

# **PFLAG** Palm Springs / Desert Communities

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## **THE BANNER OF THE DESERT**

The Newsletter of PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities Chapter  
Our twenty-second year. February 2018, Volume 23, No. 2

**PFLAG Meeting**  
**Sunday, February 18, 2:30 pm**  
**Cathedral City Library, Community Room**  
Info: 760-202-4430 – [info@PSpflag.org](mailto:info@PSpflag.org)

Dan Smith will facilitate the meeting and the discussion topic is:  
Support is one of PFLAG's primary missions.  
Our Chapter does a decent job of lending support where needed - in many forms.  
The question is – Am I open to asking for and receiving support from others?  
Could letting myself receive support, in any form,  
allow me to be more open to giving support more freely?

Light refreshments provided by Armour Black and Harry Berman

Volunteer to provide a light refreshment for  
future meetings (cookies, cake ...): email [info@PSpflag.org](mailto:info@PSpflag.org)

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### **A Message From The Editor - Mike Balasa**

This past month the flu epidemic has affected many people I know. My wife and I have faithfully taken the flu shots for many years, and I can't remember the last time I had any flu symptoms. Unfortunately, the news that the flu shot is not as effective this year as in prior years proved true in this family. Both of us are miserable with hacking, slight fever, aches and fatigue. At this point the annoyance is on its fifth day and not showing any major improvement. Not only is it uncomfortable but miserably boring. Old movies and routine reality shows are our only entertainment between taking medicine and coughing. I will try to get past the torpor and put together a newsletter.

The worst part of being ill is the depression that accompanies physical debility. It's bad enough to have to hear about the decline of morality in this country; the constant flow of hypocrisy and the thinly veiled racism and anti-LGBTQI banter from politicians and fundamentalist preachers.

Along with the hatred in this country, there are so many social problems that seem intractable. The pictures of homeless encampments in our major cities can only be seen as an epic failure of our economic and political system. Even in the beautiful Coachella Valley there are hundreds (if not thousands) of people living under bridges, in their cars and under shrubs in the wash. Many are mentally disturbed or addicts. It is hard to not feel the grinding poverty and misery everywhere in our community.

The daily news stories of people who lived good, productive lives in America, hauled off to detention camps for forced resettlement in their countries of birth, children separated from parents and young people sent to countries they haven't seen since they were babies are distressing.

The anti-LGBTQI religious fundamentalist have a sympathetic ear at all levels of government, including the Supreme Court. Will it soon be possible for medical personnel to refuse services to people for religious reasons?

Like the flu, let's hope this will all pass. I want to believe there are more good people out there than ignorant bigots.

### **WILL MORE CLOSED ANTI-LGBTQI MEN BE OUTED IN THE #METOO MOVEMENT?**

Michelangelo Signorile, journalist, author and talk show host on Sirius radio, stated that he believes the #MeToo movement, where women are coming forward to denounce men of influence who sexually abused them, is also going to bring out men who denounce closeted gay men who abused them. As an example, Signorile cited the situation with Ohio State legislator, Wes Goodman.

Goodman was a rising political star in Ohio. He made a name for himself working as an aide to Ohio Representative, Jim Jordan. Rep. Jordan was an influential Member of the House Freedom Caucus and Goodman relentlessly pushed fundamentalist Christian family values; especially, anti-LGBTQI policies and legislation. He used the family values platform to run for the Ohio State House and won.

During the years Goodman was publicly crusading against the LGBTQI community, he was secretly engaging in same-sex liaisons. He exchanged e-mail messages with other gay men he met on Capitol Hill and arraigned trysts. He sent sexually enticing messages to young men he met in Conservative circles. The young men were intimidated by his influence and power and were reluctant to complain.

Goodman's antics were not unknown in fundamentalist Christian circles. While running for the Ohio House seat, one of Goodman's supporters was Tony Perkins, president of the virulently anti-LGBTQI Family Research Council. Perkins learned that Goodman has sexually assaulted an 18-year-old man in a hotel room. The night of the assault, Perkins was in the hotel to support Goodman. The event was a fund raiser for Goodman's run for the Ohio House seat. Perkins and other influential people then warned the parents of the young man that there "would be consequences" if they choose to go public with the accusation. Perkins reportedly asked Goodman to quit the race, but Goodman ignored the suggestion and went on to win. Perkins and the other religious fundamentalists said nothing.

Rumors continued about Goodman in the House. His predatory behavior continued He continued having consensual same-sex encounters and continued predatory and harassing behavior with young men. His behavior was a well-kept secret amongst the Republican leadership in the Ohio House. Eventually a person came forward and told his story. Soon other men came forward to tell their experience. Goodman was forced to resign.

