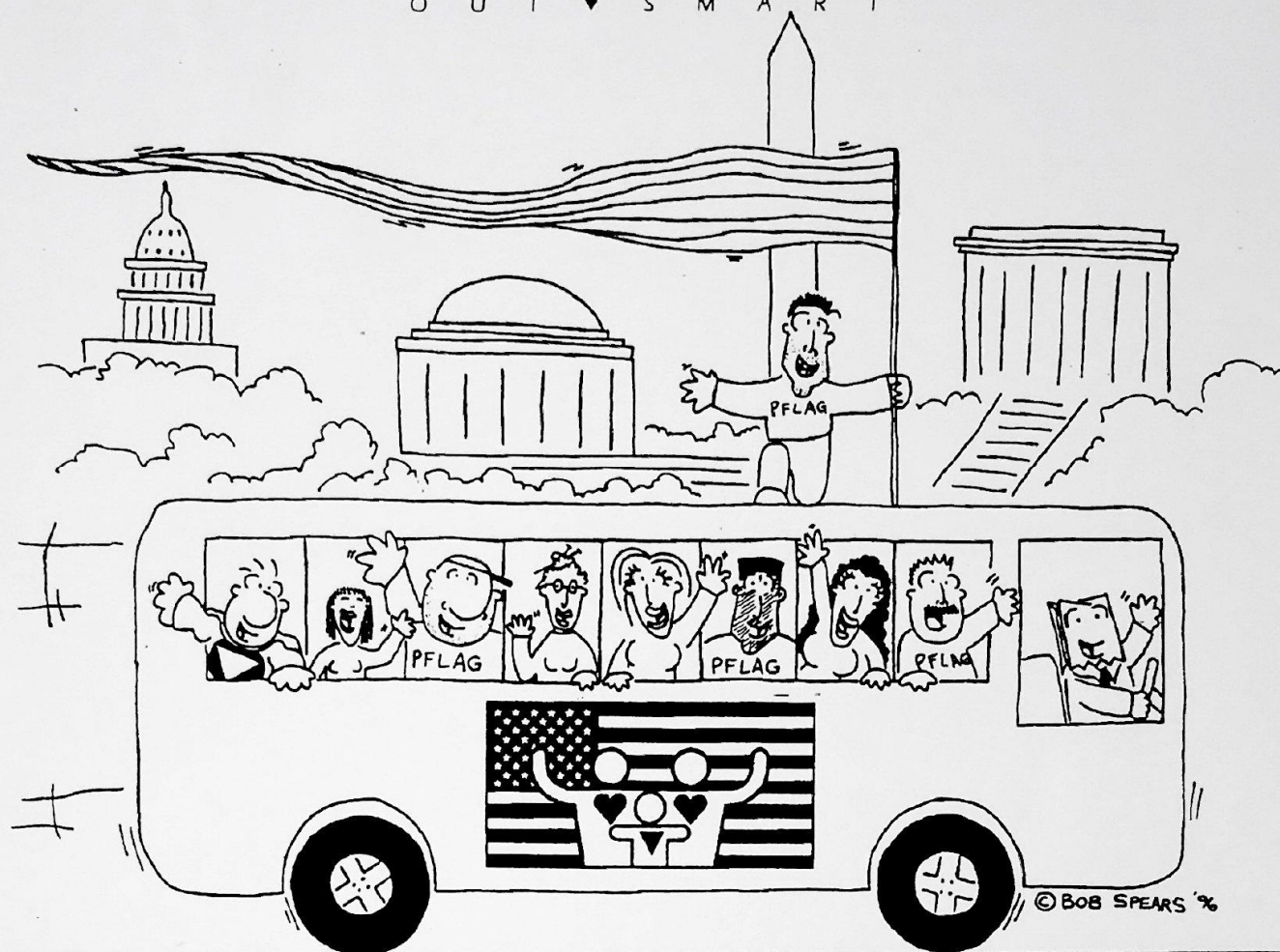


THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED P-FLAG HOUSTON TAKES A TRIP TO WASHINGTON

ALSO...Interviews with Singer June Pointer
and Comedian Georgia Ragsdale

How to Make Your House Your Home

New Treatment for AIDS/Wasting Syndrome...AND MORE



Dean Luttrell was fired from his job a year ago this month. He wasn't laid off due to budget cuts or terminated because of poor performance. No, Dean Luttrell was fired because he is gay.

Luttrell's termination came through the mail on March 30, 1995, with no explanation for the firing. However, Luttrell knows that his supervisor had discovered he was gay two days prior to his firing and had refused all communication.

Much like the dismissed employees of Randall's and of Cracker Barrel restaurants a few years ago, Luttrell had no legal recourse. That's right, in Texas as well as 40 other states in a country where we cherish our "freedom," no law exists that protects gay, lesbian, and bisexual people from being fired simply because they are, or are perceived to be, gay.

ENDA would end that. Reintroduced to Congress last June, ENDA is the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and, if passed,

would extend fair employment practices to lesbian, gay, bisexual, *and* heterosexual Americans. In essence, it would prohibit employers, employment agencies, and labor unions from considering sexual orientation as the basis for employment decisions, such as hiring, firing, promotion, or compensation.

Many gay and lesbian groups, including the Washington-based Human Rights Campaign, are working toward its passage, lobbying Congress, writing letters, and seeking endorsements from major corporations and civil rights organizations. But none are as passionate as PFLAG.

At 7 am on Saturday, March 16, 30 members of the Houston chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) will board a bus bound for Washington, D.C. On its way to the nation's capitol, where the "Bus Bunch," as they're called,

will have face-to-face meetings with congressional members, the bus will weave its way through the South, picking up passengers from other PFLAG chapters along the way.

Conceived by the Houston chapter of PFLAG, the project's intention is to have hundreds of parents of gays and lesbians from across the United States lobbying lawmakers in support of ENDA. As final schedules were being completed for the trip, 178 people from 28 states plan to be in Washington on March 19 and 20 to support the passage of this bill.

