

Obama Declares June GLBT Pride Month

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Observer Update) - President Barack Obama has declared the month of June, LGBT Pride Month, reports advocate.com.

The complete statement reads:

As Americans, it is our birth-right that all people are created equal and deserve the same rights, privileges, and opportunities. Since our earliest days of independence, our Nation has striven to fulfill that promise. An important chapter in our great, unfinished story is the movement for fairness and equality on behalf of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. This month, as we recognize the immeasurable contributions of LGBT Americans, we renew our commitment to the struggle for equal rights for LGBT Americans and to ending prejudice and injustice wherever it exists.

LGBT Americans have enriched and strengthened the fabric of our national life. From business leaders and professors to athletes and first responders, LGBT individuals have achieved success and prominence in every discipline. They are our mothers and fathers, our sons and daughters, and our friends and neighbors. Across my Administration, openly LGBT employees are serving at every level. Thanks to those who came before us, the brave men and women who marched, stood up to injustice, and brought change through acts of compassion or defiance we have made enormous progress and continue to strive for a more perfect union.

My Administration has advanced our journey by signing into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which strengthens Federal protections against crimes based on gender identity or sexual orientation. We renewed the Ryan White CARE Act, which provides life saving medical services and support to Americans living with HIV/AIDS, and finally eliminated the HIV entry ban. I also signed a Presidential Memorandum directing hospitals receiving Medicare and Medicaid funds to give LGBT patients the compassion and security they deserve in their time of need, including the ability to choose someone other than an immediate family member to visit them and make medical decisions.

In other areas, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced a series of proposals to ensure core housing programs are open to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

HUD also announced the first ever national study of discrimination against members of the LGBT community in the rental and sale of housing. Additionally, the Department of Health and Human Services has created a National Resource Center for LGBT Elders.

Much work remains to fulfill our Nation's promise of equal justice under law for LGBT Americans. That is why we must give committed gay couples the same rights and responsibilities afforded to any married couple, and repeal the Defense of Marriage Act. We must protect the rights of LGBT families by securing their adoption rights, ending employment discrimination against LGBT Americans, and ensuring Federal employees receive equal benefits. We must create safer schools so all our children may learn in a supportive environment. I am also committed to ending "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" so patriotic LGBT Americans can serve openly in our military, and I am working with the Congress and our military leadership to accomplish that goal.

As we honor the LGBT Americans who have given so much to our Nation, let us remember that if one of us is unable to realize full equality, we all fall short of our founding principles. Our Nation draws its strength from our diversity, with each of us contributing to the greater whole. By affirming these rights and values, each American benefits from the further advancement of liberty and justice for all.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim June 2010 as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month. I call upon all Americans to observe this month by fighting prejudice and discrimination in their own lives and everywhere it exists.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-eighth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand ten, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fourth.

BARACK OBAMA

JUNE GLBT PRIDE MONTH

Congress Moves To End DADT



WASHINGTON, D.C. (Observer Update) - The U.S. House of Representatives and a Senate panel have both approved measures that would begin the process of dismantling the 17-year-old "don't ask, don't tell" policy that prohibits gays and lesbians for serving openly in the military, reports advocate.com.

After a heated floor debate, House members voted 234 to 194 to approve a repeal amendment to the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act sponsored by Pennsylvania representative Patrick Murphy.

"Tonight, Congress took a historic step toward repealing 'don't ask, don't tell' and toward ensuring that every American has the same opportunity I did to defend our nation," said Murphy, who served as an Army paratrooper. "Patriotic Americans willing to take a bullet for their country should never be forced to lie about who they are in order to serve the country they love."

Earlier in the evening, the Senate Armed Services Committee approved a companion amendment by a 16-12 vote in a closed-door session.

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine was the lone Republican on the committee joining 15 of her Democratic colleagues to approve the measure as an attachment to the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act. Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia was the only Democrat to vote against it.

If signed into law as part of the defense funding bill, the measure would not immediately repeal the law. "Don't ask, don't tell" would continue as the official policy of the military until two events occur: the Pentagon completes an implementation study due in December; and the secretary of Defense, chairman of the Joint

Chiefs, and President Barack Obama certify that repeal will not weaken military readiness. Once those two requirements are met, a 60-day waiting period will begin before the policy is finally lifted.

Repeal advocates celebrated the historic vote even as they acknowledged that it was one step in what promises to be a multitiered process.

Aubrey Sarvis, executive director of the pro-repeal Servicemembers Legal Defense Network hailed Democrats for persevering in the face of opposition from the military's leadership.

"Chairman Carl Levin and Sen. Joe Lieberman showed remarkable courage and steadfastness in the face of unprecedented and inappropriate last minute lobbying by the Pentagon service chiefs who seemed to have forgotten that they are not the policy makers here," he said.

But Sarvis also cautioned that the road to repeal was not over. "The U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate Armed Services Committee passed a historic road map to allowing open military service, but it doesn't end the discharges," he said. "It is important for all gay and lesbian active duty service members, including the reserves and the National Guard, to know they're at risk. They must continue to serve in silence under the 'don't ask, don't tell' law that remains on the books."

Some activists expressed concerns about the last-minute 60-day concession that was made to secure the vote of West Virginia senator Robert Byrd. But Alex Nicholson, executive director of the gay veterans group Servicemembers United, said the extra time would

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UPDATE

An Evening With Sonia Sanchez June 16



TUCSON (Observer Update) - Spend an evening, Wednesday, June 16, 5:30 p.m., at the Dunbar School Auditorium, 325 W. Second St. (ASL interpreter will be provided) with renowned poet Sonia Sanchez as she reads from her works and discusses her poetry at the 12th Annual Author Presentation of the Pima County Public Library's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Services Committee.

Ms. Sanchez will read from her book, *Does Your House Have Lions?*, a book-length poem memorializing the life and death of her brother, who died from an AIDS-related illness. Arizona Public Media's Laura Markowitz will interview Ms. Sanchez, who will take questions from the audience after the interview. Ms. Sanchez will remain to sign her books following the presentation. Her books will be available for sale before and after the event.

Sonia Sanchez is a poet, playwright, mother, activist, professor, and international lecturer on black culture and literature, women's liberation, peace and racial justice. She is most often associated with the Black Arts Movement. The annual GLBT author event is made possible through generous funding from the Friends of the Pima County Public Library.

H2O - Kicking Off Pride 2010

TUCSON (Observer Update) - Come kick off Pride Week 2010 in Tucson on June 19 and get WET at H2O located at the Radisson Suites at 6555 E. Speedway. Entertainers include singer/songwriter Eric Himan along with Tucson's own Namoli Brennet!

Food & beverages will be provided, cash bar with drink discounts all day. Swim and enjoy episodes of *Absolutely Fabulous* with Patsy & Edina on the big screen. Room rates start at only \$69 for a 2 bedroom suite!

