

PRESS CLIPS

BY ANDREW HSIAO

The GLAAD Hand of Coors

It's been a frenetic month for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. The country's premier gay and lesbian media watchdog rushed to set up news conferences in Wyoming and Washington, D.C., when the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard thrust the issue of gay-bashing into the national spotlight. Then last week, GLAAD staffers returned to their offices to find a backlog of angry messages from gay activists taking the organization to task for what one critic called "its ugly drinking buddy."

At issue was GLAAD's recent decision to accept \$110,000 from the Coors Brewing Company. There has been a gay and lesbian boycott of Coors for 20 years to protest the company's longstanding connection to far-right groups, as well as company policies that once included lie detector tests asking employees about their sexual orientation. Joseph Coors Sr., one of America's preeminent reactionaries, was a cheerleader for the John Birch Society and the Nicaraguan contras, helped launch the odious Heritage Foundation, and poured millions into the Moral Majority and its ilk.

In recent years, however, Coors has tried to make amends, sponsoring gay events and buying ads in gay papers. Company spokespeople tout the brewery's progressive employment policies, which include domestic-partner benefits.

Scott Seomin, GLAAD's Entertainment Media Director, cites that change in explaining GLAAD's "partnership" with the brewery: "Coors as a company is very strong on our issues. They've had a nondiscrimination policy since 1978, and they have mandatory sensitivity training for employees that encompasses race, orientation, and gen-

der issues." Seomin says the Coors money will underwrite a "sexual orientation in the workplace" program, and adds, "If we hadn't accepted their money, there's a good chance the program would have folded."

But the problem for many activists is that, while company policies may have changed, Coors family members continue to fund extreme-right groups. As ACT UP's Ann Northrup puts it, "The change in employee practices is important. But meanwhile they're still trying to kill us. For anyone in the gay community to do business with Coors is suicidal."

Indeed, the Coors family-run Castle Rock Foundation gave \$150,000 to Paul Weyrich's Free Congress Foundation and \$50,000 to Bill McCartney's Promise Keepers last year alone. And ironically, in that same period, Castle Rock also funded right-wing media watch groups, like the Media Research Center (\$50,000), which has protested against the inclusion of gay characters on TV, and Joseph Farah's Western Journalism Center (\$98,500). In an article published last October, Farah complained about "America's latest whining, carping, victim class—homosexuals," and proclaimed that "no matter what homosexuals tell themselves to justify their own lusts, it ain't just as good to be gay. In fact, it's downright dangerous. Homosexuals die precariously young—not just because of the self-inflicted AIDS virus or prejudice against them, but because of a thousand different illnesses and deadly lifestyle choices they make. . . ."

But, says Mary Cheney, Coors gay and lesbian corporate relations manager, besmirching the company's name by bringing up Castle Rock funding is unfair, especially since the foundation divested itself of all its Coors stock more than a year ago. The upshot, says Cheney, is that "Castle Rock receives no money from Coors Brewing Company. There isn't an affiliation."

GLAAD deputy director Jason Heffner seemed to endorse this view last week when

he told Bruce Mirken of the *San Francisco Bay Times* that "from our analysis it's not the corporate officers that are giving the money [to anti-gay groups]." Heffner told the gay paper he thought Coors management was "distressed" that "a few members of the family make such contributions."

Such sentiments incense the L.A.-based Coors Boycott Committee. "Coors is using GLAAD to whitewash its image," says the committee's Don Kilhefner. "What a marketing ploy." The idea that Coors family funding should be viewed separately from the family's brewery is "ridiculous," Kilhefner maintains, noting that Castle Rock's president is William Coors, president and board chair of Adolph Coors Co., and the foundation's vice president is Peter Coors, CEO of the brewery. Jeffrey Coors, who runs ACX Technologies, which supplies packaging materials to Coors—and hence profits from brewery business—is on Castle Rock's board.

Moreover, say committee members, Castle Rock isn't the only Coors enterprise supporting homophobes. Investigations by the *Bay Times*'s Mirken revealed that Coors Brewing Co. had contributed some \$40,000 in soft money to assorted Republican committees—while giving none to Democrats. And the brewery's political action committee has lined the pockets of some of the most right-wing Republicans in Congress, including Senator Don Nickles of Oklahoma, who introduced the 1993 bill to ban immigration by HIV-positive people, and New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith, one of the few senators to vote against the Ryan White AIDS-care act.