Some are mothers of gay sons, some are fathers of lesbian daughters, some have no gay children, and some don't have children at all (and they're straight). Differences aside, the common denominator that bonds them together is their belief that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is wrong, and taking that message to our nation's Capitol is their vision. They're going to Washington not to protest, not to march,

by Eric L. Roland

not even to rally, but instead to insist on equal protection under the law for gay and lesbian Americans.

Although their numbers may be small, their power is mighty. These people are lobbying for a cause that does not directly affect them, and somehow that forces our nation's elected officials to stand up and take notice. When gays and lesbians lobby for themselves, their presence is often ignored by lawmakers, who look at it as "Oh, it's just those gays in town. Wait till next week and they'll be gone."

While many will speak to individual legislators about discrimination against gays and lesbians, a greater spirit exists in this

The Birth of an American Idea

So why would this group of people, ranging in age from 24 to 77 years old, want to

"When I tell straight friends about a gay friend who lost his job because his boss found out he was gay, they say, 'Well, he should sue!' They're astonished when I tell them that gay people have no legal recourse. I think most Americans feel that job discrimination is wrong. It's time to make it illegal."

— Ann Chapman, 54

spend three days on a cramped bus? Why not just fly to Washington, D.C.?

Inspired by President Clinton's bus tour during his 1992 campaign, PFLAG parent Barbara Winston had wanted to form a group

bers of LGRL's board of directors for 1995. Gail Rickey, chair of PFLAG Houston's advocacy committee, was one of those parents, and she immediately threw herself into working on LGRL's top priority for 1995—the Hate Crimes Bill.

"PFLAG Houston got very involved in working for the passage of that bill," recalls the 54-year-old Rickey, whose oldest daughter is a lesbian. "From the beginning, Dianne recognized a resource that LGRL had never tapped—parents lobbying as a group for gay rights. She called upon us to testify at hearings and to lobby in person. Back at home, we wrote, called, faxed, and in general, made our presence known to our legislators."

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED: *Moms & Dads Go to Washington*

Houston PFLAG members have invited a few of their friends to join them on a cross-country bus ride to Washington, because they're tired of their children being forced to sit in the back of one.

group. After a mere five minutes with any one of these bus riders, an incredible, motivating energy is evident. Already prepared to be in the media spotlight, these parents and friends want to let the country know that their voices are the voices of "good Americans" and are very different from the voices of the Radical Right.

"I want the world to know that we are ordinary people with the same dreams and aspirations for our children as they have for theirs," says Norma Graves, who, with her husband, will travel to Washington on the three-day bus pilgrimage to speak out for her gay son and lesbian daughter. "We rejoice as they do when our children are doing well, and we hurt in the same way they do when our children are hurting. The big difference is that our children are not assured the basic human and civil rights that other parents can afford to take for granted."

which would allow parents to tour on a bus with the intent of being in the public eye, showing their faces, and speaking up for their gay and lesbian children. Winston, a 58-year-old single mother of six whose youngest son came out to her three years ago, didn't know where she wanted to tour or

"I've been a part of the problem most of my life. Now I have a chance to become a part of the solution. If we, as parents, are willing to speak out against the myths and hatred, there is a chance for our gay children to live productive lives without fear of discrimination."

— Ken Market, 47

who the group would talk to, but she knew she had a great idea.

During that same time period, PFLAG members began to get involved in lobbying lawmakers here in Texas. Dianne Hardy-Garcia, executive director of the Lesbian Gay Rights Lobby of Texas (LGRL), invited three Texas PFLAG parents to become mem-

Their work didn't go unnoticed. Legislators did respond to their pleas; some, who had wavered before, had now decided to endorse the bill. Even gays and lesbians who had lobbied for years were amazed at the response these neophyte lobbying parents had gotten. Unfortunately, the Hate Crimes Bill was tabled by a vote of 70 to 68. However, that was the closest a hate crimes bill has ever come to being passed in the state of Texas, and it's evident that these PFLAG parents were partially responsible for that accomplishment.

Despite the loss and their disappointment, something greater happened—the lobbying bug had bitten everyone involved. They each had a newfound commitment for speaking to elected officials, and, following the end of the legislative session in Texas, they began to think about where to focus their attention next. Meanwhile, the Employment Non-Discrimination

Moms & Dads to Washington

Continued from previous page

Act (ENDA) had just been introduced to Congress.

Barbara Winston's bus touring idea: lobbying Congress in support of ENDA. The two ideas merged and a new PFLAG project was born.

Nurturing an American Idea

With the help of the Human Rights Campaign and the advice of political experts

from across the country, a time period when it would be most effective to lobby Congress was decided upon. The Human Rights Campaign was enthusiastic about PFLAG Houston's efforts to lobby on behalf of ENDA, but advised them that the project would be somewhat futile unless they got PFLAG parents from other states to join them.

PFLAG Houston had their work cut out for them as they began contacting all 380 PFLAG chapters in the U.S., urging members to be in Washington on March 19 and 20 to lobby Congress. From as far away as Oregon and California (Alaska had to cancel at the last minute), 28 states will be represented by PFLAG members, all with plans to speak to their congressional representatives urging them to pass ENDA.

The plans for the Houston-to-Washington bus trip soon evolved, and the bus be-

came more than just a mode of transportation to the nation's capital. With hopes of encouraging more parents to attend, PFLAG Houston invited those chapters along the bus route to hop on the 55-seat bus

and join them on their pilgrimage. Going within 100 miles of 22 PFLAG chapters, the bus bunch will make stops in Southern cities like Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Commerce, Georgia; Dallas, North Carolina; and Richmond, Virginia before their final destination of Washington, D.C.

Stops along the way include lunch with a 91-year-old Louisiana grandmother of a lesbian, meeting with university students, offering support to other parents, speaking to church groups, and holding press conferences, as well as picking up passengers, and, of course, stretching their legs.