Tickets are \$15.00 in advance or \$20.00 at the Door and will be available at tucsonpride.org. For more information, contact David at Tucson Pride, 520-622-3200.

More Light Sunday June 6

TUCSON (Observer Update) - St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, 3809 E. 3rd St. (Stmarksprebyterian.org) will join More Light Presbyterian (MLP) congregations across the nation in celebrating our commitment to inclusiveness for LGBT persons and advocacy for their full human rights in church and society.

Worship at 9:30 a.m. (summer schedule), followed by a festive time in the courtyard with cake and rainbow sherbet.

For more information, contact Eileen Bates, 520-325-1001.

Steven Gellman Live, June 5

SCOTTSDALE (Observer Update) - With a musical styling that *Billboard Magazine* has called "intensely sensitive and impressively intelligent," Washington area gay singer/songwriter Steven Gellman will make the Southwest debut of *Peaceful World*, his newest release, at Angel's Serenity, 4839 E.

An intimate concert is planned for Angel's Serenity on Saturday, June 5, 2010. To hear sound clips from the new CD, visit hiddenpoet.com.

For more information, contact Edwin van de Grift, 602-482-0036.

Senior Pride Senior Prom June 12

TUCSON (Observer Update) - Late Bloomers and friends of any age are invited to Senior Pride's Senior Prom, Saturday, June 12, 4 to 9:30 p.m., Metropolitan Community Church, 3269 N. Mountain Ave. just north of Fort Lowell.

Couples and singles are welcome. Unlike the proms you may remember from your high school days, this prom is not formal - just come as you are.

Dance to appropriate music and partake of light refreshments. Meet up with old friends and make new ones. As always, donations to Wingspan (wingspan.org) will be gratefully accepted. If you need transportation or can provide it, please call 520-888-6673. For more information, contact Linda Thomas, 520-624-1779.

FDA Rethinks Gay Blood Ban

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Observer Update) - The Federal Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability is set to hold a hearing June 10 and 11 to reconsider a FDA rule which bans gay from donating blood, CNN reported.

The rule, implemented in 1983, prevents men who have had sex with another man since 1977 from donating blood. Established during the onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis, it was intended to be a preventive measure from spreading the virus and other transfusion-transmitted diseases, reported 365Gay.com.

"With new and more effective means for HIV/AIDS testing, many argue that the ban is 'medically and scientifically unwarranted.'"

Activists, including the Human Rights Campaign, the American Red Cross, America's Blood Centers and AABB are opposed to the lifetime ban of gay donors. "Potential donors should be screened more fairly regardless of sexual orientation" they said in a joint statement.

Politicians have also weighed in on the debate. Senator John Kerry and 17 other senators signed a letter challenging the "outdated policy."

"Gay men, including those who are in monogamous relationships, are forbidden from contributing blood for the rest of their lives, while 'a heterosexual who has had sex with a prostitute need only wait a year [before giving blood]. That does not strike me as a sound scientific conclusion," Kerry wrote.

Even so, the Food and Drug Administration stands by their policy. The policy "is based on scientific data that shows that certain medical, behavioral and geographical factors are

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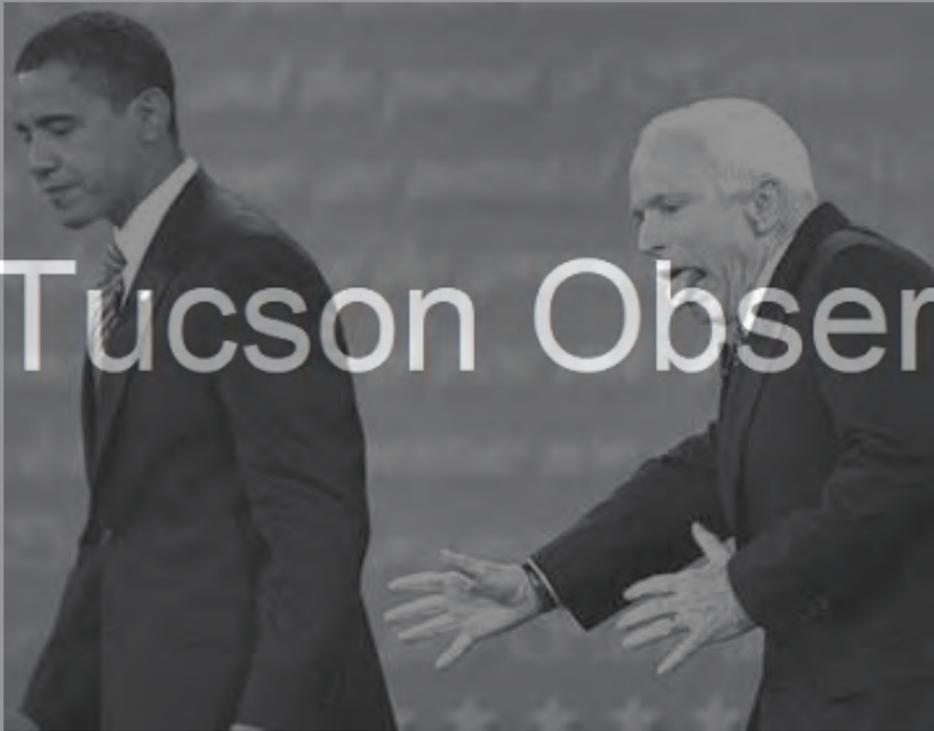
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John McCain Debates Himself On Repeal Of Don't Ask, Don't Tell



PHOENIX (Observer Update) - John McCain is promising to block a repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell that was fashioned in the manner he previously said he would support.

Rep. Patrick Murphy (D-Penn.), an Iraq combat veteran, sponsored legislation that would leave it up to the military to allow gay and lesbians to serve openly. The law would not take effect without both the Secretary of Defense and the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff signing off on it. Both are appointees of George W. Bush.

This is exactly the approach McCain 1.0 said he would welcome in 2006. McCain 2.0 is not just opposing lifting the unpopular ban but is leading the charge on behalf of discrimination.

McCain told an MSNBC audience: "The day that the leadership of the military comes to me and says, Senator, we ought to change the policy, then I think we ought to consider seriously changing it because those leaders in the military are the ones we give the responsibility to."

"McCain should have a debate with himself," said Patrick Mellody, campaign manager for U.S. Senate candidate Rodney Glassman (rodneyglassman.com). "John McCain is trying to do something new in American politics: Run against his own record. He just keeps insulting the intelligence of Arizona voters, who are asking themselves 'who is John McCain?'"

Congress Moves To End DADT

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delay but ultimately not disrupt the repeal process.

