

Elissa Silverman
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Elissa Silverman Answers to GLAA Questionnaire for April 23, 2013 Special Election

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

1. In the event of congressional action leading to a ballot initiative in the District that would take away the civil marriage rights now enjoyed by same-sex couples, will you publicly oppose the initiative and defend civil marriage equality?

Yes, I would oppose the initiative and defend civil marriage equality. I would have voted for the marriage equality bill had I been on the Council in 2009.

If DC did face a ballot initiative due to congressional action--an affront to Home Rule--I would work to affirm our law. I would put to effective use the organizing experience I gained, as well as the very strong network we built, in support of Initiative 70-- the ballot initiative to ban direct corporate contributions in DC elections. Ensuring that a ballot measure that would remove or weaken our marriage equality law would NOT succeed would require additional public education and neighborhood-by-neighborhood organizing -- something we did effectively in Initiative 70 and something I am doing effectively in my citywide campaign. In addition to putting my organizing expertise to work, I would use my considerable experience as a writer and advocate to enhance the education efforts of other leaders like Councilmembers Catania and Mendelson, and leaders of GLAA.

If the worst happened, and we lost the ballot measure, I would introduce a bill to re-establish civil marriage equality in DC.

2. Will you support Bill 20-0032, the Surrogacy Parenting Agreement Act of 2013, to legalize surrogacy agreements in the District and protect all parties to such agreements?

Yes.

As a policy analyst, I always look at best practices of other states. Clearly we are an outlier in the wrong direction on this. I look forward to working with GLAA, and with colleagues on the Council to put in place as strong and effective a measure as is possible, drawing on what has worked well in other states. It is particularly important that all parties are assured protections under a new law.

PUBLIC HEALTH

3. Will you support legislation giving the directors of the Office of GLBT Affairs and the Office of African Affairs the authority to issue competitive grants as other minority constituent offices have, that will be open to organizations serving the populations within the offices' purview?

Yes, I will support the offices having the contract authority that the other constituent offices have. At the same time, I believe all grant-making by the D.C. government needs scrutiny to be certain services are well-defined and prospective contracting partners are clearly qualified for the services they seek to provide.

4. Will you defend the District's hard-won and life-saving medical marijuana program against attacks or further restrictions, whether from Congress, federal officials or D.C. officials?

Elissa Gihyan
Gihyan

Yes. And just as important as protecting against encroachment is using Council oversight to make certain that the program is efficient and effective in meeting its important goals. As someone who has followed the Council, testified before the Council, and analyzed its performance, I am very familiar with how the legislature can use its significant power to ask the right questions, with the right frequency, to ensure effective delivery of services.

5. Describe steps you will support to improve performance at the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration (HAHSTA), including in HIV prevention, HIV/AIDS surveillance, and mental health services.

Oversight, oversight, oversight: I think as at-large councilmember I largely play three roles. I perform oversight. I legislate where there are policy gaps. I act as a voice for my constituents.

My skill set is in information gathering and analysis. I have not had a lot of background in health policy, so first thing I will get up to speed on what we are doing, looking at reports like the DC Appleseed scorecard. I have great admiration for DC Appleseed and have worked with the organization on workforce and other issues, and am grateful for the report that your policy agenda references. That will be my starting point on steps that the Council can take through its oversight, and through the budget process to ensure that such things as prevention education and surveillance are appropriately and adequately funded. I will ask where we are succeeding, where we are failing, and why. I will ask who does it better in other cities and states. And then I will ask why we aren't doing it that way.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUDICIARY

6. Will you press for increased oversight of the Metropolitan Police Department's gathering and analysis of crime statistics to ensure greater comprehensiveness and objectivity, including transgender-related hate crime data?

Absolutely. As you know, my campaign chairman is former Judiciary Committee Chairman Kathy Patterson and she has shared with me her oversight reports on MPD crime statistics. She will advise me in my oversight particularly of the police department given historical failures objectivity when it comes to domestic violence, hate crimes, and other concerns of the GLBT community. I hope that GLAA, as well as the ACLU, will similarly advise me in these and other areas.

7. Will you support funding for MPD to hire or contract qualified trainers to provide LGBT inclusive cultural competency training including the handling of intimate partner violence?

Yes, and it is important that such training not just focus on new recruits to the police department but also be a part of ongoing training that includes officials as well as officers. I would use my own good relationship with Chief Lanier in an effort to convince her of the necessity of experienced trainers – and I would use my own budget acumen to seek to reallocate funds from within the department's own budget for this priority purpose. In addition and as a complement to cultural competency training, and I will use my office, and Council oversight, to press to fully revitalize the Police Officers Standards and Training Board, including community representation to ensure that recruit training and in-service training meets community needs.