"We're going to Washington to speak to the nation and to use the Capitol of the United States as our podium," says Rickey. "Yeah, we're lobbying. Yeah, we're talking to members of Congress. But I want the nation to hear that a person can be fired simply because of their natural sexual orientation, and that is wrong! Most Americans do not know that, but I think most Americans want to be fair-minded and do not believe in discrimination."

Mr. and Mrs. Smith Go to Washington

Among the group of bus riders are Irv

and Jane Smith, whose 33-year-old son Gary and his partner Paul are their main motivation for joining the trek. With plans to lobby Rep. Tom Delay, Sen. (and presidential drop-

"Everyone will see us as we are—proud parents who love their children and are determined to make the world a safer place for them."

—Blake Weisser, 77

out) Phil Gramm, and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, they simply want lesbian and gay Americans to have the same rights as any other American citizen.

"Not special rights. Equal rights," says Jane Smith, 60. "No one should have to fear that an overheard conversation, a slip of the tongue, a chance meeting at a party, means the loss of your job, your insurance, everything. We know so many people who have to hide their sexual orientation. ENDA simply means fair treatment for everyone."

Once in Washington, all of participants have a full itinerary of activities to partake in. At 8:30 am on Tuesday, March 19, the parents will attend a welcome reception at the White House, followed by a group photo taken on the Capitol steps. After a televised congressional briefing focusing on the progress of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, the afternoon will be spent lobbying.

On Tuesday evening, everyone will again gather on the steps of our nation's Capitol building for a candlelight vigil. Forming an inverted triangle on the north steps, participants will be welcomed by Rev. Dr. Don Sinclair, pastor at Bering United Methodist Church, led in prayer by Rev. Susan Quinn Bryan, pastor of Sagemont Presbyterian

"Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not only wrong, it's irrational. It doesn't make sense, and it's not good public policy."

—Penny Leuchtag, 39

Church, and invited to sing along with the Lesbian and Gay Chorus of Washington, D.C. Donna Morrow DeCamp, who will be riding the bus to Washington with her husband Don, will lead the group in a responsive reading written by Bob Bernstein, author of *Straight Parents, Gay Children*.

Family Values

Many gay and lesbian people are shunned by their families, never having parents that will accept them, much less support them. These parents, on the other hand, are proud of their gay and lesbian children for their ongoing courage in a hostile society, grateful to them for being honest about an important aspect of their lives, and outraged at the discrimination they must endure. They're a special lot, these moms and dads, who are traveling over 1,400 miles by bus to speak to our nation's elected officials about securing protection from loss of employment for their children.

"It is the American way to seek redress for inequity by petitioning our representatives," says PFLAG national president, Mitzi Henderson. "Families are saying 'no' to arbitrary firing. Families are saying 'no' to bias in hiring. All our children deserve the chance to prove their abilities and their worth."

That's what family values is truly about. ▼

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act: What It Does

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) extends federal employment discrimination protections to sexual orientation that is currently provided to all Americans on the basis of race, religion, sex, national origin, age, and disability. Under ENDA, covered entities cannot subject an individual to different standards or treatment based on real or perceived sexual orientation, or discriminate against an individual based on sexual orientation of those with whom the individual associates.

—ENDA exempts small businesses, as do existing civil rights laws, and does not apply to small businesses with fewer than 15 employees.

—ENDA exempts religious organizations including educational institutions substantially controlled or supported by religious organizations.

—ENDA prohibits preferential treatment, including quotas, based on sexual orientation.

—ENDA does not require an employer to provide benefits for the same-sex partner of an employee.

—ENDA provides for the same remedies (injunctive relief and damages) as permitted under Title VII of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

—ENDA applies to Congress, with the same remedies as provided by the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the ADA.

Reintroduced to Congress on June 15, 1995, ENDA's lead congressional sponsors are Sens. Jim Jeffords (R-VT) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA). On October 19, 1995, President Bill Clinton signed on his support of ENDA, saying that, "Individuals should not be denied a job on the basis of something that has no relationship to their ability to perform their work.... [ENDA] is designed to protect the rights of all Americans to participate in the job market without fear of unfair discrimination." Currently, 30 U.S. senators and 130 U.S. representatives have signed on as co-sponsors of ENDA.

Through the work of the Human Rights Campaign, ENDA has been endorsed by large corporations, such as Apple Computer, Merrill Lynch, Microsoft, RJR Nabisco, and Xerox; labor unions, like AFL-CIO, Actors' Equity Association, and Association of Flight Attendants; daily newspapers, including *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Austin-American Statesman*; as well as people like Coretta Scott King, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Govs. William Weld (MA) and Christine Todd Whitman (NJ).

Families and friends lobby for gay rights

By **BARBARA KARKABI**

Houston Chronicle

Ten years ago, Dick Graves would never "in his wildest dreams" have pictured himself lobbying in Washington, D.C., for the rights of gays and lesbians.

But things are much different for Graves these days. For nine years now, he's been what he calls a "recovering homophobic." It has not been an easy journey for the mechanical engineer from a conservative family, who is the father of three children — two of whom are homosexuals.

But every year, he says, it gets better.

Last week, he climbed on a bus and rode to the nation's capital with about 30 other Houstonians, who are members of a national group called PFLAG — Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Along the route, they picked up other parents in places like New Orleans, Atlanta and several small North Carolina towns. The trip was part of a national lobbying effort called "Mom and Dad Go To Washington" that brought together more than 200 parents from 27 states.

The lively Houston contingent dubbed itself "the Southern route bus." They were ready for adventures, and they had them — chasing reluctant legislators like Sen. Jesse Helms around the Capitol — but what they didn't realize was that the experience would change their lives.

"I'll never be silent again," says Graves, 53, one of five co-presidents of the Houston PFLAG chapter. "I'm willing to stand up for all my kids rights, gay and straight. All of those people who are so afraid to come out of the closet and talk about their gay and lesbian children, I think they should come out. It takes courage. I know because I've been there. But I reached a point where I had to stand up for something in my life, and I'm willing to accept the consequences of society."