"It is our understanding that the additional 60 days are just an extra cushion added into the delayed implementation timeline," said Nicholson. Once the certification letter is signed and transmitted to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, he added, "the 60-day clock starts, and when it runs out, then the new law goes into effect automatically."

Once the Pentagon working group issues its review, Fred Sainz, vice president of communications for the Human Rights Campaign, said he expects the process to proceed with dispatch.

"The experience of foreign militaries and dozens of studies have been that gays and lesbians should be integrated into the military immediately," he said. "Following the completion of the study, we expect that the administration will proceed expeditiously."

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, stoked concerns of repeal advocates after he was quoted saying the certification process — or the "trigger" — would give military leadership control over whether to finally repeal the policy.

"That trigger is to certify whether we should move ahead with that change, even if the law were to repeal it," reported the American Forces Press Service.

But a spokesman for Mullen said the chairman's quote was misinterpreted and that he remains personally committed to repeal.

"What he was trying to articulate there is that the draft legislation provides the department the ability to complete the review, exercise our own discretion with respect to new policies and regulations, and certify that we are ready for implementation before the policy can take effect," Capt. John Kirby told The Advocate. "There is no doubt in the chairman's mind that the president's intent and desire is to repeal the policy."

FDA Rethinks Gay Blood Ban

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associated with increases risk of transfusion transmitted diseases," they told CNN. Still, the agency

says it is "considering the possibility of pursuing alternative strategies that maintain blood safety."

SATURDAYS

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EDITORIAL

Thursday, May 26 was the filing deadline for petitions to be submitted for individuals running for political office in this year's election. For Legislative District 28, openly Lesbian state Senator Paula Aboud, filed her petitions and will be the Democratic nominee. She will be facing two independent candidates, Ted Downing, the former Democrat who ran against Paula in 2006, losing badly and Dave Ewoldt, a self-professed Green Party member also running as an independent.

Paula has served District 28 and the LGBT community for Tucson and Arizona well and deserves another two years in office. She was there fighting for our rights, as well as against Proposition 107 in 2006 and Proposition 102 in 2008, while her opponents did nothing in support of LGBT rights or against these hate filled measures. What follows is an appeal from Paula Aboud from her website. For more information, go online to paulaaboud.com.

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for giving me the honor to serve Tucson and our state these last five years as your State Senator from District 28. What started out as a more collaborative work environment in the Senate five years ago has become a battleground this year as we are trying to stop the conservative, right wing legislators who are promoting an agenda that forces their ideology onto the rest of the citizens.

I have been proud to be an outspoken voice in the Legislature. People regularly ask me, "How can you go up there day after day and work with these people?" My reply to them is that I gain strength every time I stand up and speak out on behalf of our community and our values. I point out how we Democrats stand for a different vision of Arizona: a vision of inclusion and compassion, of courtesy and respect, of honoring our history & maintaining cultural diversity, of togetherness not divisiveness, of reasoned discourse not ideological ranting. Every day that I am up there, I grow stronger in my resolve to be a voice of reason in the sea of sometimes utter insanity.

Once we lost Janet Napolitano and a conservative governor took over the ship, a reasonable future for our state evaporated. We lost the primary person who could effectively stop the crazy legislation from being passed into law. Her departure cast the budget into a dire situation. I realized that, as the ranking Democrat in the Senate Appropriations Committee, my job, my duty was to poke holes in Chairman Russell Pearce's arguments and to expose the GOP's hypocrisy. I do that respectfully but firmly, with all the conviction in my being. If I am the last line of defense against their crazy ideas, then I will fight their legislation to the end.

Many of the battles first occur in the committees on which I serve, primarily: Appropriations, Education, & Health. As the ranking member of the powerful Appropria-

tions Committee, I initiated and co-created a Senate Democratic budget, a real alternative to the GOP's slash and burn budget. It highlighted how to balance the state's budget without cutting our agencies and departments to the bone. It also protected our underserved populations and maintained enough services so that when the economy rebounded, the state would not have to recover hugely from the massive budget cuts the GOP promoted. I went toe to toe with Russell Pearce for 10 hours fighting against the Republican budget that ultimately devastated social and human services and all departments and programs in government. The defunding of so many of our services and departments has left this state sorely crippled and our state employees eliminated—all because of an idea that raising revenue is bad. Our state is so crippled now from the budget cuts imposed on the state by the Republicans that our recovery will be hampered severely when the economy rebounds.

The changes being promoted in the Education Committee were challenging, as well. I took powerful stands on behalf of public education, our children, our beloved teachers, against the GOP advocates for private schools. The conservatives wanted to break the back of public education by constantly promoting their precious private schools tuition paid for with public tax dollars. It has been difficult watching the disintegration and the dismantling of our public schools. There are a few glimmers of hope on the horizon if the right folks get elected next year, but we still have many battles ahead of us in committee next year. I found the Health Committee to be the one place of brief sanity in a crazy legislature. We worked on the hard and real issues facing Arizona's hospitals and health industries and tried to provide a balanced and informed perspective to the rest of the Legislature on healthcare issues. I advocated passionately for our healthcare industry, the one bright spot in our gloomy economy. Unfortunately, the GOP budget slashed AHCCCS funding which has impacted our healthcare industries desperately. The coming years of declining revenues will challenge the hospitals greatly and the Health Committee will need to advocate wisely for moderation in future budget decisions. I look forward to coming back to this committee to help make those recommendations.

Our way of life in Arizona is changing and not for the better. The GOP has manifested their fear through their legislation. This is evident in gun laws that exceed normalcy. They have continued tax cuts for the corporations and the wealthy at a time when the state is bankrupt and at a time when other states are raising revenue. They value the privatized worker over loyalty to our state employees. No one likes taxes, but when our state is in such obvious disrepair and in

such need, it is not too much to ask for a bit of it back from the folks who received some of the \$2.6 Billion dollars in tax cuts over the last few years. Those tax cuts helped put our economy upside down. Righting the ship a bit is not wrong.

Thanks to my special advocacy on behalf of neighborhoods, food banks, women, children, social services, social justice, animal rights, civil rights, environmental rights seniors rights, I bring the effort for those specific issues to a level of defense to protect our services in those specific areas and to protect and defend our state. My expertise in the budget has helped to secure dollars over the years for programs that serve Tucsonan's needs as well as to gain the experience of negotiating the state's budget in a bipartisan senate group in 2008.

As a valued and respected Senator for Tucson, I bring a sensibility to the job that rewards my efforts. I was chosen as one of the top two Most Effective Democratic Senators last year and I am continuing on that path again this year with my passionate and compelling arguments on the Senate floor and in the critical committees in which I serve.

I want to return to the Senate to stand up for my beloved Tucson and

Support Our State Senator



Senator Paula Aboud

defend my state. I value the quality of life that we have in Southern Arizona and I intend to defend it against all the odds. They say home is where the heart is, and as a third generation Tucsonan both my heart and home are here in Tucson. Every day that I'm serving in the legislature, I bring the heart and passion of our community to the capitol. I ask you to send me back there to continue to work for the good of Arizona.

