



**THE BANNER OF THE DESERT**  
**THE NEWSLETTER OF PFLAG PALM SPRINGS/DESERT COMMUNITIES CHAPTER**

Our Twenty-Third Year, February 2019, Volume 24, No. 2

**PFLAG MEETING**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY, 17 – 2:30 p.m.**

**CATHEDRAL CITY LIBRARY, COMMUNITY ROOM**

Meeting Facilitator: Dan Smith

Discussion Topic: Black History Month

Some Experiences in the African-American and the LGBTQI Community and How They May Intersect.  
PFLAG member, Stuart Huggins, will be one of our speakers.

Light refreshments provided by Jim Goeddert and Rick Swisher

Please volunteer to bring light refreshments to a future meeting. Email: [info@PSPflag.org](mailto:info@PSPflag.org)

**FIRST THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH:**

**PFLAG and TCC Support Group for Family Members of Transgender and Gender Non-Binary People.**

**Location: Transgender Health and Wellness Center**

**35-325 Date Palm, Suite 107, Cathedral City.**

**February 7, 7 p.m.** Meeting facilitator: Susan Thronson

**March 7, 7 p.m.** Special Guest: Tori Stjohns,

Desert Sands Unified School District Consultant for Student Assistance Program.

Topic: Navigating Public Schools for Transgender/Gender Non-Binary Students.

**A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR**

*– Mike Balasa*

I remember a few years ago thinking that equality and acceptance of LGBTQI people was progressing at an unstoppable pace. Now the behaviors of our national leaders are reversing all the gains and the feeling of security we once had. The people I know in PFLAG and other supporters are anxious and worried. I tried to think about what specifically is bothering me the most about the climate in the country. There were several points that I found recurring in my thoughts.

The most distressing problem for me is the divisiveness that has arisen in this country. There have always been differences between people of different political leanings, but it was always more intellectual and philosophical than emotional. Now the division has taken on a strident level of hate and distrust. The hate is coming from both sides: those with a liberal leaning feel threatened and angry and those with conservative views believe they are saving the country from lawlessness and economic ruin. The news this past month of the disturbance in Washington D.C. between students from a Catholic high school and a Native American elder exemplify the situation. It was a complicated event with the involvement of the high school boys, Native Americans and a group of Black Hebrews. People saw the videos of the encounter and interpreted it according to their preconceived views.

The next distressing development is the President and his political allies catering to the anti-LGBTQI religious right. The newest Supreme Court Justice was chosen for his religious views rather than his character or accomplishments. Policies are coming from the White House to reverse equality and prohibiting trans people from serving the military. The extreme religious right's rhetoric includes threats of jail and murder against LGBTQI people. The extremists feel free to vent their most hateful convictions.

We know that the majority in this country do not support the hate coming from the far right. We must never give up hope and involvement

### **TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ALLOWS SOUTH CAROLINA TO WAIVE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION REQUIREMENTS**

The US Department of Health and Human Services waived anti-discrimination requirements for a federally funded child-welfare agency, Miracle Hill Ministries. Under the waiver, Miracle Hill will now be allowed to deny placing foster care children in homes that do not share Miracle Hill's theology. In effect, any Jewish, Muslim or lesbian and gay couple would be disqualified as foster parents. The waiver was requested by South Carolina Governor, Henry McMaster. McMaster asked for the waiver citing the Trump Administration's law, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. This act has since been used by religious based health care providers to deny services to persons who do not adhere to certain religious dogmas, despite the funding with taxpayers' dollars.

Cathryn Oakley, the State Legislative Director and Senior Counsel for HRC, commented on the waiver: "Every decision that is made by a provider of child welfare services must be grounded in doing what is the best interest of the child, period. Providing care for these kids is critically important, and too many kids languish in the foster care system because there aren't enough foster and adoptive parents for each child. Allowing a federal contractor the ability to refuse to work with qualified prospective parents, limiting the pool of prospective parents even further, is directly counter to the best interest of the children waiting for families. The Federal Government has a compelling interest in ensuring that taxpayers aren't footing the bill for taxpayer-funded discrimination. This waiver is unconscionable, in no small part because it prioritizes federal contractors over kids in need of families."