"It's the love of my children that changed me."

That love and pride in his family is a message that Graves and the others say they tried to carry with them as the bus rolled through the Bible Belt, visiting small towns and tiny PFLAG chapters, some of which only had one member. The goal of the trip, planned since last July, was to lobby for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a bill that would outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Graves and his wife Norma have

See PFLAG on Page 10D.

Houston Chronicle

March 25, 1996

Section D, page 1

continued to 10 D

PFLAG

Continued from Page 1D.

seen firsthand the effects of that kind of discrimination. When their son Rick, now 34, graduated from medical school he applied for two positions and was close to being hired. But feeling strongly that he should be honest, he told both prospective employers that he was gay. One said that he didn't have a problem with it, but his partners and patients might. He didn't get the job. The other was never heard from again.

"They absolutely no longer knew him," Graves said. "It was a terrible blow, and he went into a blue funk. He eventually went to California and there was no problem finding a job."

Supporters of the Employment Act say the bill extends the same federal workplace protection to gays

and lesbians that it already provides based on race, religion, gender, national origin, age and disability. So far, they say, gays and lesbians have not been protected from job discrimination under federal law.

But as important as the parents felt the lobbying efforts were, impact also was made in smaller ways, in the tiny communities they visited along the way.

There was the 91-year-old Louisiana woman, the grandmother of a lesbian, who opened her home to the bus riders. She also offered a safe place for parents to gather and talk about starting a local group. It was the sharing of stories and support they received from those often closeted parents that keep them headed toward Washington.

Although a few parents had anticipated some negative feedback, they ran into very little on the trip. At restaurants, they would wear their T-shirts and hand out flyers or talk to people about what they were

doing. Some would listen intently, others would turn their eyes away, but no one was overtly rude, they said.

The response was polite and attentive in Washington. One legislator told the parents he would not have paid as much attention to a group of gays and lesbians.

"He told us it made a big difference that parents had taken a week off to talk to legislators, and he felt it was the right approach," says Pat Rickey.

For Gail Rickey, a trip organizer, the high point was standing on the Capitol steps with several hundred PFLAG parents around her for a photo.

"It was so empowering," Rickey says. "I felt like we could do anything. People that left home with a small voice felt their ability to speak out get stronger and stronger."

But to parents like Barbara Winston, nothing felt more important than encounters like one they had with an African-American woman at a restaurant in Riley, N.C. The woman walked up and told them that she had just found out her 17-year-old son was gay. She hadn't talked to him yet and desperately needed some advice. A group of parents sat down and counseled her for a long time.

"There is so much energy in this group," Winston says. "We have to bottle it and get it out. And we need

to keep the energy level up when we get back to Houston."

Alice Wilson, executive director of the Houston Volunteer Lawyer Program and friend of Winston's,

said she learned far more than she ever expected.

"If a 75-year-old woman can talk to me about having a growth experience, then I can, too," she says.

Parents urge rights for their gay children

Bus trip that started in Houston takes families' crusade to the nation's capital

By **BOB DART**
Cox News Service

WASHINGTON — The mamas from Texas confronted Jesse Helms on Capitol Hill Tuesday and asked the conservative Republican senator from North Carolina to vote to outlaw discrimination against their gay and lesbian children.

"He said, 'I know you're nice women. Do you want my sympathy?'" said Blake Weisser of Houston. "We said 'No, we don't want sympathy. We're proud of our children. We just want them to have equal rights.'"

They had come on a bus that started in Houston and rolled across the Bible Belt — picking up parents of gay men and lesbians all along the way. Many were strangers to politics, the sort of folks who go to Wednesday night prayer meetings and who

spend their autumn Friday nights at high school football games. Several conceded they had given little thought to the rights of homosexuals until their own sons and daughters came out of the closet.

"Most people don't realize that people can be fired or lose their jobs just because they are gays or lesbians," said Valerie Fallas of Waco. "When they find out, they say, 'That's wrong.' People just need to be informed."

The self-proclaimed "Southern Route Bus" was part of a national caravan that brought over 200 parents from 27 states to lobby for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act — a bill that would outlaw job discrimination based on sexual orientation. Supporters said it extends the same federal workplace protection to gays and lesbians that is already provided based on race, religion, gender, national origin, age and disability.

On such a divisive and emotional issue as gay rights, however, the cause can be helped by down-home lobbying. "Getting our message from families to members of Congress is critical," said Michael Roybal, chief legislative counsel of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest national lesbian and gay political organization.

Of course, the mothers and fathers — members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays — came to demand fairness for their daughters and sons. They fretted about hometown homophobia and rejoiced about accepting and loving neighbors.

"It's been a great support group," said Nita Pierce of Waco. In smalltown America, "we're taught homophobia so thoroughly all our lives" that it's going to take personal crusades as well as federal protection to

guarantee the rights of gays.

The three women from Waco — home of Baylor University, a Baptist institution, and a community of churchgoers — personified the problems of parents of gays and lesbians. Indeed, one of the Waco women did not want her name in the newspaper.

"My husband is away a lot, and he's afraid I'll get harassing phone calls," she explained.

The women laughed at the notion that they are the only parents of gays and lesbians in Waco's populace of 110,000, but they knew of no others who are out in the open. Even — or perhaps especially — in churches, they acknowledged, tolerance and understanding are sometimes scarce when conversation turns to gays and lesbians.

"There's so much talk now about family values," Pierce said. "Well, we value our families — including our gay children."

'There's so much talk now about family values. Well, we value our families — including our gay children.'

Nita Pierce of Waco

Gay activists rally in favor of anti-discrimination act

By R.A. DYER
Houston Chronicle

Like many gay men, Dean Luttrell has made sacrifices. But one sacrifice, the Houston native said, was particularly painful: his \$45,000-a-year job.

Luttrell believes he was fired last year because he's gay. The dismissal was unfair, he said, but not illegal.

"I wanted very much to sue, but I had no legal recourse," said Luttrell, 44.

