

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

August 7, 1998

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am deeply disappointed that the District of Columbia Appropriations bill passed by the House imposes unacceptable restrictions on our nation's capital city.

Early this morning, the House adopted a series of objectionable amendments. They include provisions to establish a school voucher program that would drain resources and attention from the hard work of reforming the District's public schools, to prohibit adoptions in the District by unmarried or unrelated couples, and to prohibit the use of Federal and local funds for needle exchange programs or to deny any funding in the bill to private agencies that operate such programs. These measures all undermine local control, are unacceptable and should be dropped before Congress completes action on the bill.

I am concerned that other shortcomings in this bill undermine the District of Columbia's autonomy by imposing severe restrictions on local operations. For example, this bill would also bar the use of local District funds for abortions and strip local funds from the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, which are a foundation of local government.

I am also disappointed that the House fails to fund the much-needed economic revitalization plan for the District of Columbia. I urge Congress to provide appropriate resources for the economic development plan in order to capitalize the locally-chartered National Capital Revitalization Corporation, which is key to the future economic growth of the nation's capital.

At a time when the District of Columbia has made enormous strides toward financial responsibility and the eventual return of self-government, it is wrong for Congress to turn the clock backward by imposing unwarranted restrictions on broad policy making and on day-to-day decision making at the local level.

TALKING POINTS
LARGENT AMENDMENT TO DC APPROPRIATIONS BILL
August 6, 1998

- The Largent Amendment seeks to prevent unmarried couples in D.C. from jointly adopting or becoming foster parents. The Administration strongly opposes this measure. Not only is it being raised in an inappropriate forum and context for an important policy debate on child welfare, but it would interfere unnecessarily in casework decisions and matters of state and local policy. Moreover, the Administration has consistently objected to micro managing District issues in the Appropriations process.
- The Administration has worked in a good faith, bipartisan way to improve the child welfare system and promote adoption. Last year, the President signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which was crafted with bipartisan support (Republican Members of Congress spoke at the White House bill signing ceremony). This scheme of attaching an amendment to an appropriations bill flies in the face of that spirit and is similar to other inappropriate efforts by some in Congress to carry out a social agenda by first targeting the District of Columbia.
- By interfering with critical casework decisions where the best interests of the child should govern decision-making, this amendment is the wrong approach to strengthening our child welfare system --a system that desperately needs more Americans to open their homes and hearts to abused and neglected children under the protection of our child welfare system. Today, nationwide, 500,000 children are in foster care; nearly 100,000 of these children are legally free for adoption, and waiting for a permanent, loving home. Recruiting adoptive and foster parents is an important and often difficult effort.
- The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act makes it very clear that the health and safety of children are the paramount concerns of our foster care system --local agencies should make decisions on that basis without unnecessary interference and prohibitions by the federal government.
- The D.C. child welfare system needs improving, and the Administration is willing to work with Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to strengthen this system in good faith --this scheme is not a good faith effort, and we strongly oppose it.

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THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD STAY OUT OF FAMILY LAW DECISIONS

Congress has traditionally stayed out of family law, recognizing that state and local governments are better suited to address those issues. The ability of parents and trained professionals to make a decision, on a case-by-case basis, based on the best interests of the child, should be preserved. Although unsuccessful during the last three District of Columbia appropriations cycles, Congressman Jay Dickey, or another Member of Congress, may again introduce legislative language to the D.C. appropriations bill that would interfere with parents and trained professionals' ability to make decisions in adoptions involving unmarried couples.

Such congressional action would place D.C.'s children at risk:

- Under the proposed amendment, single DC residents would still have the ability to adopt children. The goal of the amendment is to legally ban unmarried couples from adopting children together. While both parties of an unmarried couple would obviously still serve as parents to the child, the second parent would have no legal responsibility or protections for the child, including financial. In unfortunate circumstances, such as a break up or the death of a legal parent, the non-legal parent would have no legal responsibility to care for the child.
- Having two legal parents is in the best interest of the child because it gives children greater financial security and ensures that the adopted child can receive health and other benefits from both parents.
- As of June 22, 1998, there were 3,600 children in the D.C. foster care system waiting to be adopted. It is hard enough to find good homes for children. It would be an outrage to make children languish in institutions at great cost to taxpayers when they can have caring, loving homes.
- The American Psychological Association reports that studies comparing groups of children raised by gays and by non-gay parents find no developmental differences between the two groups of children in their intelligence, social and psychological adjustment, popularity with friends, development of sex role identity or development of sexual orientation. In fact, in 48 states and the District of Columbia, lesbian and gay people are permitted to adopt when a judge finds that the adoption is in the child's best interest.



