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Pride and prudishness

THE BARE CONTROVERSY OF BOSTON PRIDE '96

by Ed Boyce

BOSTON — A record estimated 200,000 people marched in and watched Boston Pride '96, but in the end, most of the the mainstream press' attention was given to two Lesbian Avengers and one short-skirted man on stilts who bared more than some wanted to see.

According to numerous witnesses, one man who walked the route on stilts, wore a short skirt with no underwear underneath, thus revealing his genitals to many spectators. In another section of the parade, a float sported by the sex-positive lesbian activist group the Lesbian Avengers had two topless women lying on a bed and engaged in (presumably) simulated sex.

Partial nudity is not new to Boston Pride, but when Mayor Menino learned of these and a few other particular incidents in this year's event, he threatened arrests of the underdressed at next year's event.

The Mayor marched in the front of the parade this year, along with the Mounted Unit of the Boston Police.

Mayoral liaison to the lesbian and gay community, John Affuso, said that he has received a lot of feedback about the nudity in the parade and most of it has been hostile.

"A lot of people expressed anger and embarrassment at the action of several people out of a over hundred thousand," said Affuso.

Affuso, who marched with the mayor, said that he did not see any of the exposed individuals in question during the parade, but had heard about it later.

The story was broken by *Boston Herald* columnist Joe Fitzgerald last Tuesday, which apparently sparked a story in the *Boston Globe* the following day.

Boston Pride Committee organizers were quick to point out that the Lesbian Avengers and the unidentified man on stilts were not registered marching contingents.



WRAP HER UP Crossida Lerman and Tracey Stedman, cloaked in the Fenway Community Health Center's banner, were among the 200,000 present at the Boston Pride Parade on June 8. Controversy erupted over the participation of others who wore considerably less. Photo by Carla Osberg.

Pride organizer Sabrina Taylor criticized the mainstream media for focusing so much on the nudity issue and so little on the fact that there were more marching contingents marching this year than ever, over 220, and that by State Police estimates, there were over 200,000 people present — also a record.

"We were buried in the paper on Sunday and once controversy hit we're big news," said Taylor.

For the rest of the week, gay activists, the mayor and several city councilors espoused various proposals to crack down on nudity at future Pride events.

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DOMA lurches forward

FRANK AND CHER'S EX-HUBBY AT ODDS

by Bob Roehr

WASHINGTON — The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) reached another milestone in its legislative journey when it passed the full House Judiciary Committee on June 12. The 20-10 vote came after two days of emotional debate.

The anti-gay act would prohibit same sex marriages for federal purposes and not require states to recognize those marriages performed in other states.

Sponsor Charles Canady (R-Florida) framed the issue in apocalyptic terms: It is "nothing less than our collective moral understanding, as expressed in the law, of the essential nature of the family, the fundamental building block of society."

Not so, argued Barney Frank (D-Massachusetts) one of three openly gay Congressmen and a member of the committee. "This is not about the defense of marriage. It's an offense to gay men and lesbians." He called the bill politically motivated.

Sonny Bono (R-California) was caught in the middle. "I'm not homophobic," said the Congressman with a lesbian daughter. "I'm not a bigot. I'm not pandering. I like Barney and I love my daughter. But I simply cannot handle it yet, Barney. I can't say to my son, 'It's okay.'"

Frank responded, "No one is asking for a stamp of approval, just let us be like anyone else. If it bothers you, turn your head."

Bono shook his in agreement. "I hear you. You're absolutely right. You just go as far as you can go. But I can't go as far as you deserve—and I'm sorry."

Two Democrats joined 18 Republicans in voting for the bill. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island) is running for the Senate seat being vacated by Claiborne Pell who also has a lesbian activist daughter. Rick Boucher (D-Virginia) has long been rumored to be gay.

Prospects for blocking DOMA in the Senate, always small, became smaller yet when one of its most liberal members, Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota) announced he would vote for the bill. The news came at a "Come Out for Wellstone" fund raiser in Minneapolis organized by lesbians and gays. The crowd reacted with hisses, some walked out, and at least one retrieved a contribution check he had written earlier.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) will try to salvage something from the likely passage of DOMA. Political director Daniel Zingale says they will attempt to add the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) to DOMA. That would protect gays and lesbians in the workplace.

Oral sex may pose HIV risk

by Paul Recer

AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Oral sex may not be safe sex, despite the belief of some that it poses a small risk of spreading the AIDS virus, researchers reported today.

The study, which involved exposing monkeys to an AIDS virus in controlled laboratory experiment, showed that viral infection occurred through oral exposure with fewer virus particles than in controlled experiments of rectal exposure.

In effect, said Dr. Ruth M. Ruprecht, "this study shows that people need to know that oral sex is not safe sex."

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BOSTON PRIDE, CONTINUES FROM COVER

Most of the partial nudity at Boston Pride traditionally has consisted of lesbians who go topless. It is not illegal in Massachusetts for women to be topless in public. But what is illegal is any exposure of the genitalia, according to Boston attorney and longtime activist Don Gorton.

Gorton denounced the threats of arrests next year as an over reaction that is not supported by current law and pose significant First Amendment issues.

"The calls for arrests are clearly unwarranted," said Gorton.

"The fact that we're talking about misdemeanors as opposed to felonies means that police authority is restricted in any event; The most the police could do to the expression of any exposure is to issue a ticket."

Affuso suggested that it should be incumbent on the Pride Committee to prevent such displays next year, a task that the Pride Committee says it rejects as being out of their mission.

"The onus is going to fall on the Pride Committee to figure this out," said Affuso. "Otherwise, it's going to put the Police Department in the uncomfortable place of having to take the initiatives on this."

Taylor told *in newsweekly* that the Pride Committee would rather not act in the capacity of the clothing police.

"I believe our current guidelines are fine," said



The Lesbian Avengers' sexually explicit float raised the hackles of the Boston Pride Committee and the Mayor.
Photo by Carla Osberg

Taylor. "If someone does something illegal, that's up to the police to deal with."

Gorton told *in newsweekly* that he is leery of any attempt to enforce a dress code at Pride.

"I'm concerned that the call for decorum, which is reasonable, go no further in restricting the expression of gay and lesbian love that is so appropriate at Pride," said Gorton.

"We need to be careful that free expression is preserved to the fullest extent allowable under law so that any restrictions not suppress the expression of the diversity of our community."