

NATION

Gay-rights movement regrouping, activist says

By J. Jennings Moss
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The homosexual political movement is in a period of reorganization in the aftermath of its national March on Washington and its defeat over the issue of ending the military's ban on homosexuals.

Several recent events point to a movement in flux: Its largest lobbying group is surveying members to develop a new agenda, the head of another major group resigned last week, and a new grass-roots group is challenging the status quo.

"It is absolutely a critical time to regroup," said political leader Torie Osborn, who added that many in the movement were caught off guard by the uproar over the military issue.

"We were robbed of a moment of strategic thinking and planning, leadership summits ... and a re-articulating of 'What is the gay agenda?'" she said.

Ms. Osborn announced Friday that she was leaving her post as executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on Nov. 1 after being in the job since March. She said yesterday she is not suited to the management requirements of her position but wanted to campaign on various issues.

Historically, homosexual political leaders placed at the top of their agenda passage of a federal law protecting the rights of homosexuals. But continued lack of support for the measure on Capitol Hill and the reaction by Congress to the military

issue has led to reconsideration.

Among the questions facing the movement, according to several sources:

- Do homosexuals want a civil rights bill or are they more concerned about other measures, such as legalization of same-sex "marriages"?
- Should the political movement shift its focus from Capitol Hill to fighting anti-homosexual initiatives in the states? As many as 10 states could have such initiatives on their ballots next year.
- Should leaders start looking for money from sources other than homosexuals, such as corporations or homosexual businesses?
- Should leaders mobilize an aggressive voter registration drive in

gay bars and community centers?

• How do leaders learn from the Christian Coalition, both in fund-raising and running candidates in local elections?

"We are now at the cusp of breaking out of the ghetto and into the mainstream. That is where our movement is," Ms. Osborn said.

Her broad assessment is shared by the leadership of the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF), the nation's largest homosexual-rights lobbying group. It is seeking suggestions from its 80,000 members about where it should focus its energy and has run newspaper ads saying it was turning "anger into action."

"We are actively engaged in a re-evaluation of all of our programs the legislative issues we work on and

within the next month we expect to make some major announcements regarding our future direction," said Gregory King, HRCF spokesman.

But Mr. King noted the difficulty in developing an agenda that would fit the needs and goals of everyone in the homosexual community.

"The gay community has many voices and does not march to the beat of a single drum, and we have to recognize that reality," he said.

The HRCF's actions, however, are under attack by a new group called Gay and Lesbian Americans, which bills itself as a coalition of grass-roots leaders. Two of its main players are Steven Reichert and Michael Petrelis, who had been leaders in the direct-action group Queer Nation.

Gay and Lesbian Americans has

purchased a full-page ad to run in Friday's edition of the Washington Blade, a newspaper for the homosexual community, calling on HRCF to develop an agenda, build a grass-roots coalition and improve community dialogue.

"They may be no different than any other inside-the-Beltway advocacy group, but that needs to change and they need to open up and adopt a mechanism for input through regular town meetings and public forums," Mr. Reichert said, noting that he recognized "times had changed" and that Queer Nation's protests no longer carried the same weight.

Mr. King noted that HRCF is reaching out for ideas and has recognized the need for a new direction.