

President Ford joins board of gay GOP group

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

Former U.S. President Gerald Ford has accepted an invitation to join the advisory board of the Republican Unity Coalition, a gay-straight alliance that advocates support for gay issues within the Republican Party.

Ford's decision last month to join the RUC advisory panel marks the first time a past or current U.S. president has joined the ranks of an organization that advocates on behalf of gay equality.

"We're honored and delighted to have him," said Charles Francis, the RUC's founder and chair.

Francis said former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.), who serves as the RUC's

honorary chair, contacted Ford about joining the RUC advisory panel last year after Ford expressed support for equal government benefits for same-sex couples in an October interview with Deb Price, an openly gay columnist for the Detroit News.

When asked by Price if gay couples should receive the same economic benefits as married couples, such as Social Security and tax deductions, Ford said, "I don't see why they shouldn't. I think that's a proper goal."

"I think they ought to be treated equally. Period," Ford said in the interview.

Ford told Price he applauds President Bush's decision to appoint three openly gay officials to his administration.

"I have always believed in an inclusive

policy, in welcoming gays and others into the party," Ford said in the interview.

Francis said Ford's comments in the Detroit News interview prompted RUC members to ask Simpson to approach Ford about joining the RUC advisory panel. Francis said Simpson, himself a prominent Republican Party leader, was "happy to do it."



FOR MORE INFO

Republican Unity Coalition
P.O. Box 19206
Washington, D.C. 20036-9206
info@republicanunity.com
www.republicanunity.com

national news

Mary Cheney joins 'gay-straight' GOP group



Ending almost two years of silence about her sexual orientation, Mary Cheney announced this week that she is joining the board of the Republican Unity Coalition, a GOP group formed by gay supporters of Cheney's father, the vice president, and President Bush.

Mary Cheney, Vice President Dick Cheney's lesbian daughter, issued a statement this week saying she has joined the board of directors of the Republican Unity Coalition, a group that describes itself as a "gay-straight alliance" seeking to build bridges between gays and the Republican Party.

Mary Cheney's decision to join the RUC board marks the first time she has taken a public stand on gay issues since news of her sexual orientation surfaced in July 2000, when then-candidate George W. Bush named her father as his vice presidential running mate.

"RUC is an organization that reflects my fundamental beliefs and principles," she said in her statement, which the RUC distributed by email to its members on April 21. "Working together we can expand the Republican Party's outreach to non-traditional Republicans; we can make sexual orientation a non-issue for the Republican Party; and we can help achieve equality for all gay and lesbian Americans."

Charles Francis, the openly gay public relations executive who founded the RUC at the time of Bush's inauguration, said

Cheney would help the RUC "reach out to gay and lesbian voters as well as build bridges to all within the Republican Party." In the same e-mail that included Cheney's statement, Francis said Cheney would also "work with us to help build the RUC membership network across the country."

Francis told the Blade on April 25 that Mary Cheney would be attending several RUC fund-raising dinners this summer in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, New York, and other cities.

"We're real excited to have her on board," Francis said.

Francis, a friend of President Bush and the Bush family from Texas, has said the RUC has formed a political action committee and planned to raise \$1 million to give to gay-friendly Republican candidates in the 2002 congressional elections. A finance report the group submitted to the Federal Election Commission shows it had raised \$33,000, as of Dec. 30, 2000, the latest period for which PACs are required to disclose to the FEC the amount of money they raised in the current election cycle.

RUC official Eugene Lawson issued a

statement on April 5 saying the RUC had joined the Human Rights Campaign, a non-partisan gay political group, in holding a joint fund-raiser for three Republican House candidates.

Mary Cheney could not be reached by press time. When asked for Vice President Cheney's reaction to his daughter's decision to join the RUC, vice presidential spokesperson Jennifer Millerwise told Washington Post columnist Lloyd Grove, "The vice president loves and supports his daughter."

Earlier this year, former U.S. President Gerald Ford announced that he had joined the RUC's board of advisors. Former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson (R-Wy.), who serves as the RUC's honorary chair, is credited with persuading Ford to join the board of advisors.

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Republican Unity Coalition
P.O. Box 19206
Washington, DC 20036
www.RepublicanUnity.com