Thank you so much for giving me the honor thus far to serve Tucson and our state.

Thank you,
Paula Aboud

COMMENTARY....

by Joe Sudbay

John McCain Is The Biggest Hypocrite on DADT Repeal

John McCain is in a tough primary battle against a neanderthal Republican, JD Hayworth. So, John McCain has morphed into a right wing whacko. The repeal of DADT is one classic example. As John reported back in February, old John McCain sounded almost sensible on DADT:

In October of 2006, John McCain said we should listen to our military leaders as to what to do on Don't Ask Don't Tell:

And I understand the opposition to it, and I've had these debates and discussions, but the day that the leadership of the military comes to me and says, Senator, we ought to change the policy, then I think we ought to consider seriously changing it because those leaders in the military are the ones we give the responsibility to.

The military leaders came to him and said change the policy and McCain said no. Well, he didn't just say no, he turned this into an anti-gay vendetta.

McCain asked Chairman Carl Levin to hold the Armed Services Committee markup on DADT in an open session. Markups are traditionally held in private — and that's how this one was planned.

Why in public? McCain wants to put on a show for the hard-core right wingers whose votes he needs in the primary. It's just another political stunt from a guy who used to purport to abhor political stunts. Watch for it early this afternoon.

So, we'll witness another vivid example of the self-destruction of John McCain's reputation. It's pathetic. Really pathetic.

And, the hypocrisy is gross. McCain has long had gay senior staffers. He knows better than this.

(Joe Sudbay is a writer/blogger for AmericaBlogGay.com., from which this is reprinted.)

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Equality Arizona Against 1070

TUCSON (Observer Update) - The Equality Arizona (equalityarizona.org) Board of Directors has come out against SB1070 and partnered with Immigration Equality to release the following statement:

"All of us at Equality Arizona and Immigration Equality are proud to stand in solidarity today with our allies in the immigrant community. It is important that each of you know you are not fighting this unjust oppression and discrimination alone. And it is important for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Arizonans - and Americans - to understand that this law is not just an attack on our neighbors. It is an affront to the rights and dignity of us all.

"The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community knows all too well how easily people who "look different" can be singled out for harassment and prosecution. And LGBT immigrant families are too familiar with the double burden of immigration discrimination. Now, families in our state, whether gay or straight, have yet another reason to be alarmed. This new law threatens to tear apart families, separate children from their parents and rip apart loving couples who are building their lives together. That is unacceptable.

"For as long as America has existed, the world has looked to us as a place of safe haven for those who have been persecuted, attacked and maligned in their home countries. With passage of this law, that world view is now threatened, and our reputation as a safe harbor is in jeopardy. Just last week, Mohammad Abdollahi, a young, gay man originally from Iran, was arrested here in Arizona for simply asking lawmakers to give him - a young man brought to this country by his family in pursuit of a better, safer life - a chance to take part in the American dream. Because he is gay, he faces unspeakable violence and persecution if he is forced to return home. Yet, under our broken immigration system, that is a very real possibility.

"At Equality Arizona, however, we think it is also an unacceptable possibility. All of us have a stake in fixing our broken immigration system, and it is imperative that the LGBT community support humane, comprehensive immigration reform. We need reform that keeps loving lesbian and gay binational couples - nearly 18,000 of whom are raising young children - together. We need passage of the DREAM Act, to ensure young immigrants like Mohammad have a path to citizenship and a chance at a new life safe from harm. And we need to get laws like this one in Arizona off the books, and replace them with fair federal laws that honor our history as a nation of immigrants and our reputation as a nation of compassion and justice for all. We say today, to our friends and allies in both the LGBT and immigrant communities, that we stand ready to support you in this endeavor, and work to ensure that America's promise is available to each of you, too."

Immigration Equality is a national organization fighting for equality under U.S. immigration law for

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV-positive individuals. Founded in 1994 as the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force, has a membership of 10,000 people in cities all over the country. Immigration Equality is run by a Board of Directors and has a full-time staff at their National Headquarters in New York. Immigration Equality is funded by donations from members as well as generous support from private foundations.

Equality Arizona is the only state-wide LGBT organization in Arizona. Their mission is to secure, protect and defend the rights and welfare of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Arizona.

For more information please contact Equality Arizona at 602-650-0900.

Little Impact On Hawaii Economy From Civil Unions For Gays

HONOLULU (Observer Update) - Approving a law that recognizes gay and lesbian couples with civil unions would have a minimal impact on Hawaii's economy and government, a new study concludes, reported On Top Magazine.

The paper, which was authored by two University of Hawaii economists, Summer La Croix and Kimberly Burnett, found that the law would have an insignificant effect on tourism, state government revenues and spending and employer health insurance for civil union partners and their dependents.

"We concluded that the legalization of civil unions in Hawaii will have only a very minimal impact on any aspect of Hawaii's economy and state government operations," La Croix and Burnett wrote. Lawmakers approved the civil unions bill last month. Governor Linda Lingle must decide whether she'll sign the bill into law or veto it by June 22, the day she'll inform lawmakers about which measures she's planning to reject.

"The bill is a civil rights measure and should be decided on that moral basis, not on any perceived financial risk or benefit that passage poses for the state," the Star Bulletin wrote in an editorial. The new study, however, should please Lingle's Republican ideals of fiscal responsibility. Opponents of gay rights who met with the governor on Monday said they believe she'll focus on the bill's "technicalities."

Lingle said in 2002 that she would not veto a bill that recognizes gay couples with domestic partnerships, but she has also described civil unions as gay marriage in disguise. Earlier in the month, Republicans meeting at their party's annual state convention approved a resolution calling on Lingle to veto the bill. The resolution urged Lingle to protect marriage as a heterosexual union and described civil unions as "same-sex marriage in disguise or merely by another name."

La Croix and Burnett also believe that the state will likely see a small gain in state revenues due to civil union registration fees, excise taxes and state income taxes and a \$7 million annual jump in tourism.

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Roy Ashburn 'Sorry' For Voting Against Gay Rights



SACRAMENTO (Observer Update) - State Senator Roy Ashburn, the California GOP lawmaker with a long anti-gay record recently forced to admit he's gay, says he's "sorry" for voting against gay rights, reported On Top Magazine.

Speaking with the Bakersfield Californian, Ashburn said: "I'm sorry for that." On Thursday (May 27), he spoke for the first time on gay issues on the state Senate floor. Saying that before his coming out he "would not have been speaking on a measure dealing with sexual orientation ever," Ashburn added that he was "no longer willing or able to remain silent on issues that affect sexual orientation."