Governor McMaster insists that allowing Miracle Hill to discriminate was necessary to keep them in business. Miracle Hill accounts for 15% of foster care placements in South Carolina. He claimed that asking Miracle Hill to work with people with whom they had theological differences was making their continuance difficult. The Governor said President Trump deserved credit for making sure South Carolina keeps as many groups as it can in business to help place foster children. He continued, "As Americans, our fundamental right to practice religion, regardless of our faith will not be in jeopardy under this administration." Under the waiver Miracle Hill must refer rejected couples to other agencies in the state.

### **SUPREME COURT ALLOWS TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TO BAR TRANSGENER PERSONS FROM SERVING IN THE MILITARY**

The U.S. Solicitor General, Noel J. Francisco, represented the Trump Administration appeared before the Supreme Court to argue the urgent necessity to allow the ban on transgender enlistment in the military. Francisco argued, "It involves an issue of imperative public importance: the authority of the U.S. military to determine who may serve in the nation's armed forces." The ban was challenged in a circuit court and the judge ruled that the ban was discriminatory and ordered it lifted. The Ninth Circuit Court is expected to rule in the near future and uphold the ruling that the ban is illegal. On January 4th, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the ban could remain in effect until a final determination is made. The ruling by the Supreme Court upholds the ruling of the Court of Appeals and the ban will stay in place until a final ruling is determined in the future. Justices Ginsburg, Breyer, Sotomayer and Kagan dissented on the ruling.

The policy prohibits people identifying with a gender different from their biological sex from enlisting in a U.S. military service; however, the policy makes an exception for several hundred transgender individuals currently serving and for any persons who agree to serve while identifying with their biological sex. Lawyers for LGBTQI organizations fighting the ban make the argument that there is no vital or urgent reason for the ban. Just the fact that there are hundreds of transgender persons serving openly in the military at this time, proves that it does not affect military preparation or discipline. The brief states, "Transgender people have been serving openly in all branches of the U.S. military since June 2016, including on active duty in combat zones. Transgender individuals have been permitted to enlist in the military since June 2018. The hundreds of people grandfathered in under the new policy cannot be squared with the claims of urgency....."

### **SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOL LGBTQI CHILDREN FINDS A SURPRISING LACK OF SUPPORT**

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation and the University of Connecticut in partnership with a number of California educational associations conducted a study to determine if LGBTQI youth had adequate support in the California public schools. Over 1,700 youth participated in the study ranging in age from 13 to 17. Despite the fact that California has progressive laws to support and protect LGBTQI youth, the survey found that many youth continue to feel isolated and unprotected.

The survey reported the following:

10% of LGBTQI youth say all of their school staff are supportive.

32% of LGBTQI youth feel safe in the classroom.

50% of all LGBTQI youth were teased or bullied because of their perceived or actual orientation.

28% of LGBTQI youth were threatened with violence.

43% of transgender youth were unable to use the bathroom or locker room that matches their gender identity.

Ellen Kahn, HRC Foundation Director summarized the findings, "This groundbreaking data reveals that the cards remain stacked against LGBTQI youth in California - and especially so for LGBTQI youth of color and transgender and gender - expansive youth. However, despite these challenges, many LGBTQI students are taking action and advocating for inclusivity and equality in schools. As advocates, parents, teachers and school administrators and school board members, we must follow their lead by implementing recommendations in this report, including ensuring curricula are LGBTQI inclusive and supporting LGBTQI student clubs, to create safe, affirming and welcoming schools."

A Riverside school counselor wrote that he always considered himself supportive of LGBTQI students, but found that students weren't aware that he was a safe person to talk to, "This was evident the day I placed a Safe Space sticker in my office. Within days, several students were sharing and recounting stories of rejection and harassment that no child should ever experience alone. Every student should know they have support from a caring adult, an educator. I now know that calling myself an ally without action isn't enough."

### **A GOOD MAN AND A GAY ONE, TOO**

*– Bob Warburton*

The Valley was a little different in 1995. In Palm Springs PRIDE was a smallish affair that took place over the Memorial Day weekend in Demuth Park. There were no LGBTQIA Political Clubs except for a mixed party PAC that my spouse Bob and I belonged to. The first and only out Gay elected official was Cathedral City Council Member Greg Pettis. During the Halloween Weekend our PAC was scheduled to register voters on Arenas Road between the two Gay Bars, Street and Rainbow Cactus, with Greg. I was excited as Greg was the only out Gay official in the Valley, and I wanted to meet him. After sitting next to him for

three hours that afternoon, we had spoken only four or five sentences to each other. Pettis had not spoken much to anyone.