8. Will you support legislation to repeal the so-called Prostitution-Free Zone (PFZ) law, which facilitates anti-transgender profiling?

Elisa Silverman
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Yes, in consultation with GLAA and the ACLU as well as with communities that are concerned about the impact of prostitution on their streets. I frequently walk through one such area--the unit block of K Street NE which is my path from work to home--and I think that solutions come through collaboration.

HUMAN RIGHTS

9. Do you agree that the Director of the Office of Human Rights should be required to have professional training and experience in civil rights law enforcement?

Yes. Enforcement is a key responsibility of this important agency. The Director must have the education and/or experience to issue appropriate decisions.

10. Will you support legislation to allow the issuance of new birth certificates for individuals who undergo treatment related to gender transition, end the requirement for publishing notice of a name change in the newspaper, and allow issuance of new birth certificates via administrative process instead of a court order?

Yes, this seems efficient and the right thing to do. The public notices in newspapers seems to be a requirement that predates the internet and has become moot since. Making this an administrative and not judicial matter makes it routine and removes judges from tasks that don't need judgment. I support the recently introduced, "JaParker Deoni Jones Birth Certificate Equality Amendment Act of 2012."

YOUTH AND SENIORS

11. Will you oppose both federal and local voucher programs that fund students in religious schools that are beyond the protections of the D.C. Human Rights Act?

Yes. Everyone should benefit from being protected by the Human Rights Act.

12. Will you support legislation to ensure equal Medicaid spousal impoverishment protections for same-sex partners, including providing local funding to pay for benefits that are denied at the federal level due to the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act?

Yes. I am interested in looking at the Massachusetts and California laws. The District should not tolerate discrimination, whether local or imposed by the Congress.

13. Do you support the right of adults in the District to choose adult-oriented entertainment for themselves, and the right of appropriately licensed and zoned businesses to provide it, without excluding any ward?

Yes.

14. Will you support legislation to eliminate legal standing for ad hoc protest groups and citizens associations in liquor licensing cases, to permit input by all community stakeholders via the great weight already accorded Advisory Neighborhood Commissions?

Elissa Silverman
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Yes. I am for looking for solutions, not ad-hoc protests. My approach to public policy is a “we’re all in this together” approach not a “you’re on your own.” That applies to human services, economic development, and, yes, even liquor licensing.

15. What will you do to provide alternatives to incarceration for marginalized and at-risk populations like homeless youth and transgender people who resort to prostitution for survival?

As your policy agenda indicates, there has been a start made on providing alternatives for at-risk populations including those forces to resort to prostitution. I would support a comprehensive approach to secure additional options – from counseling and other mental health services to youth centers and housing alternatives.

As far as my record, I will tell GLAA what I have told labor, the trial lawyers, the DC Chamber of Commerce: My agenda is to make DC government honest, open, accountable. I think that serves the interests of all communities that have a “we’re all in this together” approach. Making DC government open and transparent makes the operations of DC government understandable and we can see where the shortcomings are. I have pushed for the last four years for a responsible DC budget that serves all residents, including GLBT residents. I have fought against cuts to domestic violence programs. I have fought for health care funding. And I believe we need to make strategic investments in these things to grow our city.

Testimony of Elissa Silverman
At the D.C. Council Committee on Government Operations
Hearing on Campaign Finance-related Bills 19-713, 19-730, 19-733, 19-933, and 19-960
November 2, 2012

Chairman Bowser, thank you both for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Elissa Silverman, and I am a DC resident who lives and works in Ward 6. I am also one of the many DC residents who want full transparency and disclosure in campaign finance reporting and vigorous enforcement of individual contribution limits. That is why I support the grassroots, resident-led effort to ban direct corporate contributions known as Initiative 70, and I am working very hard to see that DC voters have an opportunity to vote for Initiative 70 on the ballot.

The most sweeping of the bills you're considering today, Bill 19-960, the "Comprehensive Campaign Finance Reform Amendment Act of 2012," has many elements in it that I agree with—more muscular reporting requirements, beefed up penalties for violating campaign finance laws, and restrictions on contributions from contractors to stop the incestuous pay-to-play culture that has caused such a cynicism among my neighbors that we can actually elect honest local politicians who represent the public interest and not just their own—but the bill falls short on one key reason why my neighbors have lost confidence in DC politics: that the influence of the individual voter is far outweighed in public policy decision-making by interests that gives lots of campaign cash and do that by the evading our laws through the use of limited liability companies. Let me put it this way: DC residents like myself want campaign finance reform that is FOR REAL and not just a bunch of words in legislation that won't—and can't—be enforced. By not tackling the LLC issue head on—and that issue being that through the use LLCs, ownership and relationships between companies can be concealed behind a corporate veil—many of the well-intended efforts in the mayor's bill are rendered impotent.

