

"Gay Men: The Law and Issues We Face"

Notes from the presentation by A.J. Bockelman, Executive Director of
PROMO

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Introduction: A.J. Bockelman, before becoming PROMO's Executive Director, served on PROMO's Board of Directors and the HRC Campaign Fund. He has been a resident of St. Louis over fifteen years.

A.J. Bockelman discussed the three separate functions of PROMO:

1. PROMO's political lobbying of Missouri state legislators

- **MONA** - the Missouri non-discrimination bill with respect to sexual orientation. PROMO has been working to build legislative support for this bill over the last seven years. There is no chance that this legislation will pass until the Democrats control both chambers and the governorship.
- **Safe Schools Bill** - this bill prohibits bullying targeted at LGBT children. PROMO has been working to build legislative support for this bill over the last four years. The sponsors of this bill are interested in specifically enumerated categories of targeted bullying (such as age, racial, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation).
- **LGBT parents' rights** – these lobbying efforts attempt to protect the rights of LGBT parents who want to adopt. Seventeen states now ban gay adoption. Thirty seven states ban gay marriage. A.J. Bockelman believes that the conservatives will try to use gay adoption as a wedge issue in elections, the same way they used gay marriage. However, the poll data even in Red States show that 60% of the state's population would favor gay adoption if it were in the best interests of the child. At the present time, there is no law in Missouri preventing gay adoptions. PROMO lobbies state legislators to try and keep it that way. A.J. Bockelman believes that LGBT issues would fare better in the courts if Missouri were to change its method of selecting judges. At the present time, the governor appoints a "nonpartisan panel" who selects the state judges. PROMO is working with other progressive groups to change the selection process so that the governor would directly appoint judges to the bench.

2. **PROMO's nonprofit educational fund**

- The nonprofit branch of PROMO is separate from the political part of PROMO and is funded by tax-deductible contributions.
- **Pro-Claim Faith**- this educational effort is building a network of religious leaders who will speak up for LGBT equality. A partner in this effort is Missouri Coalition for Reproductive Choice.
- **Youth Incentive** – this educational effort seeks to recruit, train and develop leadership among youth willing to become politically active. PROMO tries to have an active presence on university campuses. Since LGBT individuals are going out in high school, PROMO is trying to harness some of this youthful energy into educational projects. In St. Louis, there are forty-five Gay/Straight Alliances in local high schools. There are thirty such organizations in Kansas City high schools.
- **Workshop on Gender Identify**- this is a new effort by PROMO to offer a workshop on Gender Identity 101.
- **Health Issues Initiative** – this is another new initiative that seeks to raise awareness of the higher rates of cancer in the lesbian population (cervical and breast cancer), to encourage LGBT individuals to be “out” to the doctors and to insure LGBT clients receive appropriate medical care.

3. **PROMO's PAC fund**

- This is the political branch of PROMO that endorses politicians during electoral campaigns. PROMO does not distribute money but it does provide manpower – knocking on doors for political candidates and managing phone banks.
- The process begins in February when PROMO sends out a survey and then interviews candidates for political office. The product of this work is a political report card on each candidate's positions on issue relevant to PROMO.
- PROMO, in the last election, endorsed 52 candidates with 65% getting elected.
- Two lesbians who currently serve in the state legislature have been very supportive of PROMO's agenda. They are Janet Oxford from the 59th district who serves in the House and Julie Justin from Kansas City who serves in the Senate.
- A.J. hopes that in 2008 that control of the Senate could switch to the Democratic Party and Jay Nixon (who is a much stronger ally on LGBT issues than the present governor) might be elected governor.