

From: Cesar Hernandez
Sent: Monday, February 09, 2009 11:52 AM
Subject: PFLAG Policy Matters - a bi-monthly publication

Dear PFLAG Chapter Leaders,

PFLAG National is proud to provide you with our third installment of *Policy Matters* – a bi-monthly publication that you can share with your community on the latest federal and state policy information related to the LGBT Community. This publication includes a very brief summary of some of the most important policy happenings around the country and it also features a column answering some of your most urgent policy questions. If you have a policy related question that you would like answered and featured in the next bi-monthly *Policy Matters*, please send your queries to Rhodes Perry, our Field and Policy Manager at rperry@pflag.org.

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Riding the Front Page

[Monumental Day in LGBT World History.](#) Johanna Sigurdardottir, named as Iceland's prime minister on Sunday February 1st, is the first openly lesbian head of government in Europe, if not the world - at least in modern times. The 66-year-old's appointment as an interim leader, until elections in May, is seen by many as a milestone for the gay and lesbian movement. Up until now, if a gay man or woman has been prime minister, they have done their best to conceal the fact.

[Economic Recovery Bill.](#) The US Senate continues the debate on the Economic Recovery Bill that includes \$400 million for the National Center for STD, HIV, and TB Prevention. The bill under consideration is particularly important to PFLAG National as it would fund many key priorities for the LGBT community including community health centers, biomedical research, Medicaid, Food Stamps, unemployment benefits and tax cuts for the working poor that would help some of our most vulnerable families.

[Lawmakers Remove Equality MD from Terrorist List.](#) Equality Maryland, the state's largest LGBT rights group, was among the peaceful protest groups to be classified as terrorists in a Maryland State Police database. Over a dozen Democratic lawmakers have mandated local law enforcement agencies to purge the files. These legislators also announced plans to introduce legislation to prevent future surveillance of non-violent groups. Police would need "reasonable articulated suspicion of actual criminal activity," before they can conduct surveillance, said the legislation's sponsors. Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) also plans to call for a similar bill.

[Apology for Homophobic NBA Ad.](#) Last week brought us the latest installment of advertisers using homophobia to sell their products. This time the ad was on ESPN promoting its NBA programming. The [ad](#) features NBA star **Shaquille O'Neal** rejecting the offer of a "fist kiss" from sports commentator **Mike Breen**. The spot is generating significant concern in the LGBT community for its portrayal of affection among men as "disgusting". After senior ESPN [executives became aware of the ad, they issued a public apology](#) and terminated the advertisement.

Creating Change in Unlikely Places

[Uniting American Families Act.](#) Representative Jerrod Nadler (NY-8th) seeks to introduce the Uniting American Families Act close to Valentine's Day – Feb. 14th. This bill will allow lesbian and gay Americans to sponsor their foreign-born partners for immigration. PFLAG National is working in coalition with Immigration Equality and several other organizations to help ensure the passage of this bill. If you know of an individual

that this law may impact and are interested in helping influence your legislators, please contact rperry@pflag.org for more information.

[Lesbian Woman Running for Houston Mayor](#). Two years ago, former Dallas City Councilman Ed Oakley nearly became the first openly LGBT person elected mayor of a top 10 U.S. city. Now, [Annise Parker](#) will try to accomplish the feat a few hundred miles down Interstate 45 in Houston. Parker, 52, a former city councilwoman who currently serves as city controller — Houston's elected fiscal watchdog — formally announced her candidacy for mayor on Monday, Feb. 2. The election is Nov. 3. Parker is considered one of the frontrunners to replace Houston Mayor Bill White, who's term limited and plans to run as a Democrat for U.S. Senate in 2010

[SC Legislator Push for Marriage Equality](#). State Sen. Robert Ford, D-Charleston, thinks South Carolina voters got it wrong in November 2006 when they overwhelmingly passed a state Constitutional amendment making marriage between one man and one woman the only legal domestic union. "I think it's unconstitutional," Sen. Ford says of the amendment. Because of that and the Democratic National Committee's platform plan to encourage states to adopt civil unions, Sen. Ford has introduced the Civil Union Equality Act. It would allow same-sex civil unions in the state that would have all the benefits, privileges, rights and responsibilities of marriage.

Policy Matters – A Question from the Field

Dear Policy Matters,

I just returned from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual Creating Change conference. What an experience! It was so exciting to be surrounded by so many people from around the country working towards equality for the LGBT community. I was one of many allies interested in learning more about the legislative process – particularly the specific steps of the lobbying process. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend specific lobbying workshops. Can you please provide a brief overview of the basics or a resource that could help me navigate this process – it seems like an important skill for an advocate to have!

*Thanks,
Jill, PFLAG Mom*

Dear Jill,

We are glad you enjoyed the 21st Annual Creating Change Conference. It is absolutely a phenomenal event where so many useful skills are learned and shared!

Addressing your question, we have a few general guidelines gleaned from our more comprehensive resource, [Bringing the Message Home](#). In this document, we recommend the four specific guidelines you should follow when lobbying:

- **Know Your Representatives.** Every person in the United States has two US Senators and one member of the House of Representatives (with the exception of people living in Washington, DC). Every member of the US House of Representatives has approximately 600,000 constituents. Every US Senator represents an entire state. Each of the 435 members of the House and 100 Senators has many PFLAG constituents, but chances are they don't know it because they have heard your voice. To learn who your members of Congress are, contact Rhodes Perry (rperry@pflag.org) to get a personalized and up-to-date profile on your legislator.

- **Know the Facts.** Learn more about LGBT civil rights, state and local laws, important information on specific federal legislation, and important points to make. If you need help, please refer to our [Bringing the Message Home](#) guide or contact our Field and Policy Manager at rperry@pflag.org.
- **Take Action.** There are several ways you can take action. Probably the most effective way to talk about the issues most important to you is for you to visit your member of Congress in person either in your Congressional District or in Washington, DC. Another way you can affect change is by writing a fax, letter, e-mail or simply calling your member of Congress. To learn how to schedule meetings or contact your legislators, be sure to refer to our more comprehensive resource, [Bringing the Message Home](#).
- **Stay in Touch.** After meeting your member of Congress, be sure to write a thank you letter – it's relatively quick and painless and will be an effective tool in strengthening your relationship with your member. Also, be sure to invite your member of Congress to various community activities, such as a PFLAG Chapter meeting or a town hall event. Interact frequently with your member by scheduling follow-up meetings in the future to continue discussions on various pieces of federal, state or local legislation impacting your community.

For more specific information, be sure to review PFLAG National's [Bringing the Message Home](#) guide, or contact our Field and Policy Manager, Rhodes Perry at (rperry@pflag.org).

Thank you so much for your question!
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