Coors spokesperson Cheney says the PAC "gives to candidates based on their positions on industry issues only." PAC manager Gary Schmitz maintains that "social issues have never, ever come up" in the PAC's deliberations, and he adds that the PAC recently gave money to Arizona GOP congressman Jim Kolbe, who is gay.

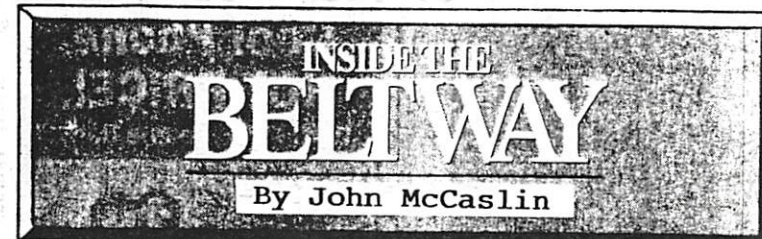
As for GLAAD, Seomin says, "We do not in any way endorse financial support given to ultra-extreme groups," but he also says that "we make no apology for our decision. We knew that for certain people it would not be popular, but we are not going to give the money back." In the end, Seomin says, "Isolating Coors is not progress. And as a community, we cannot afford to be absolute purists."

Indeed, says the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force's Urvashi Vaid, "No situation in which a group is receiving corporate money can be pure. And you have to remember that corporate giving to the movement is not something that's been happening for years. Most companies don't give anything, because they're afraid of controversy from the other side."

Still, Vaid says, "These days you see a number of gay and lesbian organizations sacrificing principles for short-term gain—I'm thinking of HRC's endorsement of D'Amato—and this situation with Coors strikes me as another illustration of that. NGLTF has also made mistakes accepting corporate donations. There was an uproar after we accepted money from Nike last year, because of their labor practices, and that was a mistake. I don't think we would do that again."

Seomin adds that though GLAAD did not consult the boycott committee before accepting Coors support, staffers plan to meet with committee members next week. They are likely to get an earful. "The anger is beginning to build on this," Kilhefner says. "If they don't give that money back, their credibility is zilch." Already Bay Area activist Michael Petrelis has begun an Internet protest campaign. And Kilhefner says activists have come up with an award to match GLAAD's own, handed out each year to acknowledge positive media portrayals of gays and lesbians. The committee's prize is called the "Coors Whore Award," and warns Kilhefner, "If they do not agree to return the money, we're going to present it to them."

The Washington Times OCTOBER 29, 1998 / PAGE A5



It's the water

The Adolph Coors Foundation and its subsidiary Castle Rock Foundation are big donors to conservative causes, shelling out hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to groups like the Heritage Foundation, the Western Journalism Center and Free Congress Foundation.

As a result, for the past two decades homosexual groups angered by Coors' "right-wing funding practices" have led a community boycott of Coors beer.

That said, imagine the surprise among the homosexual protesters when GLAAD, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, recently accepted \$100,000 from the Coors Brewing Co.

Groups like the Coors Boycott Committee and Queers Boycotting Coors are now not only stepping up their call to boycott Coors suds, but are demanding that GLAAD return the \$100,000 and the International Lesbian Gay Pride Coordinators Association stop accepting Coors money to finance local homosexual pride celebrations.

"GLAAD is supposed to be our

leading organization monitoring homo-hating media and corporations, not prostituting itself to a major funder of oppression," says Queers Boycotting Coors. "We won't swallow Coors' lies or his beer!"

Referring to family member William K. Coors, who wrote in a letter: "The assumption of the activist set is that conservatism is by nature and action homophobic, pro-life, anti-Semitic and racially biased. If there are such organizations, they receive no [Coors] foundation support."

Mr. Coors added, however: "Broadminded people whom I know have no trouble with the concept of homosexuality, but they get totally turned off by the crass exhibitionism of the gay parades that the news media so delight in bringing to the public."

Coors has gone so far as tout its brewery's progressive employment policies, which guarantee domestic-partner benefits.

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