Take the issue of bundling, for example. The mayor's bill defines bundling as an effort by an individual, explicitly a lobbyist, from collecting a bunch of contributions and handling them over as a package. We often talk about SuperPACs, and this practice creates SuperIndividuals in DC politics, who are able to wield influence by getting credit for contributions that added together way exceed the individual limit. But in practical terms, I'm not sure how this changes our culture. Say a lobbyist sponsors a fundraiser for a local politician, his clients show up and while the lobbyist stands next to the politician, the clients hand over their checks. It is clear why the clients are there and who brought them there.

This seems within the mayor's proposed law, and therefore does little to limit lobbyist influence.

The bill ignores the more common definition of bundling in DC politics by member of the local press: that some business interests willfully evade our individual contribution limits by creating veiled corporate entities known as limited liability companies, LLCs, which allows them to give much more than I can as a resident. These are SuperCompanies, in other words, and under the mayor's bill, they would continue to evade our laws because legally they do not have to disclose their ownership.

The willful blindness to the LLC issue also impacts efforts to cripple the pay-to-play culture. My understanding is that the mayor's bill would restrict contributions from contractors with grants or contracts more than \$250,000. So what impact would the mayor's bill have on a parent company that creates 10 LLCs that bid for contracts that dip right below the \$250,000 mark? Very little, it seems. I am also concerned that this method would seem to discriminate between large and small businesses.

These are the reasons why a ban on direct corporate contributions is a more fair, more exacting way to address transparency and the willful evasion of contribution limits. From the Attorney General's testimony this summer, it seems a major objection of the Gray administration to a corporate contribution ban is speculative: that the Supreme Court **could** take up the issue of direct corporate contributions sometime and **could** rule against it sometime. The Attorney General used as evidence the Citizens United ruling, but as you know, Councilmember Bowser, Citizens United dealt with indirect expenditures not direct contributions. Therefore, I encourage you to address the very real problems of transparency and evasion of individual limits by including a ban on corporate contributions, as is in Bills 19-713 or 19-733, the legislation that comes out of this committee.

I also want to say a few words about the public financing legislation: I am concerned that the task force as outlined has few only one campaign finance expert and no members of the public who are not representing special interests. I hope this is an oversight.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.

I submit this, showing that I was focused on same-sex marriage five years before legislation passed.

Same-Sex Marriage Takes the Spotlight in Forum

[FINAL Edition]

The Washington Post - Washington, D.C.

Author: Elissa Silverman - Washington Post Staff Writer

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Capital Pride, the annual gay and lesbian celebration that mixes high-minded dialogue with dance parties, began a week's worth of events last night with a "town hall" meeting that focused on such topics as same-sex marriage and faith.

Six panelists fielded questions from moderator Jason Bellini and members of an 80-person audience at the Studio Theatre in Northwest Washington.

Four of the panelists are openly gay elected officials -- two serve on the D.C. Council, one in the Virginia House of Delegates and one in the Maryland House of Delegates.

Same-sex marriage came up frequently in the discussion.

"I think we are at the point in the District of Columbia where we need to move forward on the marriage issue," said D.C. Council member Jim Graham (D-Ward 1). Graham later said that he planned to introduce a bill in the next two years for the city to recognize same-sex marriages or civil unions.

But first, Graham said, he wants Mayor Adrian M. Fenty (D) to release a legal opinion on whether the District recognizes same-sex marriages officiated in other states. Former D.C. attorney general Robert Spagnoletti, who served in the Anthony A. Williams administration, prepared an opinion, but it was never made public.

Efforts to legalize same-sex marriage in the District have been highly controversial. Some gay and lesbian activists have said they fear advocacy could bring a congressional backlash. Graham, who has expressed such concerns in the past, said that the majority-Democratic Congress has changed his outlook.

The sensitivity and complexity of the issue were also highlighted by the answers of Virginia Del. Adam P. Ebbin (D-Alexandria) and Maryland Del. Heather R. Mizeur (D-Montgomery).

Mizeur said that a ruling by the Maryland Court of Appeals in a same-sex marriage case is imminent and that she is hopeful about the outcome.

In Virginia, Ebbin said, the fight for marriage equality and equality for gay men and lesbians in general is much more of a long-term battle. He spoke about a bill in the last legislative session that tried to restrict gay and straight clubs in schools by requiring parental consent.