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Family Issues

AMERICANS AGREE: PARENTS SHOULD BE JUDGED ON THEIR PARENTING SKILLS NOT ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Lesbian and gay Americans are having families and raising happy, healthy and well-cared-for children. Some political groups on the extreme right are pushing for the government to intervene and make new laws against gay parents raising children. New research shows that voters overwhelmingly agree that they do not want politicians and the government making sweeping new regulations about these important family issues.*

- Americans categorically reject the notion that the government should take a greater role in deciding who can and cannot adopt children. By a margin of nearly four to one (74 to 19 percent), voters say we should keep the system we currently have, rather than allow the federal or state government to take a greater role. More than three-quarters of voters (78 percent) believe that the issue of gay men and lesbians adopting children should be decided on a case-by-case basis rather than by the federal (10 percent) or state (8 percent) government.
- Voters understand that gay people can be good parents. A total of 75 percent of Americans agree that lesbians and gay men can be just as good parents as heterosexuals — and 52 percent strongly agree. In addition, 56 percent believe that gay men and lesbians should be allowed to be parents.
- Voters do not want to make it illegal for lesbian and gay Americans to adopt children. More than half of voters (55 percent) would oppose a law that would prevent gay men and lesbians from adopting children. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) would oppose a law making it illegal for gay and lesbian couples to jointly adopt children.
- Americans are looking for a rational discussion about parenting skills and the best interests of the child on a case-by-case basis, not an emotional debate over sexual orientation. The majority of Americans believe that parents should be judged more on their parenting skills than on their sexual orientation. Nearly three in five voters (59 percent) say that otherwise qualified parents should not be disqualified solely on the basis of their sexual orientation, and 54 percent think that sexual orientation should not be the primary factor in deciding if a person is fit to be a parent. Americans agree that there are many more important qualities than sexual orientation in deciding whether or not a person is a fit parent. Parenting qualities such as love, patience, time to spend with kids, energy and financial security were far more often cited as important.
- Given the importance of good parenting to the future of America's families, it is understandable that voters do not see the issue of adoption as a "right" for homosexual or heterosexual couples. This bodes well for lesbian and gay parents raising children — whose fitness for adoption, like that of other parents, is best judged on their merits in each particular family situation.

FAMILY FACTS

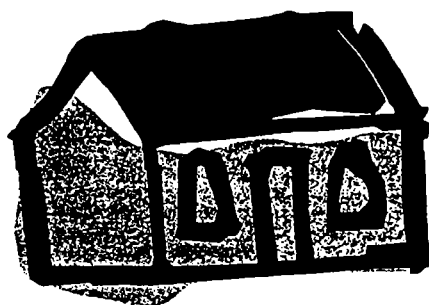
The following facts are important in helping people see beyond misinformation, overcome their fears and keep their focus on the family issues that should be at center of a rational discussion:

- Today, more than 500,000 children living in foster care or institutions need loving homes.
- Gay and lesbian parents possess just as good parenting skills as heterosexual parents. There is no evidence that the parenting skills of gay and lesbian parents differ significantly from those of heterosexual parents.¹
- Studies have shown that children raised by gay or lesbian parents are no more likely to grow up gay or lesbian than other children.²
- Gay and lesbian parents raising children provide good and loving homes, and their children lead just as healthy and productive lives as children raised by heterosexual parents.³
- In 48 of our 50 states, qualified lesbians and gay men are already among the parents raising children through adoption.

Second-Parent Adoption:

- Ensures that the adopted child can receive health benefits from both of his or her parents.
- Gives the child greater financial security.
- Increases stability in the child's life by establishing a legal relationship between the child and his or her parents.

