



David E. Clarenbach

SPEAKER PRO TEM OF THE ASSEMBLY

A DECADE OF GAY AND LESBIAN RIGHTS

By David Clarenbach

Legislative accomplishments of the last ten years established the 1980's as the civil rights decade for gays and lesbians in Wisconsin.

Today, discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited, lesbian and gay relationships are legitimized and legal, and achievements in Wisconsin are a model for states throughout the nation.

The decade of unprecedented milestones that have made Wisconsin "The Gay Rights State" include:

- April 28, 1981 The State Assembly kills the Consenting Adults Bill, which sought to legalize homosexuality. After extensive debate, the Assembly votes down AB 235, 50-49.
- October 23, 1981 The Assembly passes the Gay Rights Bill, prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations. The vote on AB 70 is 49-45.

- February 26, 1982 The State Senate passes AB 70, 19-13. As in the Assembly, the vote is bipartisan.
- March 2, 1982 The Gay Rights Bill takes effect when Republican Governor Lee Dreyfus signs AB 70 into law, despite heavy lobbying from the Moral Majority. Mainstream religious leaders support the bill.
- February 23, 1983 The first Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues, created by Democratic Governor Tony Earl, convenes. The Council is co-chaired by Richard Wagner and Kathleen Nichols and conducts hearings throughout the state.
- April 21, 1983 The Assembly passes the Consenting Adults Bill eight years after introduction in 1975. The Assembly vote on this year's bill, AB 250, is 53-43.
- May 3, 1983 The Senate passes AB 250, 20-13.
- May 5, 1983 Governor Earl signs AB 250 into law, legalizing homosexuality and all sexual activity between consenting adults.
- July 22, 1983 A Lake Geneva man, fired from his job because he is gay, files a complaint with the state Equal Rights Division. He becomes the first person to win a gay rights discrimination complaint under the state's year-old law.
- December 6, 1983 The Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services grants a foster home license to a gay applicant. Winnebago County takes the issue to circuit court. The court establishes that gays and lesbians are protected under state law in foster care circumstances.
- April 6, 1984 An effort to repeal the Gay Rights Law is thwarted when the Assembly adjourns, refusing to act on AB 570.
- June 14, 1985 The Assembly passes legislation that prohibits involuntary AIDS testing, protects confidentiality of AIDS test results, and limits the use of AIDS tests for insurance purposes. The Senate later concurs and Governor Earl signs the bill into law.

- July 17, 1985 Governor Earl signs the state budget bill, AB 85, which includes funding for a gay and lesbian liaison in the Governor's office. Governor Earl later appoints Earl Bricker to the position.
- February 24, 1988 The Assembly passes the Hate Crimes Bill, 97-0, creating special criminal penalties for "gay bashing" and other violence motivated by bigotry. The Senate later concurs and Republican Governor Tommy Thompson signs the bill into law.
- April 19, 1988 County Supervisor Richard Wagner of Madison is elected to chair the Dane County Board of Supervisors, making him one of the highest ranking openly gay elected officials in the nation.
- June 14, 1989 The Joint Committee on Finance recommends \$1.4 million in state funding for AIDS service organizations to provide direct care and treatment programs. The Assembly and Senate later approve the appropriations as part of the state bill SB 31, and Governor Thompson signs it into law.
- October 31, 1989 The Assembly passes, on a unanimous voice vote, a comprehensive bill of rights for people with AIDS and HIV infection that outlaws discrimination in medical care and mandates increased insurance and drug treatment benefits. The Senate is scheduled to act on the bill, AB 400, early in 1990.

In the final analysis, these laws are in the process of working. Increasingly, they affect the real lives of real people.

For the 1990's, the lesbian and gay community must continue to strive to make it easier and safer to live, and to work, and to come out in Wisconsin.

(Editor's note: State Representative David Clarenbach (D-Madison), the author of this column, has been a member of the Wisconsin legislature since 1975 and has been directly involved in many of the accomplishments listed above).



David E. Clarenbach

S P E A K E R P R O T E M O F T H E A S S E M B L Y

January 22, 1987

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wisconsin Gay Rights Birthday Party

Madison - In March, Wisconsin will observe the fifth anniversary of its historic gay rights law. Wisconsin is the first-and-only state to prohibit discrimination against gays and lesbians in public and private sector employment, housing and public accommodations.

Leaders of the state's gay community intend to mark the occasion with a birthday party, honoring the act's author, Rep. David Clarenbach (D-Madison). Clarenbach, who now serves as Speaker Pro Tem of the Assembly has also successfully sponsored legislation abolishing the state's sodomy laws and establishing AIDS testing protections and procedures.

"We're all looking forward to marking another milestone in the gay rights movement," said Clarenbach. "This birthday celebration will be both a symbol of our past accomplishments and a reminder of the challenges we still face." Clarenbach currently is fighting an effort by Rawhide Boys Ranch to amend Wisconsin's Fair Employment Act. Rawhide, a private home and treatment center for delinquent boys, has lost state and local contracts because it refuses to comply with the law's gay rights provisions and wants these sections repealed.

(More)

422 North, State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin 53702
608-266-8570

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Add on - 1 -

This event will be at the home of Dane County (Madison) Supervisor Richard Wagner on March 7, from 6 until 8 p.m., and is a fundraiser for Representative Clarenbach.

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