

Proposed Marriage Ban Splits Washington's Gays

By LYNETTE CLEMETSON

WASHINGTON, July 23 — There was a time when Washington's robust and politicized gay community functioned under the same unspoken social rules that apply to other politically involved people in town. Heated battles waged during the day were left at the bar door at night. Wicked barbs might fly over hot topics, but nothing got too personal.

No more. The election-year fight over gay marriage has altered the gay scene here in ways that have left some in the community — most notably gay Republicans — stunned and even fearful. Under intense pressure to separate their gay consciousness from their broader political identity, gay and lesbian conservatives are facing stinging ridicule in the very neighborhoods, bars and restaurants that were once unquestioned safe zones.

In recent weeks Lynden C. Armstrong, administrative director for Senator Pete V. Domenici, Republican of New Mexico, an opponent of gay marriage, has been called "a Jew working for Nazis," and "a gay Uncle Tom." During a recent dinner at a Washington restaurant, a friend loudly berated Mr. Armstrong in front of other patrons. He was even confronted about his political allegiance during a weekend getaway in Rehoboth Beach, Del., again, by people he considered friends.

"I don't feel like I'm being attacked by anyone in my office," said Mr. Armstrong, 33, who is also co-chairman of the Gay, Lesbian and Allies Senate Staff Caucus. "The attacks have come from other gays and lesbians, and that's hard. It's very hard for me to understand how they can do that. Most people know how difficult this all is for all of us."

The tension experienced by Mr. Armstrong and others has been ratcheting up since February when President Bush formally endorsed a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. But it has reached fever pitch in the past two weeks, since Mike Rogers, a gay activist in Washington, began posting on the Internet the names of gays

who work for lawmakers supporting the amendment.

"It's about exposing hypocrisy wherever we find it," Mr. Rogers said.

Mr. Rogers said his targets are bipartisan. But so far only the names of Republican staff members have been posted. In coming days, he said, he plans to add the names of gays who hold senior positions within the administration and the Bush presidential campaign.

An 'outing campaign' names gays who work for legislators supporting the ban.

The outing campaign, as it has been dubbed, has taken on a life of its own. John Aravosis, a political consultant who has encouraged the campaign, said he recently received a call from someone offering to secretly photograph the gay son of a prominent Republican woman. On Friday, *The Washington Blade*, a gay newspaper which had run articles about Mr. Rogers's Web site, ran an independently reported article detailing the gay life of a Republican political consultant in Florida who was not openly gay in his professional life.

The article defied an unofficial but generally accepted journalistic practice of not disclosing a person's sexuality against his or her wishes. Chris Crain, executive editor of *The Washington Blade*, said there were heated exchanges among editors and reporters over running the article.

"Some of the people involved in all of this are friends," Mr. Crain said. "But we wouldn't stop to think about whose feelings we were hurting in almost any other area of journalism. And in most cases, these aren't people who are struggling with being gay. These are people who are leading double lives. I don't think it's the

obligation of any media to protect double lives."

The jolting rewriting of the rules has had a chilling effect on how many people navigate their lives, professionally and socially. "The feeling is so divisive now that people are cautious about what they say and even who they are seen with," said a 39-year-old lobbyist who is gay and refused to be named to protect his political relationships with both parties on Capitol Hill.

The debate within the wider gay political community splits even more finely among gay Republicans, many of whom are struggling with how to stay true to their beliefs. Chris Barron, political director for the Log Cabin Republicans, a national gay conservative group, condemns the outing campaign. But he is also adamantly opposed to the push against gay marriage by prominent figures within his party. He said that his organization may not endorse Mr. Bush for re-election and that he has qualms about how to vote in November.

He has a responsibility to stick with the party, he said, to influence change from the inside. "I plan on having the Gary Bauers and Pat Robertsons leave the party before I do," said Mr. Barron, 30, speaking about two prominent figures from the party's most conservative branch.

A gay press secretary for a House Republican who refused to be named because his boss asked him not to speak publicly on the marriage debate said that the "barbaric tactics" of gays attacking other gays had reinforced his partisan commitment.

He felt the pull most recently, he said, during the emotional June weekend marked by both President Ronald Reagan's funeral and Washington's annual gay pride parade — a parade, he said, that seemed less about pride and more about polarizing politics.

"It put it into focus," said the aide, whose name and telephone number have been posted on Mr. Rogers's Web site. "If there is a spectrum of things that make up who I am, the things that draw me to work for Republicans are more important than anything related to my sexual orientation."

Others are stuck somewhere between outright condemnation or support for those in the party with antigay positions. Mr. Armstrong declined to state his personal stance on the marriage issue, also at the request of his boss, Mr. Domenici. "I know the senator supports me," he said. "I also know that his job is to represent the constituents in New Mexico. And the polling in the state shows that the constituents there are overwhelmingly in support of the Federal Marriage Amendment."

Still, over dinner at the Duplex Diner, a Washington restaurant and bar popular with politically connected gay men, Mr. Armstrong strained to speak to a reporter in hypothetical and general terms about the debate.

The clientele in the crowded eatery included several gay Republicans. It also included people like Mr. Crain, who backed the outing campaign.

Looking at the various clusters of people, Mr. Armstrong wondered aloud, "What and who is next?"



Carol T. Powers for The New York Times

Lynden C. Armstrong, an aide to Senator Pete V. Domenici.