One parent who testified for the bill "thought her daughter would succumb to peer pressure and join one of these clubs," Ebbin said as several members of the audience chuckled.

Events focused more on parties and celebration are scheduled for later this week, culminating in the Capital Pride Parade on Saturday evening and a street festival on Pennsylvania Avenue NW on Sunday afternoon.

Credit: Washington Post Staff Writer

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I submit this showing that as a reporter, I covered Stein and other GLBT political activists.

The Washington Post

 [Printer Friendly](#)

Cropp's Gay Support Surprises Insiders

[FINAL Edition]

The Washington Post - Washington, D.C.

Author:

Lori Montgomery and Elissa Silverman - Washington
Post Staff Writers

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Council member Adrian M. Fenty's remarkable surge in campaign donations this week overshadowed an equally remarkable accomplishment by his chief rival for the Democratic mayoral nomination, Council Chairman Linda W. Cropp.

On Monday night, Cropp trounced Fenty in a survey of about 170 members of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, the oldest and most influential political organization representing the city's gay community.

During the first round of voting, Cropp nearly won the 60 percent necessary for endorsement, getting 103 votes (58 percent) to Fenty's 39 (22 percent). In a runoff, Cropp snared 106 votes, sewing up the group's support. Fenty got 41 votes (24 percent), while 24 people voted to issue no endorsement at all.

The outcome startled some political insiders, who had come to view Fenty as the candidate of gay Washington. Throughout his year-long campaign, Fenty's schedule has been peppered with fundraisers held in the homes of gay luminaries in Georgetown and Dupont Circle. What happened?

Fenty adviser and gay activist Peter Rosenstein says it's no mystery: Cropp spent time and energy rallying her supporters to the Monday night meeting at the John A. Wilson Building, a process facilitated by Cropp campaign adviser David Meadows, who was president of the Stein Club from 2004 to 2005. Indeed, Meadows engineered a news conference just before the balloting at which nine past Stein Club presidents endorsed Cropp -- a little insurance policy in case Cropp failed to hit 60 percent.

"It's old-time politics: Make sure your people are there on the one night you need them," Rosenstein said of Cropp's efforts.

So why didn't Fenty do it?

"Adrian doesn't believe in working that way," Rosenstein said. "He respects the Stein Club. But he was not about to make phone calls and urge people to show up just for one night."

Rosenstein argued that the endorsement means little anyway, because the Stein Club represents the conservative old guard of the gay community, not the larger universe of young club hoppers and up- and-coming professionals.

Cropp campaign chairman Max Berry begs to differ.

"Gertrude Stein is the most solid, responsible organization in Washington, in my opinion, representing the gay community. It's a very important endorsement," Berry said. "So we got an endorsement [Fenty] wanted. Give us a little credit."

If clients commission pollsters to report findings they want to hear, then Cropp and the Foggy Bottom Association got their money's worth out of two recent surveys.

Cropp's poll of 796 likely Democratic voters conducted by Diane Feldman shows the council chairman with a slight lead over Fenty, 38 percent to 36 percent — a statistical dead heat, given the 3.5 percent margin of error. The other major contenders registered in the single digits, with 12 percent of voters declaring themselves undecided.

"Cropp's lead extends across the city with a strong lead among African American voters," reads a summary of the results obtained by The Post.

In the other poll, the Foggy Bottom Association hired the Mellman Group to survey 400 likely Democratic voters about this fall's citywide races, as well as issues related to development. That topic is extremely important to the association, which has complained that George Washington University is expanding like a cancer.

While the poll didn't actually refer to the university as a malignant growth, it was designed to communicate the message that the academic institution is interested in building more than ivory towers.

"We're fighting a David-versus-Goliath battle against a huge developer that is masquerading as a university," said Joy Howell, the association's president.

To the group's delight, even residents who don't live near masked giants are concerned about the issue: Sixty-six percent of those surveyed said developers have too much influence in land use decisions. And 88 percent said community members need to have a voice in campus land use issues.

The smaller poll differed from Cropp's in its election analysis.

In the mayor's race, according to Mellman, Fenty leads Cropp 34 percent to 28 percent, with 28 percent of the vote undecided and the three other major contenders in single digits. The poll has a 4.9 percent margin of error. Fenty holds a 3-percentage-point lead over Cropp among black voters (33 percent to 30 percent), the poll shows, and a stronger following among white voters (37 percent to 25 percent).

"Polling is a subjective business," said Cropp campaign spokesman Ron Eckstein about the difference in numbers. "The environment is still very fluid."