He was among about 75 activists at a Friday night rally in support of the proposed federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would prohibit job discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Today, about 35 activists head to Washington, via bus, to lobby Congress to pass the bill.

Members of PFLAG — Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays — the bus-riding activists will pass through several Southern states, picking up more supporters and

See RALLY on Page 33A.

Rally

Continued from Page 29A.

conducting press conferences.

In Washington, the group will meet with congressional lawmakers and White House officials, and hold a vigil on the Capitol steps.

ENDA, shot down during the last congressional session, would prohibit job discrimination against gays but would not apply to religious organizations, small businesses and the military. It also would prohibit quotas and not require employers to provide equal benefits to same-sex partners of employees.

It has received some Republican support but is not expected to make headway in the GOP-dominated Congress. It has also received support from President Clinton.

But ENDA has also drawn opposition.

Kristi Hamrick, spokeswoman for the Family Life Research Council, said that unlike women and blacks, gays have not suffered economic injury. She also said gays have higher incomes and are more educated than average Americans.

"At a time America is talking about trouble with excessive affirmative action policy, it is counterproductive for us to make sexual behavior a whole other way of dividing up the workplace," Hamrick has said.

But PFLAG officials said gays and lesbians — regardless of economic status — frequently suffer discrimination. Gail Rickey, vice president of the group's Houston chapter, said she hopes their lobbying efforts will encourage ENDA's passage.

Failing that, she said, PFLAG's multistate, weeklong bus journey should at least draw attention to the issue. "Many fair-minded Americans don't realize people can be fired because they're gay," she said.

Without legal protection — such as federal law provides on the basis of race, gender and religion — gays can fall victim to the "employment-at-will" doctrine, legal experts say.

Recognized in Texas and elsewhere, the legal doctrine generally recognizes an employer's right to dismiss workers without cause.

Because of the doctrine, employees are sometimes fired "for good reason, bad reason or no reason whatsoever," said University of Houston law Professor Thomas Newhouse.

"There are exceptions — like race or union activity — but once you get away from those, it's pretty much employment-at-will in many states."

And that's why Luttrell supports ENDA.



Luttrell

Despite increasing his company's sales and receiving repeated commendations, Luttrell said, he was dismissed after his supervisor discovered his sexual orientation.

"I received three large bonuses just prior to this," recalled Luttrell. "But then one of my co-workers told me my manager found out I was gay and was very very upset."

"I worked from my home here and (my boss) worked in Kansas City. I tried to call and I got no response. He was always good at returning my calls, but he just wouldn't respond. After three days, I tried to start my computer, and my phone line was dead. I knew immediately that he fired me."

Luttrell said he never received an explanation for his dismissal or a call back from his boss.

HOUSTON

VOICE

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Houston PFLAG coordinating bus trip to Washington

Families to lobby for ENDA

(HOUSTON)—When a handful of Texas parents with gay and lesbian children started planning a spring lobbying trip, they had no idea how much national interest it would spark.

The Houston chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is coordinating "Moms and Dads Go to Washington," a cross country bus trip ending with a day of lobbying in the nation's capitol Tuesday, March 19. The focus of the event is to support the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The federal bill, introduced last June, is aimed at pro-

tecting gay and lesbian people in most jobs from being fired based on their orientation. Currently, there is no federal law prohibiting job discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

In addition to lobbying representatives, PFLAG has plans for a media breakfast and a candlelight vigil on the steps of the Capitol. "We want to talk to the public, to touch their hearts and call upon their sense of fairness as Americans," said event coordinator Gail Rickey.

The 55-seat bus is scheduled to depart from Houston on March 16, and will travel across seven states, picking up families

bound for Washington. Along the way, at community meetings, press conferences and church luncheons, the group will deliver PFLAG's message to large urban areas and small towns, members said.

To send off the parents with a "bang," a pep rally/kickoff party is scheduled for Friday, March 15, from 7-9:30 p.m. at Christ Church Cathedral, 1117 Texas Avenue, in the Great Hall.

So much excitement has developed over the trip, according to Rickey, that PFLAG chapters in other parts of the country have begun planning similar bus and train trips to D.C. "We have confirmations from across the U.S.—Alaska, Maine, Colorado, Kentucky, Florida, you name it/Families are getting excited about this opportunity."

PFLAG's efforts are being supported by the Human Rights Campaign, the country's largest gay and lesbian political organization. HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch says that ENDA is legislation the majority of Americans can agree on. "People should not be fired from their jobs for a reason that has nothing to do with their abilities," said Birch.

Birch added that HRC is excited about working with PFLAG because parents can offer elected officials a unique perspective. Rights for gays and lesbians become family issues.

P-FLAG gathers in D.C. to lobby for ENDA

Houston Voice

March 22, 1994

page 1

Nearly 200 parents and friends of gays and lesbians gathered in the U.S. Capitol March 19 from all over the country to lobby for a bill to prevent discrimination in hiring, firing and promotion based on sexual orientation. The Moms and Dads—members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)—joined from various states so they could lobby members of congress on behalf of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

ENDA would prohibit discrimination, quotas and preferential treatment on the job. It would not apply to religious organizations, small businesses or the military. The parents arrived on a

bus that left Houston and traveled through the Bible Belt, all the while stopping to pick up parents along the way. "There's so much talk now about family values. Well, we value our families—including our gay children," said Nita Pierce of Waco.

ENDA currently has 131 co-sponsors in the House and 30 in the Senate. ENDA has been endorsed by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the nation's largest civil rights coalition, representing more than 185 religious, civil rights and labor organizations. President Clinton has also endorsed the bill as has numerous corporations, among them Quaker Oats, Apple Computer, Nabisco, Xerox and Harley Davidson.

