



Chicago Free Press | A Common Voice for a Diverse Community | March 11, 2010 | Vol. II, No. 27



BURRIS JOINS FIGHT TO END "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL"



Sondheim comes to Chicago PAGE 5

Washington DC
legalizes gay
marriage

page 7



"Brother" to
brother: an
interview with
playwright Tarell
Alvin McCraney

page 17



Bebe Zahara-
Benet's "Drag
Race" coverage

page 18



"A
Separate
Peace"

page 20



This week's
Click! in
FreeTime
page 15

Local

Burris joins fight to end "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

By Matt Alderton

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Because it was created by a Chicago-born sociologist, "don't ask, don't tell" began at the urging of an Illinois native. It seems only appropriate, then, that it end at the urging of another, which is exactly what will happen if Sen. Roland Burris (D-Ill.) has his way.

Burris, a native of downstate Centralia, Ill., joined a cadre of five senators last week in introducing legislation to end the 17-year-old ban on gays and lesbians serving openly in the U.S. military. Announced on March 3, the so-called "Military Readiness Enhancement Act" is the Senate's first attempt at repealing DADT. Co-sponsored by Burris—along with Sens. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.), Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Mark Udall (D-Colo.)—it stipulates that the Department of Defense "may not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation against any member of the armed forces or against any person seeking to become a member of the armed forces."

"This law is totally unfair," Burris told CFP during a sit-down interview at the Center on Halsted in Lakeview. "I'm old enough to know that it's time for us to recognize individuals who can make a contribution to America, and that it should not be based on the color of anybody's skin or anybody's sexual orientation."

DADT was created by the late Dr. Charles Moskos, a Northwestern University professor and military policy adviser who coined the original phrase, "don't ask, don't tell, don't seek, don't flaunt," which was shortened to "don't ask, don't tell." Since its enactment under President Bill Clinton in 1993, nearly 14,000 service men and women have been discharged under the law. Meanwhile, more than 65,000 gay Americans are estimated to still be serving in the military.

"I support [repealing] DADT because I know what happened with service in World War II and on, when blacks weren't allowed to serve in the military," Burris said. "My uncles and uncles in law were brought up seeing how blacks were used in the military—those who could get in. They used them in the Navy as cooks and in the Army as ditch diggers and truck drivers. That's all they could do. And in 1947, when Truman issued his executive order saying, 'We're going to break down the barriers,' there was a lot of resistance to that. But look where we are today. Who do we have as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff? It's a black man. Who do we have as president of the United States? A black man."

Although President Obama, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen all have expressed their support for repealing DADT, his bill faces a tough fight in the Sen-

ate, according to Burris, who said he needs 60 votes in order to pass it. In an attempt to get them, he and his colleagues have included in the bill a compromise: While the bill would prevent military discharges based on sexual orientation from the date of enactment—and instructs that any previously discharged service member not be prohibited from re-enlistment—it also gives military leaders up to 15 months to review and recalibrate internal policies and procedures before it's enacted.

"It's an assessment period for the military," Burris said, adding that a rushed repeal—without proper education and preparation—could incite violence against gay and lesbian service members. "We're going to have to educate and prepare members of the military so we can do this with the least amount of resistance and fallout as possible."

Although he's been a vocal supporter of GLBT rights during his time in office—last year he co-sponsored the Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Act, which functions as a federal hate crimes bill, as well as the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act, which recognizes domestic partnerships among federal workers for the purpose of awarding employee benefits—Burris wasn't always so tolerant of gays and lesbians. "I came up a country boy using all those slang terms and laughing at people who were homosexual, the same way people used to laugh and call us names because of the color of our skin," he said. "But then I got educated. You mature and you say, 'Wait a minute, that isn't right; these people have rights.'"

While he's not running for re-election in November, Burris said he hopes Congress will vote to repeal DADT while he's still in office. And if it doesn't, he's promised to continue advocating for GLBT rights. "The fact that I'm not running again has no bearing on my position whatsoever," he said. "Even if I were in the middle of a campaign, I would go down to my hometown of Centralia, Ill.—where we've got a lot of conservative people—and I would stand up and say I support [repealing DADT]. Because if a bullet's coming at you in Iraq or Afghanistan, that bullet isn't going to determine your sexual orientation. That bullet will hit you right in the head and kill you dead as a doornail, whether you're gay or straight. When we're in the foxhole together, I don't care what you are if you're going to be able to shoot back and save my life."

DC legalizes gay marriage

Jessica Gresko

AP WRITER

One gay couple met on a Star Trek fan site, another dancing at a country western bar. Some have been together for months, others more than a decade.

About 150 pairs had something in common last Wednesday, though, applying for wedding licenses on the first day same-sex unions became legal in the nation's capital.

The mood at the marriage bureau inside the city's Moultrie Courthouse was celebratory. Couples clapped, called out "Congratulations" and cupcakes and tulips were handed out. One family said it was important to show up the first day.

"It sets a good example," said district resident Christine Burkhardt, who married Denise Gavin in a ceremony in 2006 in Washington.

The pair stood in line rocking their twin 4-month-olds, Milo and Josephine. "We'll be able to tell them that we all went together as a family."

The District of Columbia became the sixth place in the country permitting same-sex unions. Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont also issue same-sex couples licenses.

Because of a processing period of three business days for all marriage license applicants, the couples won't be able to marry until this Tuesday. That's the day they can pick up their licenses.

Sinjoyla Townsend, 41, and her partner of 12 years, Angelisa Young, 47, claimed the first spot in line just after 6 a.m. The district residents are already domestic partners but wanted to marry.

"It's like waking up Christmas morning," said Young, who teared up when she sat down to process their paperwork. "It's really like a dream come true."

Most couples who applied for licenses were from the district and nearby Virginia and Maryland, which said last week it will recognize same-sex unions performed elsewhere until the state Legislature or courts

decide otherwise. One couple got on the road at 4 a.m. to drive from West Virginia and another couple was from Delaware. Some said it was symbolic to get married in the nation's capital, but for many D.C. is simply home.

A number of couples worried that the licenses would be short-lived as in California, where same-sex marriage was legal for a time but later overturned by voters.

In D.C., the marriage bureau prepared for the day by making license applications gender-neutral, asking for the name of each "spouse" rather than the "bride" and "groom." The bureau also brought in temporary employees to help its regular staff. Couples got numbers when they arrived to help with crowd control.

Normally, the bureau handles 10 applications a day. Last Wednesday it was 151, though at least four heterosexual couples did show up, including Matt Lawson, 30, and Christine Vander Molen, 27.


They are getting married next weekend and couldn't wait any longer to apply for a license. Vander Molen said she didn't mind being the "odd couple out" and found it funny when one person looked at them quizzically and asked, "You two are getting married to each other?"

The gay marriage law was introduced in the 13-member D.C. Council in October and had near-unanimous support from the beginning. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty signed it in December, but because Washington is a federal district, the law had to undergo a congressional review period that expired March 2.



Opponents have so far been unsuccessful in challenging the law, but they are still attempting to overturn the bill in court. That worries Eric North and Tom French, both 45, who were at the courthouse.

"We want to get in when we can," French said.

"I want to be able to say I'm married," North added.



**Progressive
chiropractic**
PHYSICAL THERAPY • MASSAGE
ACUPUNCTURE • HOMEOPATHY

Dr. Robert DiDomenico Dr. Richard Ezgur

2835 N. Sheffield (@Diversey) - 773-525-9355
711 W. North (@Halsted) - 312-664-9060

www.progressivechiropractic.com