The 56-year-old Republican's sexuality came under close scrutiny after details of a March 3 drunk-driving arrest were made public, including the fact that he was traveling with a male companion after leaving a popular Sacramento gay bar. After evading the press for five days, the conservative lawmaker and father of four told talk show host Inga Banks: "I am gay." Social conservatives immediately

asked for Ashburn's resignation, while Republicans gave the termed-out Bakersfield lawmaker a pass.

In the Senate, however, Ashburn split his votes on gay issues, rejecting a bill sponsored by openly gay Senator Mark Leno that exempts clergy from performing civil marriages that counter his or her own faith, but voting in favor of a resolution urging Congress to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the law that bans gay troops from serving openly. Both measures were approved by the chamber.

Ashburn told the paper he was comfortable with being openly gay. "I outed myself, I really did," he said. "I was drinking and doing riskier and riskier things." He also said saddling his children with his secret was the most painful part of his charade: "I was so used to lying and hiding who I was, it didn't even occur to me what a horrible burden that was for young teenagers."

Louisiana Panel Rejects G/L Adoption Ban Repeal Effort

BATON ROUGE (Observer Update) - A second Louisiana committee has rejected a bill that sought to allow gay and lesbian couples to jointly adopt a child, the Leesville Daily Reader reported.

Louisiana is among a handful of states that prohibit gay couples from adopting by restricting adoptions to married couples in a state that defines marriage as a heterosexual union. However, a partnered gay or lesbian person where the pair live apart may adopt a child, but only one adult can become the legal parent, reported On Top Magazine.

Representative Juan LaFonta's bill sought to allow gay couples to jointly adopt a child.

"There are too many children who need homes," LaFonta, a New Orleans Democrat, told NOLA.com. "We've got to stop this narrow regulating of what is a family and what's not." The Louisiana House Civil Law and Procedure Committee voted unanimously to pass on LaFonta's bill. A similar bill died with a 3-to-1 vote in a Senate committee earlier this legislative session.

A similar measure approved in 2008 by voters in Arkansas was ruled unconstitutional in April. In making his ruling, the judge said the law was "troubling" because it "specifically targeted" gay men and lesbians. Opponents have vowed to appeal. Only Florida has an outright ban on gay adoption. The ban, however, was also found to be unconstitutional in 2008. An appeals court heard the case last August after the state challenged the lower court's ruling and a decision is expected any day now.

Opponents of removing the adoption restrictions in Louisiana argue that such actions would violate the spirit of the state's gay marriage ban.

CIA And The Pedophile Tape

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Observer Update) - In 2003 when the Iraqi invasion was being planned, the CIA came up with the brilliant plan to produce a video showing Saddam Hussein's love of boy booty. "It would look like it was taken by a hidden camera," said a former CIA official. "Very grainy, like it was a secret videotaping of a sex session."

Hussein wasn't the only one who was going get tagged as a pedophile. Apparently a tape was made of Osama bin Laden, played by one of the agency's "darker-skinned" employee, sitting around a campfire talking about all of the boys he slept with, reported 365Gay.com. Both plans eventually went nowhere. Mainly because they might have turned the stomachs of our blue haired ladies, but would have fallen flat overseas.

"Saddam playing with boys would have no resonance in the Middle East - nobody cares," said a former agency official with experience in the Middle East. "Trying to mount such a campaign would show a total misunderstanding of the target. We always mistake our own taboos as universal when, in fact, they are just our taboos."

Anyone associated with these plans needs to be fired. These "ideas" stink for a number of reasons: 1) bin Laden loves the ladies. Anyone who has cursory knowledge of the man knows this (check out Steve Coll's excellent The Bin Ladens), 2) what was the "disgust factor"? The boy angle? Same sex desire? Both? Were the planners conflating the two?, and 3) did anyone in the CIA know of the phrase "bacha bazi"?

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COMMENTARY . . .

by John Corvino

What About Asexuality?

I hesitate to write another column about Elena Kagan, President Obama's nominee to replace Justice Stevens, and someone whose putative sexuality has been discussed ad nauseam by people (like me) who aren't in a position to know the first thing about it.

It's true that when people enter public life, they must forgo some realm of privacy. But c'mon. It's not as if Kagan is picking up chicks at the Dinah Shore Golf Weekend. For that matter, it doesn't appear that she's doing much romantically with men, either—at least not in any public way. Despite relentless media efforts to make it so, Kagan's sexuality is just not a particularly visible feature of her life.

So let's not have another column about Kagan—at least not directly. Let's instead bring up Kagan only as a springboard to something else.

In the discussions surrounding Kagan, various parties aimed to produce evidence that she was either gay, straight, or bi. She plays softball, smokes cigars, and doesn't have a man in her life (which apparently suggests that she's gay); she dated Eliot Spitzer's male friends in college (which apparently suggests that she's straight); she never dated Spitzer (which suggests that she has taste).

What no one seems to have considered is a fourth option: perhaps Kagan is neither gay, straight, nor bi. Perhaps she is asexual.

Asexuality is an unusual phenomenon where people do not experience any sexual attraction. (Or perhaps it is better understood on a continuum model, where they experience vanishingly low levels of sexual attraction.)

Asexuality does not get discussed much, mainly because it challenges our tendency to put everyone into the neat boxes we're used to. It has taken decades to accustom people to the "gay/lesbian" box, making them understand that gay people are not just perverted heterosexuals. Many people still have a hard time with the "bisexual" box. ("They're just confused; they haven't decided yet; there's no such thing.")

And some people (a minority) argue that we shouldn't have "boxes" at all, although they can be a useful way of organizing information and building community identity.

I'll be candid: I don't know much about asexuality. I have at least one friend that I think it probably describes. He's never dated either males or females and doesn't have much interest in doing so, and as far as I know, this disinterest is not the result of some emotional or physical dysfunction. He appears to view sex the way I view having children or running marathons—I can see why other people might enjoy these things, but they're just not for me. And I don't need to try either one to know this.

One thing that LGBT people ought to understand is that the boxes society wants to impose don't always fit. That's one reason why I aim to give people the benefit of the doubt when they're sharing their experience: generally speaking, every person gets to be the expert on his or her own feelings. And some people report feeling no sexual desire.

According to Asexuality.org, an online community of over 19,000 people:

"An asexual is someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are. Asexuality does not make our lives any worse or any better, we just face a different set of challenges than most sexual people. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is just beginning to be the subject of scientific research."

The website goes on to explain that asexuals have the same emotional needs as everyone else and that some date and form long-term partnerships. Those who do are just as likely to date sexual people as to date each other (indeed, probably more so, since there are far more sexual people in the world).

Thus, while many asexuals are celibate, some aren't: despite lacking sexual desire, some have sex as a way to care for non-asexual partners. (Kind of like I might go running with a partner even though I have no direct interest in running. But don't get any ideas, Mark.) By contrast, most celibates are NOT asexual: they are people with sexual desire who choose to forgo sex for some other reason.