HOUSTON VOICE

March 15, 1996
ISSUE 803

A Weekly Community News Publication



The Mommas and the Papas...of P-FLAG leave Houston Saturday (March 16), on a bus bound for Washington, D.C. The White House will hold a reception Tuesday for parents of lesbians and gays from all over the country who are traveling to Washington to Lobby for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The group pictured includes Myrtle Meaux, Terrie Cooney, Penny Leuchtag, Peter De Michelle, Fred Wilson, Rosemary Wilson, Irv Smith, Sherry Stephens, Russell Jones, Don Upchurch, Ann Chapman, Susan Upchurch, Jane Montgomery, Jane Smith, Don Sinclair, Edna Martin, Donna DeCamp, Pat Rickey, Gordon Weisser, Mary Lou Kurtz, Mary K. Jones, Norma Graves, Gail Rickey, Kathy Sinclair, Blake Weisser and Barbara Winston.
(Photo by Alan Montgomery)

PFLAG Plans D.C. Trek For ENDA

HOUSTON — The Houston chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is coordinating a March 19 bus trip entitled, "Moms and Dads Go to Washington." The focus of the event is to lobby members of Congress to support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

"We want to talk to the public, to touch their hearts and call upon their sense of fairness as Americans," said Gail Rickey, event coordinator. "Everyone in our country deserves the right to employment. How can a just society provide any less?"

PFLAG's efforts are being supported by the Human Rights Campaign, the country's largest lesbian and gay political organization. HRC Director Elizabeth Birch says that ENDA is legislation the majority of Americans can agree on.

"People should not be fired from their jobs for a reason that has nothing to do with their abilities," Birch said. "Today in America, it's perfectly legal to fire someone for being gay or lesbian." ♦

The Texas Triangle

February 29, 1996



HOUSTON MOMS AND DADS GO TO WASHINGTON

More than 30 parents of gays and lesbians and P-FLAG members travelled to Washington, D.C. this week, where they were greeted by White House officials Tuesday morning. The parents were part of a contingent of more than 200 P-FLAG members from 28 states who traveled to the nation's capital to lobby in favor of ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The act would bar discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation. The trip was the brainchild of a small group of parents in Houston. Mitzi Henderson, P-FLAG president, said parents came together to make this week's trip happen because discrimination in the workplace is a family issue. "Basic to every family is the need for its members to earn a living," Henderson said. "For families with gay or lesbian children, that opportunity can be denied. We are committed to the passage of ENDA. It would give our children the same redress for unfair treatment that other workers already have." ♡

The Texas Triangle

March 21, 1996

'MOMS & DADS GO TO WASHINGTON' Takes the Power of P-FLAG and Parents To the Nation's Capital In Support of ENDA



BY SUSAN McDONALD

Send-Off Party for Houston Chapter of P-FLAG to Be Held Friday Evening



P-FLAGers leaving Houston for Washington this weekend include Myrtle Meaux, Terrie Cooney, Penny Leuchtag, Peter De Michele, Fred Wilson, Rosemary Wilson, Irv Smith, Sherry Stephens, Russell Jones, Don Upchurch, Ann Chapman, Susan Upchurch, Jane Montgomery, Jane Smith, Don Sinclair, Edna Martin, Donna DeCamp, Pat Rickey, Gordon Weissner, Mary Lou Kurtz, Mary K. Jones, Norma Graves, Gail Rickey, Kathy Sinclair, Blake Weissner and Barbara Winston.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith go to Washington! Irv and Jane Smith, that is. The Smiths, of Missouri City, Texas, are among hundreds of members of P-FLAG expected to travel from across the United States to Washington, D.C., where they will gather next Tuesday, March 19 to lobby members of Congress in support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

"Our goal is to show the nation who the parents of gays and lesbians are, and to tell them how strongly we feel about discrimination against our children...and not just our children, but all of our figurative sons and daughters across the country," said Gail Rickey, one of five co-presidents of the Houston chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act [ENDA], endorsed by President Clinton, and co-sponsored by Sen. James Jeffords, R-Vt., and Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., would end discrimination based on sexual orientation in the work place. It pro-

hibits job quotas and preferential treatment, and does not include small businesses — defined as those with fewer than 15 employees — religious organizations or the armed services. ENDA is not retroactive, and would not require employers to provide benefits to same-sex partners.

Interestingly, the trip, billed as "MOMS & DADS GO TO WASHINGTON," came about when a recent hate crimes bill failed to pass the Texas Legislature. When Dianne Hardy-Garcia, executive director of the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas, invited the parents of gay men and lesbians to take part in lobbying for the law, an amazing thing happened: Legislators took notice, listened to the parents and responded. The bill ended up being tabled (on a narrow 68-70 vote), but a new, untapped resource had been utilized for the very first time, and the empowered, excited parents decided to tackle the nation's capital. They would try to focus attention on the newly introduced ENDA.

P-FLAG Houston consulted the Human Rights Campaign [HRC] and various political experts for advice. HRC gave its approval, provided other state chapters agree to participate. Other groups expressed interest, and the only question left was when to stage the event. A national P-FLAG Convention had already been scheduled for October, but the pioneering parents wanted to try something new. Their decision? To descend on Washington, D.C. as parents, families, friends, and non-gay supporters to spotlight the issue of discrimination against their loved ones.

So much excitement has been generated by the Houston group that P-FLAG chapters in almost every other state are joining the effort.

"Of course, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act is the focal point," Rickey said. "But we really believe that fair-minded Americans in general just can't believe that it's right to discriminate in the workplace against somebody because of what their natural sexual orientation is. We want to get their attention to look at this injustice and let's do something about it. We're going to talk to members of Congress, but really and truly, our audience is people like us across the country."

Kathy Whitmire (not to be confused with the former Houston mayor of the same name) is also going to Washington. As the mother of a gay son, she has a special reason for her participation. Sadly, she had never experienced any aspect of her son's "gay" life, and was "closeted" herself; it took a major heart attack about 3½ years ago to get her to come out of her closet and join P-FLAG Houston.