In the chairman's race, the poll showed Ward 3 council member Kathy Patterson with a slight advantage over Ward 7 council member Vincent C. Gray, 30 percent to 27 percent, though 44 percent remain undecided.

At-large incumbent Phil Mendelson has a 13-point lead over major opponent A. Scott Bolden, 30 percent to 17 percent, with 53 percent of voters undecided.

While tough races are being fought for open council seats in Wards 3, 5 and 6, the largest pot of cash raked in by a candidate in a ward race over the past three months was collected by an incumbent with token opposition.

Council member Jim Graham (D-Ward 1) raised more than \$176,000 during the reporting period that began March 10, according to reports filed this week with the D.C. Office of Campaign Finance.

Graham notes that he has spent less than \$1,200 of those funds, putting him in the catbird seat as he enters the final crucial months before the Sept. 12 Democratic primary, when he could face as many as three challengers: Lenwood O. Johnson, Chad Williams and Sertira A. "Cookie" Williams.

"You've got to take it seriously," Graham said. "I wouldn't be the first popular incumbent to be knocked off."

Staff writer David Nakamura contributed to this report.

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I submit this, and as you'll notice, this was written BEFORE Catania switched to being an independent.

LOOSE LIPS Right Of Way

By Elissa Silverman • February 27, 2004

President George W. Bush considers D.C.'s openly gay Republican at-large councilmember a "maverick."

That's quite apropos.

But the designation doesn't refer to David A. Catania's habit of bucking Mayor Anthony A. Williams on city-governance issues. Or to the rabid tax-cutter's fight to preserve the city's lone public hospital. Or to the local Republican's advocacy of gay marriage.

LL will return to that point in a moment.

Catania has earned his distinction because he has raised a lot of money over the past few years for Bush. And in the prez's Lone Star jargon, "maverick" is high praise.

Now Catania regrets every penny.

According to the Bush campaign, "mavericks" are under-40-year-old supporters who have raised more than \$50,000 for the president's re-election efforts. Thirty-something Catania estimates his fundraising prowess at between \$70,000 and \$80,000. In fact, the local Republican's activism and coffer-filling on behalf of the president earned him an exclusive invitation to the Bush family ranch in Crawford, Texas, this past summer.

A photograph in Catania's John A. Wilson Building office shows Catania standing next to First Lady Laura Bush as her husband throws his arm around Catania's partner, Brian Kearney.

The two couples look quite comfortable together. "At the ranch, the president went out of his way to thank me for bringing Brian," says Catania.

Good thing Catania didn't ask Bush for his blessing to get hitched.

On Tuesday, the president turned D.C.'s popularly elected GOp into even more of a maverick. Bush announced his support for a constitutional amendment banning marriage for gay and lesbian couples, a clear sop to right-wingers in his party who've been squawking about this issue for months. Their rationale is that government sanctioning of same-sex marriages might weaken society as we know it.

Yes, just think of the wreckage in the District alone! Such vibrant neighborhoods as Logan Circle and Capitol Hill have suffered greatly from the infusion of gay couples equipped with drywall, joint compound, and fierce nesting instincts!

Bush's announcement reverberated in the Dupont Circle home that Catania and Kearney moved into last year. Catania considered the White House statement "revolting." "My fundraising days for President Bush are over," he says. "The degree of disappointment I have in him is so profound."

The at-large councilmember removed the Bush photo from his office Wednesday morning.

Yet LL has to believe that the party maverick must have expected this announcement for quite some time. Catania says his fundraising for Bush occurred before gay marriage moved to the forefront of the national discourse. The party's "troglodytes," as Catania refers to GOP right-wingers, decided to bag their states-rights credo when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court cleared the way for same-sex marriages in that state in a decision last November.

At that time, Bush vowed to "do what is legally necessary to defend the sanctity of marriage."

LL encourages readers to look up the current divorce rate and then look up the definition of "sanctity." Actually, LL will save you the time. Fifty percent of first marriages end in divorce. "Sanctity," in this sense, is defined as "the fact of being sacred or inviolable," according to Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

"What is outrageous is the level of hypocrisy that the administration, and the president, is engaged in. He promised to be a uniter, not a divider," says Catania. "He promised to be a

compassionate conservative. There is nothing conservative about amending the Constitution—nor is there anything compassionate about writing discrimination into the Constitution.”

Now, LL understands that the GOP—like the Democratic Party—is a big tent, with lots of room for dissent. “My participation in the party should not be seen as condoning or excusing the party’s intolerance and poor record in respect to gays and lesbians,” Catania explained to LL Tuesday.