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- * Polling results are from a national survey of 812 registered voters conducted Aug. 20 - 30, 1997, by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates on behalf of the Human Rights Campaign. Overall margin of error is plus or minus 3.4 percent.
- ¹ Patterson, C. J. (1996). Lesbian and gay parenthood. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of Parenting* (pp. 255-274). Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Patterson, C. J. (1995). Lesbian mothers, gay fathers and their children. In A. R. D'Augelli and C. J. Patterson (Eds.), *Lesbian, gay and bisexual identities across the lifespan: Psychological perspectives* (pp. 262-290). New York: Oxford University Press.
- ² Bailey, J. M., Bobrow, D., Wolfe, M., & Mikach, S. (1995). Sexual orientation of adult sons of gay fathers. *Developmental Psychology*, 31 (1), 124-129.
- Golombok, S., & Tasker, F. (1996). Do parents influence the sexual orientation of their children? Findings from a longitudinal study of lesbian families. *Developmental Psychology*, 32 (1), 3-11.
- ³ "Not a single study has found children of gay or lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents. Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psychosocial growth." American Psychological Association. (1995). *Lesbian and gay parenting: A resource for psychologists*. Washington, DC: Author, p. 8.



Family Matters

National Survey on Gay Family Issues Will Help Inform the Debate

By Mark J. Penn & Bernard A. Whitman

More than ever, gay and lesbian Americans are having families with children, who become part of these families in many ways. Institutions on the extreme right try to frame gay family issues only in terms of adoption, where there is a perception that gay men and lesbians are vulnerable. New research shows that even on that topic, there are key messages that resonate with the country.

"The issue of adoption is best decided by parents and professionals on a case-by-case basis, not by politicians or the government." So say the American people, according to a public opinion survey conducted in August by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, on behalf of the Human Rights Campaign. In this groundbreaking study of 812 registered voters across the United States, we found Americans do not want to see Congress, state legislatures or bureaucrats making broad rules and regulations about who should and should not be able to adopt children.

Americans categorically reject the notion that the government should take a greater role in deciding who can and cannot adopt children, with 74 percent saying we should keep the system we currently have, rather than allow the government to take a greater role (19 percent). More than three-quarters of voters (78 percent) believe that the issue of gay men and lesbians adopting children should be decided on a case-by-case basis rather than by the federal (10 percent) or state (8 percent) government. And nearly four in five (79 percent) think the issue of gays and lesbians adopting children should be decided by parents and professionals rather than by judges (9 percent) or politicians (3 percent).

Voters do not want to make adoptions by single gays and lesbians illegal. More than half (55 percent) would oppose a law that would prevent gay men or lesbians from adopting children, and nearly two-

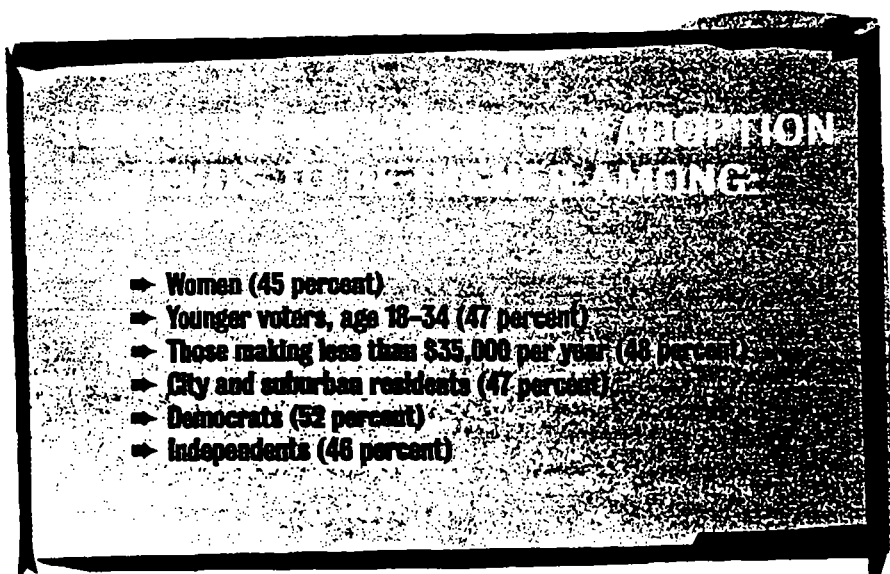
thirds (63 percent) oppose making joint adoption among gay and lesbian couples illegal.