Some other interesting points from the website:

"Many asexual people experience attraction, but we feel no need to act out that attraction sexually....Asexual people who experience attraction will often be attracted to a particular gender, and will identify as lesbian, gay, bi, or straight."

The website also explains that some asexual people experience sexual arousal whereas as others do not; some masturbate; others don't. What they all have in common is a lack of desire for partnered sexual expression. Thoughtfully, the site includes this caveat:

"Note: People do not need sexual arousal to be healthy, but in a minority of cases a lack of arousal can be the symptom of a more serious medical condition. If you do not experience sexual arousal or if you suddenly lose interest in sex you should probably check with a doctor just to be safe."

At the risk of adding more letters to the coalition of LGBTQQISS and so on, I think it's time we take the "asexual" box seriously. Check out Asexuality.org if you want to learn more.

(John Corvino, Ph.D. is an author, speaker, and philosophy professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. His column "The Gay Moralist" appears at 365gay.com, from which this is reprinted. Read more about him at www.johncorvino.com.)

Mass. AG Argues Against Federal Gay Marriage Ban

BOSTON (Observer Update) - The Massachusetts attorney general asked a judge to strike down a federal gay marriage ban, arguing it interferes with the right of states to define marriage and have those marriages acknowledged by the federal government, reported 365Gay.com.

The challenge to the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act by Attorney General Martha Coakley's office was heard in federal court in Boston. Assistant Attorney General Maura Healey argued states have historically had the right to define marriage. She said the 1996 law could result in the denial of Medicaid and other benefits to married couples in Massachusetts, where same-sex unions have been legal since 2004.

A lawyer from the U.S. Justice Department, Christopher Hall, argued the federal government has the right to set eligibility requirements for federal benefits - including requiring that those benefits only go to couples in marriages between a man and a woman. Hall also pointed to instances where the federal government has regulated the definition of marriage in certain immigration cases.

It is the second time this month that a challenge to the federal law, also known as DOMA, has been heard in a federal court. Earlier this month, gay rights groups launched their own challenge before the same judge, arguing the law unconstitutionally denies gay couples federal benefits available to other married couples. An estimated 15,000 same-sex couples have been married in Massachusetts.

Healey argued the federal law not only intrudes on an area of core state sovereignty, but "forces Massachusetts to discriminate against its own citizens."

"Never before has the federal government told a married couple that they are married under state law but not under federal law," Healey said, adding that states "have always had exclusive control over defining and regulating marriage."

Healey cited the case of a military veteran who has asked that he and his same-sex spouse be buried in a veterans' cemetery when they die, a privilege offered other married veterans. She said the state has decided to authorize the burial, even though it risks losing federal money for doing so.

"Why? Because it's the right thing to do," she said. "We are now subject to forfeiture and loss of funds."

Hall argued the law doesn't intrude on states' sovereignty because it doesn't bar them from legalizing same-sex marriages.

Under questioning from U.S. District Court Judge Joseph Tauro, however, Hall acknowledged the law sets a different marriage standard for state and federal governments.

Tauro also pressed Hall on the case of the veteran, asking if the federal government had an interest in "perpetuating heterosexuality in the graveyard."

When Hall tried to argue that the state faced no immediate harm by authorizing the burial since the Obama administration opposes the law and is pushing for its repeal, Tauro pressed him on what constituted an immediate threat.

"Do you have to wait until the dirt from the shovel is in the grave?" Tauro said.

The judge also took issue with status quo argument, saying that preserving it in 1996 could have meant preserving the right of states to define marriage and have those marriages recognized by other states and the federal government.

Tauro hasn't indicated when he would rule on the challenges.

Poet's Corner

WORDS

by Ron Rose. Tucson

At 75, they started to flow
 Words over the dam, to the paper below
 Gushing and rushing, most of the time
 On search of a word, in search of a rhyme.
 Like crystal clear water, or just plain old mud
 Words flow over the dam, part of the flood
 Reaching the banks, and filling the streams,
 I go back to my bed and return to my dreams.

Sean Hayes To Host Tony Awards

NEW YORK (Observer Update) - Sean Hayes will be the host of the Tony Awards next month.

The former "Will & Grace" actor is working on Broadway alongside Kristin Chenoweth in "Promises, Promises." He has a Tony nomination for best actor in a musical for the role.



CBS made the announcement. The network is broadcasting the Tonys live from Radio City Music Hall in New York on June 13. The musicals "Fela" and "La Cage aux Folles" dominate the nominations.

With Neil Patrick Harris as host, the Tony Awards audience last year was up 19 percent from 2008 - leading a run of awards shows that scored solidly in the ratings.

Nathan Lane Called The 'Greatest Entertainer'



NEW YORK (Observer Update) - Two-time Tony Award-winning actor Nathan Lane has been called Broadway's "greatest entertainer" in

an appreciation published in the New York Times.

The openly gay Lane, currently appearing in the critically-reviled box office smash The Addams Family, "is best savored live," writes critic Charles Isherwood. "You have to be in the room with him - even a very big room, like the Broadway palaces he now mostly plays - to feel the tickle of his genius, reports advocate.com.

And when Mr. Lane is at his delirious best, spinning funny froth from material that reads pancake flat on the page, riding waves of audience laughter with the instinctive grace of a pro surfer, there's really no room I'd rather be in."

John Waters: Reality TV Ruined Bad Taste

NEW YORK (Observer Update) - Filmmaker John Waters, famed for once-shocking films such as Pink Flamingos and Female Trouble, says reality TV has ruined bad taste, in an interview with website ExpressNightOut.

"I don't even think there is bad taste anymore,"he says. "American humor is bad taste—that's what we import, that's what television is about, reality television is based on that. I think it kind of ruined bad taste, because you're asked to feel superior to the subject matter, which I don't think I ever do.

Waters's new book, Role Models, in which he profiles people



ranging from singer Johnny Mathis to atheist leader Madalyn Murray O'Hair, is now available, reports advocate.com.



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Tammy Baldwin & Partner Split

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Observer Update) - Openly lesbian Wisconsin Representative Tammy Baldwin and her partner of nearly 15 years are splitting, Eau Claire ABC affiliate WQOW reported.



Rep. Tammy Baldwin

Baldwin, 48, became the first openly gay person elected to the House in 1998. She is also the first female representative elected from Wisconsin, reported On Top Magazine. Baldwin and her partner Lauren Azar, a member of the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, were among the first to sign up for Wisconsin's domestic partnership registry last year. The registry offers gay and lesbian couples a handful of benefits, including hospital visitation rights. Governor Jim Doyle, a Democrat, vigorously championed the measure's passage.