Greg only spoke when he had something to say, and luckily he was smart as a whip and usually knew more than most and had plenty to say. I was shocked when the newly sworn in Mayor of Cathedral City died in January at the age of 63. I knew he had undergone gastric bypass surgery, and we missed him at the State Democratic Executive Board in mid-November, but I just assumed he would be fine. I had never known anyone to have difficulty with these procedures. I was very proud of the care he was taking of his body. Even though he was overweight, he had a trainer, and he walked and exercised all the time.

I do not think Greg slept. He had meetings at 7:30 or 8 A.M. every day and answered my emails as late as at 2 A.M. Like most of our elected officials to "small" offices like school board or councils, they work at a full time job and then do their government jobs. He was on all sorts of boards and committees, mainly representing Cathedral City and Coachella Valley. When his parents grew older, of course he moved them in with him. When someone wanted to run for office anywhere, he helped. Early in his Council life he "wore a wire" to help convict persons who were trying to get a favorable City ruling.

Through all this Pettis was always a Gay man. He dated openly and openly supported the LBGTQIA Community whenever there was need. Greg did this before it was cool. Once when he ran he was scurrilously charged as a pederast with no foundation. How homophobes can still fling that vile chestnut I will never know. He pushed for the City to support Gay Marriage and recently led the way for Sanctuary City status in his City and elsewhere. There was no one who did more for Cathedral City or for our Community, period.

#### **DESIGNATING GENDER ON BIRTH CERTIFICATES AND DRIVER'S LICENSES BECOMING AN ISSUE**

New York City joined the states of California, New Jersey, Oregon and Washington in allowing gender identity on birth certificates to indicate "none of the above". Children at birth often have indeterminate genitalia and delaying a gender identification until the child can choose gender saves a myriad of problems later in life. Also, older children and adults who identify as transgender may wish to have their gender identification corrected on birth certificates and other identification documents. At this time New York only recognizes male or female designation on driver's licenses and the federal government for passports and Social Security benefits also recognizes only the M or F choice. Maine and Washington D.C. allows a third gender only on driver's licenses.

Across the country there is a patchwork of accommodations for transgender persons. Discrepancies between the sex on someone's official documents and gender presented in person can lead to discrimination and harassment. This year, California began issuing non-binary drivers licenses.

*(more on next page)*

**DEAR FRIENDS — IT IS TIME TO JOIN OR RENEW PFLAG MEMBERSHIP**

If you would like to join PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities, print and mail the form below or join online at [www.pspflag.org/join donate.html](http://www.pspflag.org/join donate.html)

All our expenses go to furthering our mission. Our expenses are for materials that we supply to individuals, schools and supporting organizations; the information phone line, newsletter production, support to local schools' Gay Straight Alliances; and, many other occasional expenses such as the Pride Parade.

When you join and support the local PFLAG chapter with a membership of \$30 or more, we send your name and a portion of the fees (\$15) to PFLAG National, making you a member of both the National and our local chapter of PFLAG. You will receive all publications and notices.

Members sometimes don't realize that if you join National PFLAG directly you are not on the membership rolls of the PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities. PFLAG National does not notify us that you joined, and they do not share any of the membership fee.

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Donation: Family Membership \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$30 \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to PFLAG and mail to:  
PFLAG 611 S. Palm Canyon Drive 7-262, Palm Springs, CA 92264

---

PFLAG INFORMATION LINE: (760) 202-4430  
EMAIL: [INFO@PSPFLAG.ORG](mailto:INFO@PSPFLAG.ORG)

**Chapter Officers**

President: Mike Balasa, Vice-president: Carol Balasa, Secretary: Christine Hammond,  
Treasurer: Peter East, Directors: Dan Smith, Sly Zelnys

**ANOTHER WAY TO SUPPORT PFLAG**

Every time you shop online using AmazonSmile, PFLAG Palm Springs-Desert Communities will receive a donation from the AmazonSmile Foundation.

at [www.Smile.Amazon.com](http://www.Smile.Amazon.com)