

News Muse

MELANY PETROSKY

It's our party and we'll cry if
we want to:

ENDA passes House

*From a report by Bryan Ochalla of
www.Gaywired.com*

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act was passed by the United States House of Representatives by a vote of 235 to 184. Many see this as a historic event in the fight for gay and lesbian rights. This bill was and still is a matter of controversy, as a transinclusive provision was dropped from the bill late last month when it became clear to pols in the know that it could not gain enough support to pass. Protections are needed because only 19 states have protections for gay and lesbians in employment. The issue of whether to push a trans-inclusive bill through the House was a point of contention in the gay community and in the Democratic party. Many felt not putting a trans-inclusive bill to vote was an internal act of discrimination. Others felt not taking the opportunity to pass a sexual orientation only bill was to fail the gay and lesbian community. Although the bill is likely to pass the Senate, it is unlikely to avoid a veto by Mr. Bush. So far, advocates do not think they can muster enough votes to override a veto. Bill supporters console themselves by postulating that in years to come (when Bush is out of office) the bill will easily pass.

Guidelines Issued for the Care of Trans Veterans

Bay Windows reports that the Boston Veterans Administration has issued to all offices under its jurisdiction a healthcare mandate that outlines the proper attitudes and treatment protocols to be followed for transgendered veterans.

"The memo mandates that veterans will be addressed and referred to by VA staff according to their self-identified gender both in verbal exchanges and in patient records. Patients will also be given rooming assignments and access to facilities such as restrooms based on their self-identified gender. The memo explains that while federal law prevents the VA from providing patients sex reassignment surgery, the VA will provide hormone therapy and mental health services to transgender patients according to the accepted standards of care.

"Transgender patients will be cared for in an environment of openness, respect and honesty. A veteran's physical status, surgical history, hormonal status, and medications are private, but should be available to providers directly involved in the veteran's care. In this way the veteran is assured quality care, minimized risk of adverse pharmacological events and a supportive environment free of discrimination."

The memo is the first step to insuring that all trans-vets receive consistent, respectful and dependable care in the VA system. It is hoped that eventually the mandate will be distributed to all VA hospitals and staff in the United States; however for now, Boston is ahead of the game.

RI Lawmakers Get Rebellious

In what amounts politically to a major flipping of the proverbial bird to Gov. Don Carcieri, Rhode Island lawmakers overturned 34 of the governor's recent vetoes of legislation that had passed both the House and Senate. One of these vetoes pertained to the provision of benefits for state workers. All domestic partners of state employees are now to receive the same pension and death benefits from their spouses as their heterosexual counterparts. Partners must live together one year and be financially interdependent to qualify. Gov. Carcieri sees the extension of benefits as "unwarranted and unnecessary." He further used the example of a 50-year-old judge having a 40-year-old partner. This partner would be entitled to one third of that judge's \$120,000 salary upon the judge's death. That is \$40,000 a year for his lifetime. Carcieri cries that this one case would cost \$1.6 million. There are so many things about this example that I find odd. In this day and age, 10 years is really not much of an age gap in a relationship, but how strange Carcieri's

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example of "the gays" would start out in this way, bringing images of older gray-haired powerful robe-wearing gavel-bangin' sugar daddies to mind. Furthermore, Carcieri's only really objection lies in the fact that the money would be paid to a gay man for the death of his partner. The state pays this amount of money and more to the heterosexual partners of its state workers every year. So, please don't blame it on fiscal caution Mr. Carcieri, when we all know what it is really about. If you are a state or municipal workers whose pension is run by the Employment Retirement System of R.I., check out your eligibility. ▼