It was the #MeToo movement that encouraged the men to come forward and tell their story. Even after his resignation, Goodman was reportedly still harassing young men on line. In one of his online posts he offered this defense, "I'm more into dudes but not exactly into the gay lifestyle and am still very serious about my faith. So just trying to find a way to live both authentically and biblically."

Signorile offered this conclusion of the sordid story of Wes Goodman, “The closet can warp people, particularly those who are conflicted politicians following the Republican party’s anti-LGBTQ agenda, which is inspired by religious extremism. And it can drive them to hurt many people, from those they vote against to men who work for them. It’s reassuring to know that hypocritical and potentially harmful politicians like Wes Goodman may not survive the #MeToo movement.”

### **HAS THE ASSAULT ON LGBTQI RIGHTS CHANGED PUBLIC ATTITUDES?**

GLAAD, the LGBTQI advocacy group, has tracked public attitudes toward LGTBQI people over several years. The results from the Harris Poll they commissioned has found a drop in public acceptance of LGBTQI people and a significant increase in reports of discrimination. Despite the uptick of negative attitudes in the general population, 79% still support equal rights for sexual minorities.

The bad news is that the anti-LGBTQI rhetoric and proposed and enacted laws to allow discrimination and unequal treatment of LGBTQI people has encouraged discrimination. The Harris Poll found that reports of discrimination are up eleven percentage points from last year.

Here is a summary of the findings: The percentages are number of people who would be very or somewhat uncomfortable if:

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>LGTBQI person in church</b>	22%	24%
<b>Same-sex wedding pictures from co-worker</b>	25%	27%
<b>Learning a family member is LGBTQI</b>	27%	30%
<b>Child has a LGBTQI teacher</b>	28%	31%
<b>Learning that my doctor is LGBTQI</b>	28%	31%
<b>Seeing a same-sex couple holding hands</b>	29%	31%
<b>Child learning about LGTBQI people in school</b>	34%	37%

The assault of LGBTQI rights from the anti-gay Republicans and fundamentalists will continue. The attempts to appoint judges who rule in favor of discrimination is not going to stop. We can only hope that outrageous acts of discrimination will finally get fair minded people motivated to act.

### **CONVERSION THERAPY IS NOT DEAD**

Conversion therapy is the psychological practice of attempting to “cure” a person from homosexual desires. When “gayness” was considered a psychological disorder, it was common practice to subject young men to treatment. Some of the treatments were extreme and painful such as “shock treatment” or aversion therapy which usually involved induced vomiting. Eventually all the major medical and psychological associations came out against the practice and concluded that there was no way to change a person’s sexual orientation nor was there good reason to do so. In a recent study, the Williams Institute of the UCLA School of Law found that the practice has not gone away. California and eight other states banned conversion therapy by licensed health care professionals and several other states are considering it.

Research indicates that in the past several years approximately 700,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adults have undergone some form of conversion therapy. Many of these individuals

experienced the therapy while still adolescents. The study also predicted that there are currently 20,000 teen agers who will undergo some form of conversion therapy from professionals in the United States before they reach their 18th birthday. Another 57,000 will experience conversion therapy from a religious adviser.

This is a serious matter according to mental health authorities. The practice of conversion therapy is not only ineffective, but it is proven to be harmful. Persons subjected to the unpleasant therapy have experienced years of personality disorders and other psychological distress. Last year a bill was introduced in Congress, “The Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act”, that would classify conversion therapy as fraud. The bill is still pending.

Along with most professional mental health care providers, surveys indicate that public is aware of the therapy’s ineffectiveness and do not support it. A 2014 national poll found that only 8% of the public believe that a person’s sexual orientation is changeable through therapy.

Christy Mallory of the Williams Institute said about the importance of releasing the findings, “I don’t think many people realize that this is still going on. They may have heard the horror stories in the past, but with all the advances (in LGBTQ rights), they don’t think it is still something the LGBTQ community faces.”

### **GINA ORBAN RETIRES FROM THE PFLAG BOARD**

Gina Orban asked to be relieved of her duties as a PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities Board Member. Gina is one of the original founders of the Palm Springs PFLAG in 1995. She and the Spencers were there to start the chapter, push for LGBTQI equality in the schools and encourage local congregations to become more accepting of the LGBTQI community.

Gina assures us that she will always be ready to accept any task and responsibility that we need in the future.

### **RETURN TO FACEBOOK - RUSSIA BOT THE 2016 ELECTION THROUGH FACEBOOK**

*by Bob Warburton*

I was lucky in 2016 because I was not on Facebook during that year and, therefore, did not really suffer the slings and arrows of Russian disinformation on line. This sounds strange, but I remember the old Facebook. I guess it was 2007 through 2010 when I was on Facebook and I saw it as a twofold tool. One tool was a way to meet old friends from let’s say High School or new contacts. Others tended to be young, 18 through 30-year-old Gay guys from throughout the rest of the world, whom I would never meet, who would ask me questions such as, “I kissed this guy and he just looked at me. What do I do now?” Most of the conversations were in Spanish.