The Madison Democrat issued a statement through her office announcing the separation.

"Accordingly, they will also terminate their Wisconsin domestic partnership," the announcement says. "Neither Tammy nor Lauren will have any further public comment on this very private

matter."

An avid supporter of gay rights, Baldwin has been at the forefront of securing equal benefits for the spouses of gay federal employees. Her Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act has cleared committees in both houses of Congress. Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, the chief sponsor of the bill in the Senate, said last week that he expects the Senate to vote on the measure "within weeks."

Senate Confirms Lesbian U.S. Attorney

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Observer Update) - The U.S. Senate has confirmed lesbian federal prosecutor Laura Duffy as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of California in San Diego, the Los Angeles Times reports.

general crimes section. She worked for the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., for four years prior to that, reports advocate.com.

Duffy, who was nominated by the president in February, has worked in the U.S. attorney's office in San Diego since 1997, serving as assistant U.S. attorney in the narcotic enforcement section and as deputy chief of the

"In her 17 years as a federal prosecutor, she has distinguished herself battling the drug cartels along the U.S. border," Senator Barbara Boxer said in a statement. "She will be an outstanding U.S. attorney for the people of San Diego and Imperial counties."

DAILY BAR CALENDAR

SUNDAY

THE BIZ - Open 5pm - 2am It's Latin Sunday like the good ol' days. Catch DJ Dmenace spinning the best Cumbias. Get your Bucket of Beer ... 5 Bud Bottles for \$5!

COYOTE MOON PUB - Open 11am. Beer Bust Sunday - \$1 draft beers (12 oz), domestic only; \$2.25 domestic long necks. Hair of dog special \$1.50 well bloody mary, screwdriver, Cape Cod, salty dog or margarita.

IBT's - Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm \$2 Well or Domestic Beer. Karaoke on the Patio 4-8:30pm. Burger BBQ 5-8pm + \$1 pint draft. 9pm-close Karaoke inside with Troy & \$1.50 Well or Domestic Beer, \$2.50 Call or Premium Beer. DJ Hurricane on the Patio.

WOODY'S - Open 11am-2am. Peter's Build Your Own Bloody Mary Bar 11am-2pm. Happy Hour 11am-8pm (excluding special events). Full Menu Kitchen open 11am-8pm. Back Pocket Patio Bar 2pm-2am. Beer Bust 2pm-7pm. Karaoke with Michael D 9pm-Close. Drag Bingo every other Sunday 8-9pm. Check our Ad for Special Events or Parties

MONDAY

THE BIZ - Closed for employee training.

COYOTE MOON PUB - Open 3pm. Happy Hour 3 - 8 p.m. \$2.50 well, domestic longnecks & pints, \$3.50 sm. Pitcher/\$5.50 lg. Bucket o' Beer - \$10 Domestic, \$12 Imports and microbrews (4 beers to a bucket, for 2 or more people, Some brands excluded).

IBT's -Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm \$2 Well or Domestic Beer. 8pm-close \$5 Scratch Long Island Varieties. 9pm-close DJ Hurricane with "All Request Music".

WOODY'S - Open 11am-2am. Happy Hour 11am-8pm (excl spec events) Full Menu Kitchen open 11am-10pm Back Pocket Patio Bar 8pm-close. Karaoke with Michael D. 9pm-close.

TUESDAY

THE BIZ - Open 5pm-2am. Happy Hour 5-8 and Game Night all night long. Play Wii, beer pong and pool with the staff.

COYOTE MOON PUB - Open 3pm. Happy Hour 3-8. \$2.50 well, domestic longnecks & pints. Girlz Nite .75 for your favorite well drink or domestic drafts 6-8pm. Ladies only Texas Hold 'Em Poker 6 p.m. Y-Not Karaoke with Anna at 8pm. - Drink specials during karaoke \$1 Michelob Ultra or Bud Light.

IBT's - Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm, \$2 Well or Domestic Beer. 8pm-close "2'sDay" - \$2 Well or Domestic Beer. DJ Q 9pm-close.

WOODY'S - Open 11am- 2am. Happy Hour 11am-8pm (excl spec events). Full Menu Kitchen open 11am-10pm. Back Pocket Patio Bar open 8pm-close, Caribbean Party Night with Woody's own Specialty Mojitos, Caprioskas and Martinis with Tucson's Hottest Bartenders.

WEDNESDAY

THE BIZ - Open 5pm-2am. Happy Hour 5-8pm. Wild Wednesday 18+ Party with DJ White Shadow spinning the hottest Hip Hop, R&B and top 40 remix dance of today. 21+ NO COVER. 18+ \$8 Cover.

COLORS - Open 4-10pm. Happy Hour 4-7pm, \$3.75 Skyy cocktails, \$3.00 Domestic and Well. 1/2 price appetizers 4-6. Full menu served until 10pm. Nightly dinner specials.

COYOTE MOON PUB -Open 3pm. Happy Hour All Day \$2.50 well, domestic longnecks & pints, \$3.50 sm. Pitcher/\$5.50 lg. Pitchers. Boyz Night - .75 for your favorite well drink or domestic draft beer for men 6-8pm. Karaoke with Anna at 8pm drink specials during karaoke \$1 Michelob Ultra or Bud Light..

IBT's - Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm, \$2 Well or Domestic. "Diva-Licious" show w/Bunny FuFu. 11pm - -close "Reverse Happy Hour". DJ Q Inside & DJ Mike Lopez playing 80s music on the Patio.

WOODY'S - Open 11am-2am;. Happy Hour 11am-8pm excl. special events). Ful Kitchen open 11am-10pm. Back Pocket Bar open 8pm-close. Service Industry Employee Special All Day Long - \$1 off all drinks except schnapps and draft. Different Themed Underwear Party 9pm-close with \$1.00 off for those who participate (excl. Schnapps and Draft). Retro 80s & 90s Dance with DJ Clint 9 til close..

THURSDAY

THE BIZ - Open 5pm-2am. Happy Hour 5-8pm. Y-NOT Karaoke 9pm-2am with Mecu pouring the best drinks in town. Come out and play.

COYOTE MOON PUB - Open 3pm. Happy Hour 3 - 8 pm, \$2.50 well, domestic longnecks & pints, \$3.50 sm. Pitcher/\$5.50 lg. Pitcher. Latin Thursday: Latin music 8pm to close. \$2,50 well margaritas. \$3 Mexican beers, \$3.50 Jose Cuervo.

IBT's -Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm, \$2 Well or Domestic. 10pm-close "Boyz Nite Out" w/ Bartenders in their underwear. DJ Hurricane spinning Top 40 & DJ Mike Lopez on the patio. \$1.75 Long Island, \$1.50 Tequila Shots, \$3 Skyy Cape Cods and \$4 Skyy Cosmos.