At some point, though, dissent spills into ideological incompatibility. Take a look:

HEALTH CARE

David A. Catania: Throw massive taxpayer infusion at public hospital to benefit east-of-the-river residents

Republican Orthodoxy: Privatize and let the poor suffer

DRUG COSTS

David A. Catania: Break up pharmaceutical oligopolies to reduce prescription drug costs

Republican Orthodoxy: Beef up pharmaceutical oligopolies and send top lawmakers to lobby for the industry

POLITICAL AUTONOMY

David A. Catania: Create elected district attorney in D.C. and give citizens more voting rights

Republican Orthodoxy: Condone taxation without representation

FISCAL POLICY

David A. Catania: Advocate smaller government, lower taxes, and personal responsibility

Republican Orthodoxy: Create \$521 billion deficit

GAY MARRIAGE

David A. Catania: Give it to me!

Republican Orthodoxy: No!

Catania says he hopes to fight the troglodytes in the party and try to recapture the party of Abraham Lincoln from Ralph Reed and the social conservatives. To that end, Catania plans to be one of two D.C. delegates to the party's platform convention and vows to fight the party "bigots." "I'm not delusional. I don't have any expectations of succeeding. None," he admits. "The reason I remain in the Republican party is to attempt to have our voice at table when our lives are being discussed."

Catania points to his impact on the local Republican party. He points out that five of the D.C. delegates to the national convention are openly gay. Of course, the local delegation hardly reflects the national party.

LL only has to point to fellow D.C. delegate Carol Schwartz, who has more gay friends than Madonna.

Catania says he will remain in the party for now. "If this were a decision that affected only me, it would be much easier, and I would think about bolting the party," says Catania. "This is a smack right between the eyes.... This is not a fight I asked for, and I didn't pick [it], but I'm not going to run away from it."

Yet Catania says if the election were held today, he would not cast his vote for Bush. "Absolutely not. I don't know how he can repair the damage that he has done," says Catania.

"I will never vote for a person who attempts to write discrimination into the Constitution," he says.

POLITICAL

POTPOURRI

- Right now, Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham's contemplating a run for the at-large seat occupied by colleague Harold Brazil. In this time of exploration, Graham says he's reflecting on several factors that will help determine whether he decides to take on the council's most buffoonish legislator.

Foremost in Graham's mind is: Will any of my colleagues abandon the collegial niceties and back me up on this?

Not one of his fellow councilmembers showed up for his Feb. 12 exploratory announcement, even though it took place right outside their offices, on the steps of the Wilson Building. Yet among the residents of Ward 3 who showed their support was Dale Leibach. He's the husband of Ward 3 Councilmember Kathy Patterson.

A PR heavyweight, Leibach has worked for many prominent Democrats, including Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and former Sen. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.), and served in the communications office for President Jimmy Carter. Mr. Kathy Patterson made his last appearance in local politics in fall 2002, when he sported a yellow tie—a Schwartz campaign color—at Schwartz's mayoral campaign kickoff and handed out "Democrats for Carol" fliers at events around town.

Did the appearances signal support for Schwartz in the entire Patterson-Leibach household? "I'm a Democratic elected official, and [Williams is] a Democratic elected official. I support the Democratic nominee," Patterson said at the time.

Leibach says he reads the Washington Post Metro section and makes his mind up on his own. "Kathy told me that Jim had approached her and that he was thinking about running," Leibach says. "I said, 'Tell him I will put my entire organization behind him if he decides to run.' My organization is primarily me and my computer."

- Ralph Nader has spent the last few weeks putting Democratic Party apparatchiks in a conniption. While he's been taking calls from party head Terry McAuliffe and others discouraging an independent run for president, Nader has also found time to focus on an issue of importance to D.C. voters.

In a Feb. 9 letter, Nader asked Mayor Williams why he can't shop in a grocery store in Ward 8.

"Since first hand knowledge of what is going on is not possible, and since the Washington Post seems not to be interested in this void, despite being urged to cover the story, I once again ask that you inform Ward 8 residents and other interested groups where this quest for a food outlet is at the present time," wrote Nader.

"I have been in towns with one third of the population of Ward 8 which have three supermarkets," Nader added. "You probably shop for groceries at a nearby supermarket."

•Last week, the D.C. Department of Health informed city officials of the upcoming Maternal and Child Health Citywide Coordinating Conference.

"The conference will continue to concentrate on three population specific cluster areas impacted by the Administration—mothers and infants, children and youth, and women and men," wrote Director James A. Buford.

That seems to cover everyone. —Elissa Silverman

Got a tip for Loose Lips? Call (202) 332-2100, x 302, 24 hours a day. And visit Loose Lips on the Web at www.washingtoncitypaper.com.