Soon my Page was filled with announcements of a Senate Bill Hearing in Cheyenne on Wednesday and Gay Marriage being ruled legal in parts of Mexico. That beast with two hearts was not allowed to live. For a three-week period in 2011 Facebook just closed all accounts that someone complained about. I was never told why or given a chance to appeal, but my naive Facebook attempt failed.

For the next seven years I stayed off the interesting sites of the grid. I was not linked in. No Snapchat, LinkedIn, or tweeting. I never tried Pokemon Go, but I watched others. To a great deal I was free. Since I was no longer in Wyoming I had less time when it was snowy outside to waste on Facebook. Fast forward to 2016, and it sounded as if I would never want to go back to Facebook

again. I kept hearing from the news and from friends on the service about all sorts of strange reports being labeled as accurate, mainly referring to Candidate Clinton. ISIS fighters were being caught coming over the Mexican border; Top reasons Bernie Sanders wanted you to vote for him during the fall 2016 campaign; and Hillary Clinton was heading a child sex ring in a Washington D.C. pizza parlor were some of the items being touted as facts. What would I find in 2018?

Facebook has changed. Instead of the young fabulous communication among the few, everyone is there. So far I have not found true “fake” news, but with Vlad Putin still on the loose I do expect to encounter some shortly. What I am finding is lots of pictures of grandchildren and vacations. I must put on my FB that I am part of a proud PFLAG Family. However, I know there will be controversy as many friends report having heated discussions regarding race, immigration, and sexual orientation. It was nice not being part of that discussion on line.

### **PETER EAST ACCEPTS POSITION AS TREASURER**

Ron Wallen, the PFLAG treasurer for the past 3 1/2 years has stepped down from that responsibility. Peter East accepted a board position and the office of treasurer to replace Ron. He was voted in by the board unanimously. Peter is member of PFLAG and has helped us with designing and making many of our banners that we have used in parades and information tables.

### **TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FURTHERING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REGULATIONS**

In a continuing attempt to appease fundamentalist Christians who voted for him, the Trump administration is creating new protections for medical workers who object to procedures or individuals who offend their religious beliefs. The Department of Health and Human Services will create a new department in the Office of Civil Rights to investigate complaints from workers claiming they were forced by employers to engage in treatment or deal with individuals who offended their religious beliefs. The new division will be called the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division. The focus according the Administration officials is to prevent workers from having to engage in activities that promote or assist abortion or assisted suicide.

The concern of civil rights advocates is that the new regulations would allow health care workers to refuse service to LGBTQI individuals. There already several cases on record of health care professionals denying service based on religious beliefs. A nurse refused to provide post-operative care to a woman who had an abortion, a pediatrician who refused to see a child because his parents were lesbians and a fertility doctor who didn't want to provide service to a lesbian couple. A nurse in Illinois filed a complaint because she was required to take training to make referrals to providers of abortion services or to help women obtain abortion drugs.

Louise Melling, deputy legal director at the American Civil Liberty Union, said the serious problem is when all services will be denied to people just because they are a sexual minority, “This administration has taken a very expansive view of religious liberty. It understands religious liberty to override antidiscrimination principles.”

**Time To Join PFLAG? Time To Renew?**  
**PFLAG Membership**

If you would like to join PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities, print and mail the form below or join [online](http://www.pspflag.org/join donate) at [www.pspflag.org/join donate](http://www.pspflag.org/join donate).

All our expenses go to furthering our mission. Our expenses are for materials that we supply to individuals, schools and supporting organizations; the information phone line, newsletter production, support to local schools' Gay Straight Alliances; and, many other occasional expenses such as the Pride Parade.

When you join and support the local PFLAG chapter with a membership of \$30 or more, we send your name and a portion of the fees (\$15) to PFLAG National, making you a member of both the National and our local chapter of PFLAG. You will receive all publications and notices.

Members sometimes don't realize that if you join National PFLAG directly you are not on the membership rolls of the PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities. PFLAG National does not notify us that you joined and they do not share any of the membership fee.

**PFLAG PALM SPRINGS/DESERT COMMUNITIES MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Suggested Membership Donation:**

Family \$50: \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$30: \_\_\_\_\_ Other Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

We appreciate any dollar amount.

Budgetary restraints will not keep anyone from being part of our PFLAG family.

Make check payable to PFLAG and mail to:  
PFLAG 611 S. Palm Canyon Drive / 7-262  
Palm Springs, CA 92264

Info: 760-202-4430 – [info@pspflag.org](mailto:info@pspflag.org)

Chapter Officers: President: Mike Balasa, Vice-president: Carol Balasa  
Secretary: Christine Hammond, Treasurer: Peter East  
Directors: Dan Smith, Ron Wallen, Sly Zelnys