"It took 14 years of me being homophobic," Whitmire said, "so I snuck into the meeting, and for the first time in my life I was with other people who were gay. I heard them say that they were homophobic. I had no idea that gays were homophobic. It was such a shock to me. It was an eye-opener. P-FLAG has given me the opportunity to do something honorable and to repay my son and other people's children for my bad behavior. I used to cry because I would never have grandchildren. Now, I have all these kids that are fine young people who are loving and kind, and I would never have known them if not for P-FLAG."

The gay-negative rhetoric currently being bandied about by ultraconservative political and religious leaders are about to

be challenged personally.

"I will tell them we are a traditional family," Whitmire explained. "And we definitely have values, and that my son is a whole-some and decent person who doesn't deserve to be fired or laid off from a job because he's gay...and whatever else I can get away with! I just can't keep my mouth shut!"

The Smiths, P-FLAG Houston members since 1992, are also looking forward to the trip. They want more parents to realize there are parents who are supporting their gay children, and that it's not a disaster to have a gay or lesbian child.

"We want parents to keep families together, instead of throwing their gay children out of the nest at the ages when they should be protecting them and seeing to their welfare," she said.

"That's why this (trip) has been styled to moms and dads going to Washington," Mr. Smith added. "...A lot of our lesbian and gay folks who are in our organization and raising money and supporting us...would have liked to have gone, but they recognize that the best impact we can make on the folks up in Washington is if just the moms and dads show up."

The Smiths' son came out to them the very week that Paul Broussard was murdered by gay bashers in Houston back in the summer of 1991, and Mrs. Smith said she had nightmares for two months that her boy was being attacked. She laughingly recalled the first time her son, Paul, brought his partner home for a visit.

"I wouldn't let them go out alone. I went to the movie with them! We took them out to eat clear across town because, of course, we were afraid that someone would see us with them. When we got to the restaurant, all the girls had a fit over the boys and were flirting with them, and I thought, my God, nobody even knows they're gay!"

Although the Smiths admit they weren't initially pleased with their son's homosexuality, they are totally accepting and understanding of him today. Because of their experience with P-FLAG, they have become more broad-minded and say that it's made them better people in a lot of ways.

The Houston group, which is traveling by bus, departs this Saturday, March 16, at 7 a.m. They will stop at various points along the way to pick up passengers.

"Whenever we stop," Mr. Smith said, "the first person out of the bus will unfurl the

banner with our P-FLAG logo, and we hope to get some local publicity. We're also working with other chapters on local publicity."

Once the group arrives in Washington, they will hold a press conference in conjunction with HRC. Tuesday afternoon, participants will lobby legislators, and a candlelight vigil will be held on the north steps of the Capitol. P-FLAG will visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum on Wednesday morning, and the rest of the afternoon will be devoted to lobbying.

"We're going in a positive frame of mind. We're going with a positive message. This is not a protest or a march or a rally. This is a positive presence," Rickey said.

Everyone is invited to the Send-Off Pep Rally, to be held this evening (Friday, March 15) from 7-9:30 p.m. at Christ Church Cathedral, Great Hall, 1117 Texas Ave., in Houston. The bus leaving Houston is full, but if any more parents want to participate, they can call Rickey, who is serving as project coordinator, at (713) 440-0353 for more information.

P-FLAG gathers in D.C. to lobby for ENDA

Nearly 200 parents and friends of gays and lesbians gathered in the U.S. capitol March 19 from all over the country to lobby for a bill to prevent discrimination in hiring, firing and promotion based on sexual orientation. The Moms and Dads - members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) - joined from various states so they could lobby members of congress on behalf of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

ENDA would prohibit discrimination, quotas and preferential treatment on the job. It would not apply to religious organizations, small businesses or the military. The parents arrived on a bus that left Houston and traveled through the Bible Belt, all the while stopping to pick up parents along the way. "There's so much talk now about family values. Well, we value our families - including our gay children," said Nita Pierce of Waco.

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ENDA has been endorsed by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the nation's largest civil rights coalition, representing more than 185 religious, civil rights and labor organizations. President Clinton has also endorsed the bill as has numerous corporations, among them Quaker Oats, Apple Computer, Nabisco, Xerox and Harley Davidson.
Reported in the Houston Voice

The Wand

Womynspace Activities/Networking Directory
Houston
April, 1996

Houston
February 15, 1996

PFLAG Converges on Washington

Last July, several members of the Houston Chapter of Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) began coordinating a week-long, cross-country bus trip starting Saturday, March 16. The 55-seat bus will roll across seven states, picking up families bound for Washington to meet in support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a federal bill aimed at protecting gay and lesbian people from being fired from most jobs, based on their orientation. En route they will deliver PFLAG's message to large urban areas and small towns at community meetings, press conferences, and church luncheons.

"We want to make the workplace safe for our children," explained event coordinator Gail Rickey. "Surely, people across the country who have children of their own would understand the unfairness. We can tell them stories of gay people being fired and they'll say, 'Well, why don't they sue?' There is no protection, and we can start a dialogue about that."

With the support of the Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG plans for Washington include a media brunch in the congressional building, lobby-

ing representatives, and a candlelight vigil on the steps of the capitol.

For more information, call Kyle Young at 713/871-1272 or Donna Pinnick at 713/630-1114.

Letters from PFLAG chapters across the USA

Thanks for "Moms & Dads go to DC"

Our PO box and email boxes have been flooded with notes of thanks and appreciation since we returned from Washington, DC. We firmly believe that this project is your project. So we wanted to share these notes with you. Thanks to all of PFLAG Houston for their support of the "Moms and Dads Go to Washington Project."

1. Being a part of "Moms and Dads" was a great experience for Carol and me. We had written letters before but it felt so much more meaningful to deliver our message in person. Now comes the task of building the fire of enthusiasm in our chapter. The message we got, as if we didn't know before, was personal letters count and the opposition does a better job in that respect.

We appreciate all the work you and your chapter did to make the event happen. The HRC connection was essential and we plan to keep in touch with our new friends there, too.