Once again, I aggressively covered issues related to the GLBT community.

LOOSE LIPS **Field Day**

By Elissa Silverman • August 6, 2004

D.C.'s Department of Parks and Recreation has turned some things around in recent times. First, its name: A few years back, former director Robert Newman swapped words in the

agency title to make parks come first. He hoped the switcheroo would offer a psychic boost to the beleaguered department's mission to keep the city's green spaces safe, clean, and accessible to all District residents.

Newman resigned less than a year later, after other creative approaches to the management of his department came to light.

Now, according to some Dupont Circle neighbors, Newman's old department has devised an even more harebrained swap: to give valuable city parkland to a private group for a pittance and hope that they lend a hand to keep the trash collected and the grass cut.

Whatever grass might grow in Stead Park, that is, after the construction of a 35,000- to 40,000-square-foot, four-story building on the P Street NW property. The building would house the Center: Home for GLBT in Metro D.C., a community center for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered District residents.

Right now, the approximately 68,000-square-foot park hosts a basketball court, a big field, and an old carriage house converted into an indoor recreation center. It's one of the only public spaces in the downtown neighborhood where one can play hoops, hop on a swing, or have a rugby scrum. According to a Power Point presentation, the Center complex would add a theater, a gymnasium, and offices, as well as a computer lab, a day-care center, and an underground parking garage for more than 500 cars on the site. "The Center's building will occupy less than 17 percent of the Park's square footage, and green space will be maintained at current levels, at roughly 65 percent," reads one slide in the presentation.

It's as if Queer Eye's Thom Filicia hosted the D.C. Cable Channel 16 version of Trading Spaces!

D.C. parks department officials deny any plans for a makeover. "The department right now has no plans about transferring over or selling any property," spokesperson Terry Lee told LL on Monday. "There's a lot of unneeded speculation taking place. It's a story feeding itself without anything concrete to back it up from the department."

Actually, the story is feeding off of a 20-plus-page draft lease agreement for the property between the "District of Columbia" and the "Metro D.C. Community Center Inc." The

document outlines a 99-year lease agreement, in which the Center would rent Stead Park for \$1 a year.

Stop right there: One dollar a year, when 500-square-foot studio apartments rent down the street for \$1,200 a month?

Who is the Center's brilliant rental agent?

Patrick S. Menasco, a lawyer with Steptoe & Johnson, president of the Center, and champion of the \$1 lease. When he hasn't been racking up billable hours in the past few years, Menasco has served as a director of the Cherry Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization that throws an annual gay-oriented, weekendlong party that raises hundreds of thousands of dollars. The fund then contributes that money to other gay and lesbian nonprofit organizations. At least some of the money, that is. According to tax filings, the Cherry Fund claimed total revenue adding up to nearly \$380,000 in 2002. The fund donated \$90,750 that year to seven gay and lesbian organizations, including the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League and the Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer, among other local groups.

About a year ago, Menasco says, he stepped down from the Cherry Fund to devote his energies to the building of the Center. Other cities, including San Francisco and Pittsburgh, have gay and lesbian community centers. D.C., with its sizable GLBT community, has had a couple of failed attempts to keep such an enterprise afloat.

So Menasco started meeting with city leaders to build support for the project. On April 8, 2003, Menasco put out a press release on the Center's Web site detailing his efforts thus far: "As plans for a new gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community center for the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area continue to evolve, local elected officials and community leaders have begun offering support and assistance, including Deputy Mayor Eric Price, DC Parks & Recreation Director Neil Albert, DC Council members David Catania, Jack Evans, Jim Graham, and Carol Schwartz."

"All of them are in favor of a community center," Menasco told LL last week. "All of them are in favor of our mission."

Of course they are: D.C.'s gay community knows how to flex its political muscle, and no savvy public official would say he's against a GLBT community center. Especially not the council's two gay legislators (Catania and Graham), the councilmember representing the heart of D.C.'s gay community (Evans), and the council's fashionista and gay icon (Schwartz).

"I'm very supportive of a center," says Schwartz, who took the opportunity to remind LL that D.C. tax-free shopping week starts Aug. 7 and ends Aug. 15. Schwartz says she met with Menasco more than a year ago to discuss a GLBT community center, but location never crept into the chat. "It was never discussed that it would be in a public building or on public land," recalls Schwartz.

Menasco tells LL that the Center's board members considered sites other than Stead, including the Central Union Mission building on 14th Street NW and one or two surplus school properties. Stead Park, however, had a big advantage: It would be cheap.

Why put out big bucks when the city might give away the land for the price of an ice cream cone?