WOODY'S - Open 11am-2am; Happy Hour 11am-8pm (excl Spec Events); Full Menu Kitchen open 11am-10pm. Back Pocket Patio Bar open 8pm-close. Cheap Party Day **FREE POOL**, \$1.00 PBR Longnecks, \$2.00 Tecate Longnecks. Techno and Top 40 Dance with DJ Jeff 9pm - close..

FRIDAY

THE BIZ - Open 5pm-2am. Happy Hour 5-8 pm. GoGo Fridays with 2-4-1 drinks for the ladies til midnight. Catch Shorty spinning the hottest Hip Hop, R&B and Top 40 remix dance of today.

COYOTE MOON PUB - Open 3pm. Happy Hour 3 - 8 pm, \$2.50 well, domestic longnecks & pints. \$3.50 Sm. Pitcher/\$5.50 lg. Pitcher. Shots shot specials 8-close.. Dance lessons with Lawrence at 7pm \$5 per person, Country Dancing 8:30 p.m. to close with DJ Pat.

IBT's - Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm, \$2 Well or Domestic. 9pm -close DJ Hurricane inside. 10pm-close DJ Mike Lopez with "I'm a Sexy Bitch Night" on the patio.

WOODY'S - Open 11am-2am; Happy Hour 11am-8pm (excl spec events). Full Menu Kitchen open 11am-11pm Back Pocket Patio Bar open 5pm-close. Enjoy the Live Blues/Motown/Soul sounds of Simon Crown 6-9 p.m.; Request your favorite Music Dance Night with DJ Clint 9pm-close. Monthly Birthday Party every 2nd Friday Night of the month.

SATURDAY

THE BIZ - Open 5pm - 2am. Latin night with Latin Drag Show the 1st, 3rd and 4th Saturdays of the month. DJ Dmenace spinnin' the best Cumbias, Salsa & Merengue. \$3 pitchers and \$2 Tequila shotz all night long!

COYOTE MOON PUB - Open at 2pm. Happy Hour 2-8pm, \$2.50 well, domestic longnecks & pints. \$3.50 sm. Pitcher/\$5.50 lg. Plus check out the bartenders choice of shot specials. \$5.00 cheeseburger & fries. \$3.00 Cuervo and \$4.75 Jager Bombs. Check our calendar for the Saturday Night Special Entertainment.

IBT's - Open Noon. Happy Hour Noon-8pm, \$2 Well or Domestic. 5-8pm Karaoke on the patio \$1Draft Pints. 9pm "Saturday Starrlett's" w/Bunny FuFu & Jane Starr. After the show, DJ Q spinning inside & 10pm-close, DJ Mike Lopez with the "Party on the Patio".

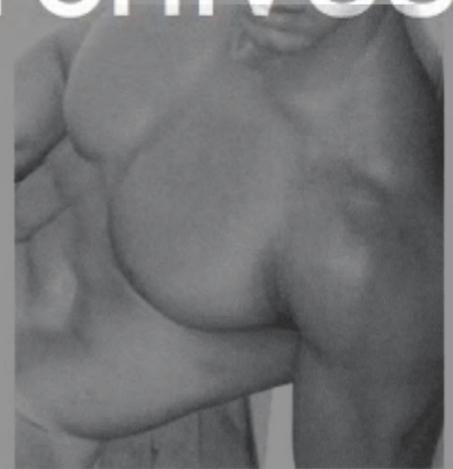
WOODY'S - Open 11am-2am; Happy Hour 10am-8pm (excl spec events); Full Menu Kitchen open 11am-11pm. Back Pocket Patio Bar open 5pm-close. Techno and Top 40 Dance with DJ Jeff 9pm til close. Check our ad for Twice-A-Month Special Events or Themed Parties.

Non-Bar Specials

JUNE 10

6-9 p.m. Men's Relationship & Couples Support Group. Meets every two weeks in central Tucson. For couples, or those who are looking for a relationship. Have fun with like-minded men! Call Marc at 881-4582 to sign up. Call or e-mail-bleu55@gmail.com at least 3 days in advance.

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Malawi President Pardons Gay Couple



LILONGWE, Malawi, (Observer Update) – Malawi’s president, Bingu wa Mutharika, has pardoned a gay couple who had been sentenced to 14 years in prison after their conviction on charges of unnatural acts and gross indecency, Reuters reported at nytimes.com.

Their sentence, the maximum penalty allowed, was a consequence of the couple’s holding a traditional engagement ceremony in an insular nation where homosexuality is largely seen as nonexistent or something that must be suppressed.

The case had drawn international attention as another example of the broad antigay sentiment in Africa and was condemned by human rights groups worldwide.

“These boys committed a crime against our culture, our religion and our laws; however, as the head of state I hereby pardon them and therefore ask for their immediate release with no conditions,” Mr. wa Mutharika said after meeting with the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, here in Malawi’s capital.

“I have done this on humanitarian grounds but this does not mean that I support this,” he added.

Last month, Mr. wa Mutharika was quoted as calling homosexuality “evil and bad before the eyes of God” and something “we Malawians just do not do.”

Mr. Ban was to address Malawi’s National Assembly later on Saturday, and was expected to ask the legislators to change the laws on homosexuality.

The couple, Steven Monjeza, 26, and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, 33, were arrested Dec. 28, two days after they threw themselves an engagement party at the Blantyre lodge where Mr. Chimbalanga worked as a cook and a housekeeper, referring to himself as “Auntie Tiwo” and insisting that he was a woman.

Hundreds of uninvited guests attended the party, and a local newspaper published an article about “gay lovebirds” taking part in Malawi’s “first recorded public activity for homosexuals.”

The couple’s conviction this month was a disappointment to the few Malawians who had openly supported them.

Gallup: Opposition To Gay Marriage Eases

NEW YORK (Observer Update) - Opposition to gay marriage has returned to 2007 levels, according to an annual Gallup Poll on American beliefs.

Gallup says that 53 percent of Americans are against gay marriage; 44 percent are in favor. Last year, 57 percent were against and 40 percent were in favor. In 2007, though, 53 percent were against and 46 percent of Americans were in favor of gay marriage.

53 percent is the lowest rate of opposition that Gallup has recorded. When Gallup first asked this question in 1996, 68 of Americans were opposed and 27 in favor.

Liberals are most supportive: 70 percent of them support gay marriage, compared to 25 percent of conservatives.

Says Gallup:

Over time, Americans have become more accepting of legal same-sex marriage, and a growing number of subgroups now show majority support for it. However, religious and conservative segments of the U.S. population remain largely opposed – even though their support for gay marriage has also increased in recent years. Because religious and conservative groups are larger than nonreligious and left-leaning groups in the United States, overall, more Americans remain opposed to, rather than in favor of, same-sex marriage.

Gay marriage is legal in the District of Columbia and five states: Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Iowa.

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