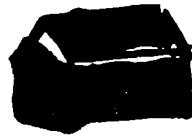
Fundamentally, Americans do not see the issue of gay adoption as a "rights" issue. In fact, by a margin of five to one, voters overwhelmingly tell us that adoption is not a right (19 percent) at all but a privilege (81 percent). Thus, the issue is not one of comparing heterosexuals' "right" to adopt children to homosexuals' "right"—few Americans believe that such a right exists. For either side to view this battle as a rights issue completely misses the point.

Instead, voters are looking for a rational discussion about parenting skills and the best interests of the child, not an emotional debate over sexual orientation. The majority of Americans believe that prospective parents should be judged more on their parenting skills than on their sexual orientation. Nearly three in five voters (59 percent) say that people should not be disqualified from becoming parents solely on the basis of their sexual orientation, and 54 percent think that sexual orientation should not be the primary factor in deciding if a person is fit to be a parent. In fact, only one in three (34 percent) cite sexual orientation as "extremely important" in deciding whether or not a person is a fit parent, the same percentage who cited "financial security."

Moreover, voters reject the notion that gays cannot be good parents. A total of 52 percent strongly agree that gays and lesbians can be just as good parents as heterosexuals, and 56 percent believe gay men and lesbians should be allowed to be parents.

But as we have seen before with issues involving gays and lesbians, opinions are fluid and subject to shift by providing people with true information or, conversely, by appealing to their fears, misconceptions and homophobia. In discussing this issue, the gay and lesbian community





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should stick to the facts, and avoid the polarizing rhetoric of "rights," however justified, that has consumed so many recent efforts. When the issue of gay adoption arises, gays and lesbians and their supporters must clearly and calmly demonstrate the facts of the matter to the community at large — particularly the tens of millions of married couples living in the suburbs raising kids of their own.

By communicating these points in the short term, the gay and lesbian community has an excellent opportunity to build support for adoption. But the data strongly suggest that the real key to acceptance and equality lies in educating the public about what it's really like to be gay. We asked a series of questions concerning people's general beliefs about gays and lesbians and then examined the effect of these opinions on support for gay adoption. The finding is overwhelmingly clear: Americans who are better informed and have a more accurate picture of lesbians

and gays generally are far more likely to be supportive.

Thus, it becomes increasingly clear that in addition to meeting today's challenges — whether it be adoption, employment discrimination or hate crimes — gays and lesbians as individuals and as a community must recommit themselves to dispelling the long-running myths and misconceptions about what it is to be gay or lesbian. It is only through such a long-term educational effort — friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, parent to parent — that gays and lesbians will achieve true equality. ■

Penn is a founding partner of Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates. Whitman is executive vice president of Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates.

THE FACTS OF THE MATTER

Today, more than 500,000 children are living in foster care or institutions need loving homes.

Numerous studies have shown that gay and lesbian parents provide as good parenting skills as heterosexual parents.

Studies have shown that children raised by gay or lesbian parents are no more likely to become gay or lesbian than children raised by heterosexual parents.

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June 15, 1998


Here is the list of riders the Conservative Action Team (CATs) would like to be included in the FY 99 DC Appropriation Bill. They were detailed in a letter from Rep. Tom Coburn (R-OK) to DC Subcommittee Chair Charles Taylor.

- 1) Continue last year's funding prohibition on domestic partnership.
 - 2) Continue a funding ban on abortions
 - 3) Retain last year's house-passed language which overturns Davis-Bacon and establishes school vouchers
 - 4) Add a prohibition on unmarried couples adopting
 - 5) Add parental notification for abortions for those less than age 18
 - 6) Add a ban on funding DC's needle exchange program
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