Dupont citizens feared a Good Humor deal was in the offing when they read a June 25 article in the Washington Blade. The lead paragraph of Lou Chibbaro Jr.'s story disclosed that city officials were "negotiating terms of a lease" that would hand over Stead Park to Menasco's group for the Center. In a July 23 follow-up in the Blade by writer Adrian Brune, Menasco characterized the lease as "a fait accompli," even though he acknowledged that the Center needed community support before such a lease would be signed by the city.

"This is the kind of neighborhood where you can't change the part in your own hair without getting prior approval from neighborhood groups, and if you're over the age of 50, you have to get the approval of the Historic Preservation Review Board," says Mike Silverstein, an advisory neighborhood commissioner in the Dupont Circle area. "That's not the way the Dupont Circle neighborhood works."

Ever since June 25, Silverstein's neighbors have been experiencing bad hair days. They say that, until the Blade story hit the streets, they had no idea that the city had even been

entertaining proposals for Stead. And the deception goes deep: They claim the city government has ignored community concerns, engaged in dirty tricks, and done insider trading.

First off, Dupont neighbors say, the Stead family willed the property to the city for the benefit of the city's children, as noted on a plaque on the property. Yet when a few inquiring minds went to the city's parks department to research that fact, the Stead Park file was missing.

Aha!

Neighbors say they have filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the Stead Park X-File.

Then there are other oddities. At a meeting with community members, according to neighbors, Parks and Recreation Associate Director Drew Becher told Dupont Circle residents that he came to D.C. from a job in Chicago to make a gay and lesbian center a reality. "He told me directly that he was brought here to build a GLBT center on public space," says advisory neighborhood commissioner Mark Bjorge, who has been very involved in the community response to the Center.

Becher referred LL's calls to Department of Parks and Recreation spokesperson Lee.

"He denied saying that," responds Albert, who has recently been promoted to Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders. "Drew is extremely busy trying to ensure that we have beautiful open space in the District of Columbia."

Albert says that he never made any commitments to Menasco and too much has been made of his meeting with the Center organizers. "I am very angry at the misrepresentations," says Albert. Yet Albert didn't exactly dismiss the idea when he was asked about the proposal on WAMU's D.C. Politics Hour With Kojo and Jonetta on July 2. "We want to partner with them," said Albert to a caller who asked about Stead Park. "Again, we're just in preliminary discussions. There is no signed deal."

As further evidence of a cooked deal for the Center, Dupont neighbors point to the dual role of Wanda Alston, a special assistant to Mayor Anthony A. Williams for gay and lesbian affairs who also serves as a member of the Center's advisory board. "We met Wanda Alston through Cornelius Baker," explains Menasco, referring to the head of the Whitman-Walker Clinic. "Cornelius introduced us to the establishment."

Says Bjorge: "There's an appearance of self-dealing here."

Alston admits to being a promoter of the concept to D.C. government officials. "My role as an advisory member is to provide access to members of the board to the D.C. government," says Alston. "I would have to agree with whoever is making that claim, and I would be more than happy to resign from the advisory board."

Alston says she helped Menasco set up meetings last year with Williams administration big shots. When Menasco reported to Alston this spring, he touted his commitments from city leaders and neighbors. Alston, who works out of the mayor's Office of Community Outreach, says she took Menasco at his word. "When he came back to us this year, he had led us to believe the community was behind him," says Alston.

There's yet more for conspiracy theorists to chew on: D.C. Department of Transportation Associate Director Lars Etzkorn served as the Center's treasurer while he headed the mayor's Public Space Committee. "The chair of the PSC has no jurisdiction whatsoever over D.C. parkland," Etzkorn told LL when asked if Etzkorn might have any professional conflict of interest.

Nevertheless, last week Etzkorn resigned as the Center's treasurer.

Despite his salesmanship and rumored political juice, Menasco admits that he hasn't exactly gotten the thumbs up from city leaders. "The city has agreed to nothing," Menasco told LL last week.

That's what Albert said as well in an e-mail to those involved with Stead Park. "I sent a clarifying e-mail which said that the city hasn't entered into any lease agreement for Stead Park and that the city hasn't offered to sell Stead Park, but that the city is working with a group of neighborhood residents to look at redevelopment of Stead Park," comments Albert.

According to Williams administration sources, community outrage has been so great that Albert will likely tell Menasco soon that a GLBT community center at Stead is dead on arrival.

Albert had no comment for LL on that likelihood. —Elissa Silverman

Got a tip for Loose Lips? Call (202) 332-2100, x 302, 24 hours a day. And visit Loose Lips on the Web at www.washingtoncitypaper.com.