Sincerely,
Dale and Carol Kirkpatrick

2. Once again I have to say that you Houston folks did a TERRIFIC job and it was a privilege to be part of your lobbying campaign for passage of ENDA.

George and Alice Clattenburg

3. The reports I've received concerning the Moms & Dads project in DC have been glowing, indeed! Congratulations and many heartfelt thanks for a great idea, and rousing good energy and *success*!! Thanks for your vision and determination!

4. I wanted to thank you for all the hard work you did in organizing "Moms and Dads Go To Washington." People here in DC are still talking about it.

5. Congratulations on the great job you did for "The Moms and Dads" group in Washington of PFLAG groups as they lobbied congressmen about ENDA. Dubose McLane, editor of State College PA chapter PFLAG Newsletter.

6. To all the members of Houston PFLAG who worked so hard to make the Moms & Dads trip to DC a success, a great big THANK YOU! Your persistence in making your dream a reality is sure to bear fruit for a long time to come. A few congressman may have been ready to lend their support to ENDA immediately, but all of them, as well as millions of Americans who saw coverage of

our event have a new framework in which to place ENDA and all gay-related issues. I had a marvelous time, as did the others in our Louisville contingent.

Many thanks, Marie

7. Heartfelt congratulations for your successful trip to our capital! I would like to personally thank you on behalf of the many lesbian woman and gay men, like me, who's parents haven't yet committed themselves to this struggle. All the "Moms and Dads" that accompanied you inspire us to keep the faith:

All is possible through love, education and understanding (and perhaps just a little more time)

Thanks Again!

Tony Gudell, PFLAG National Field Services Assoc.

8. On behalf of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Veterans of America, I wish to express our gratitude to you for your efforts on Capital Hill last week. Especially enjoyed your confrontation with Jesse Helms. We look forward to our participation in

your upcoming convention. May our combined efforts over the next four years bring a positive resolution to the issue of America's sons and daughters, who happen to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, serving openly in our Nation's armed forces as well as well as living in open, loving, legally sanctioned relationships
Nancy Russell
President, GLBVA

9. ... thank you very much to Houston PFLAG for all your hard work in organizing the trip to Washington. We do appreciate it. Best wishes for the future in your organization there.

10. I've heard that you and your organization have just returned from a successful trip to Washington D.C. I simply want to thank you for making this extraordinary effort. The

petition of a mother or father is strong, and with your continued advocacy, we shall overcome.

11. Thank you for all your hard work and a wonderful time in DC. I was glad to have the opportunity to meet so many folks from Texas and around the country with a dedicated purpose to help our kids and maybe even our grandkids.

12. My husband and I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to have this wonderful experience. I cannot begin to imagine the time, effort, and heart that went into this project. Everything was well organized and well thought out. Houston PFLAG Chapter should all be patting themselves on the back. Thanks again for a very uplifting experience. Hopefully, we will see you in October at the National Convention.

13. Please express our thanks to your group for all they did in their preparation in going to Washington for "all of our children".



"People here in DC are STILL talking about it!"

Kyle Young and Donna Pinnick were PFLAG's media coordinators for the project.

Kyle rode the PFLAG bus to and from Washington.

As a staff reporter for *The Texas Triangle*, Kyle wrote this article at the end of the trip.



Washington Trip Shows Results of Coming Out

By Kyle Young
TRIANGLE Staff

HOUSTON—Last week, I spent seven days on a bus with 35 straight people.

They were as young as 24 and as old as 77. Teachers, homemakers, geophysicists, ministers, lawyers, middle-class, church-goin' people, for the most part—as American as apple pie. Destination: Washington, D.C. Mission: To lobby for the rights of gay and lesbian people.

The trip was organized by members of Houston's Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Elected officials heard from more than 200 straight people from 27 states who support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

I was asked to join the bus group to coordinate media coverage. While we were immensely successful in grabbing the attention of newspapers and television news programs across the nation, my fondest memories of the journey will be of the courage and dignity these parents and friends brought to Washington.

I watched parents come out of their closets and become ferocious advocates for their children. Throughout the South, at every rest stop, gas station, and restaurant, they brought their message. Loaded down with flyers about workplace discrimination against gays and lesbians, they challenged people's ignorance. Their willingness to be visible also allowed them to be available to others who needed their support. Along the road, gay people were moved to tears by the group. A waitress in South Carolina confided to a table of moms that she had just found out that her 17-year-old son is gay. She didn't know what to say to him. "Tell him that you love him and you're going to need time to get educated about this," a PFLAG mom replied. They took her number to connect her with the local PFLAG group.

The PFLAG members brought the same convictions to their meeting with elected officials. One conservative congressman said that he would not have made the appointment if it had been a group of gay people. While that may be sad to hear, it is reality. Parents and other straight people who become enraged by the oppression of gays and lesbians in America may have the ability to change minds and hearts. U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms asked one mother if she wanted his sympathy.

"We don't need your sympathy," she replied. "We celebrate our gay and lesbian family members. We just want them to have the same rights that everyone else has."

The parents were willing to be visible in the media. A mother from Waco made the front page of her hometown paper. Word got back to her that comments were being made: "Why does she have to rub this in everybody's face. It's a good thing she has a job, 'cause she couldn't get one in this town." Her willingness to be out will allow others in Waco to find the support they need.

Most parents in the group said that they were not supportive when their children first came out. Some came along relatively quickly and some took years. In either case, they are empowered activists now because somebody was willing to come out to them in the past.

Gay men and lesbians will not be able to effectively deal with issues like job discrimination, lack of support for gay youth, same-sex marriages or hate crimes without the involvement of straight people. Get your parents and friends hooked up with their local PFLAG chapter for support and information. In many cases, parents reach a point where they are thankful for having gay and lesbian children. They say that the experience challenges them to be more loving and accepting of other people. One PFLAG mother remarked, "If everybody sees how happy we parents are, they will almost be praying to have a gay or lesbian child. I feel truly blessed."

Last week, 200 straight people went to Washington for all of us. I feel truly blessed, too.



