



THE  
**F**ORWARD **O**BSERVER

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, INC.  
VOLUME 4                      ISSUE 1                      SEPTEMBER 2009

**Former President Nancy Russell seated on AVER Board**

**Gold Coast Chapter "Fights" Don't Ask, Don't Tell**

**Chapter Reports**

**National Convention October 14–18, 2009**



Chicago



Albuquerque



New York



Puget Sound

**Gay Veterans March Across the Country**

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear friends and fellow veterans,

Much has happened in the organization. Membership has increased and donations are coming in. Our thanks to all!

I am glad to announce the reinstatement of Nancy Russell as past president of AVER and James Darby as managing editor of the *Forward Observer*—At long last we have a new edition of the *Forward Observer*! We welcome back both of these fine veterans.

A continuing problem with many small organizations is the lack of members capable of getting the job done. We have very enthusiastic members, especially in the chapters where they meet other veterans, but those assuming serious office are scarce. For instance, we have had serious problems in getting out the *Forward Observer*, partly because of problems with the printers, but mainly because those of us who have attempted to produce the publication are severely limited in the knowledge and experience needed. It's the same in the local chapters; the officers are frequently asking for experienced help.

### **Nancy Russell Returns**

I am pleased to inform you that, after an investigation into the removal of LTC Nancy Russell as president of AVER, the current AVER Board of Directors has reinstated LTC Russell as past president, and has reseated her on the Board of Directors.

The investigation centered mainly on procedures and the hearing at which Nancy Russell was removed from office. It is the decision and opinion of the current Board Of Directors that the original charge against LTC Russel was diluted by other, added charges, and that she was not permitted a fair defense. I am therefore gratified to announce that she is exonerated of all charges.

Both the Board Of Directors and I further wish to emphasize that most disputes can and should be settled fairly in less traumatic ways.

### **AVER Convention and Election of New Officers**

Will we see you at the AVER convention in Ft. Lauderdale? The Florida Goldcoast Chapter is planning a gala event, and of course, there will be the bi-annual election of a new Board Of Directors. Each voting member of AVER is eligible for office. Check page 14 of this newsletter and the AVER Web site ([www.aver.us](http://www.aver.us)) for the convention schedule and specifics. Please contact me if you are interested in running for an office. Nominations will, of course, be accepted from the floor. For your convenience I am reprinting the election policies and guideline from our national bylaws:

#### **VOTING AT NATIONAL CONVENTIONS**

AVER By-laws Article VIII, section B.

Voting at National Conventions will be by delegates. Each Chapter has one delegate vote for the first five members, and one delegate vote for each additional ten members.

Proxy votes will be permitted.

Chapters may assign their proportional votes to the Regional Vice President or to another chapter. Assignments must be in writing and delivered to the National Board Of Directors prior to the start of the conduct of business at the National Convention.

Proxies may be assigned in one of 2 ways: either directed to vote for a certain individual or movement, or, as is more usual, non-directed in that the proxy carrier is able to vote his/her best judgment. This is especially practical when dealing with nominees from the floor.

Finally, I want to thank all of you for hanging in there with us. We have made mistakes in the past, and while we will probably make mistakes again, I trust they will not be permanent and that we will immediately correct them. We need your help! To those who have stood by us, I give my heartfelt thanks! If you have not yet done so, please consider giving us a portion of your time and talents. If you do, we will once again make this the best Veterans Organization in the U.S.A!

Respectfully,  
Chief Jim Donovan  
President



## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Greetings,

I am the new editor of *The Forward Observer*. I'm not really the new editor. I was the editor and publisher of *The Forward Observer* from 1994 to 2004. I am very fortunate to have two able assistants—Bill Beaman from Chicago and James Apedaile from St. Louis.

I am also the president of the Chicago Chapter of AVER, which I started in 1992.

I do want to state that Patrick Bova, my partner of 47 years has been by my side through all the trials and tribulations of GLBVA-AVER-DADT.

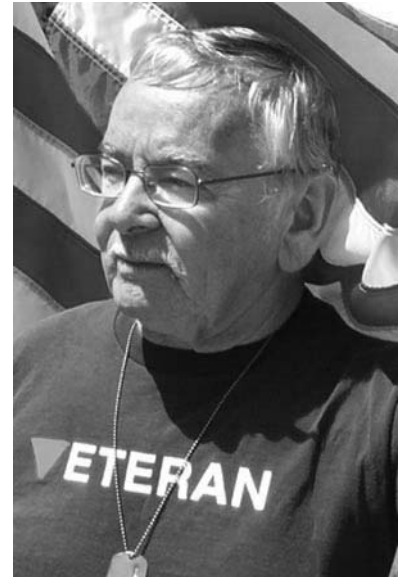
In 1993 we traveled to Washington, D.C. five times because we wanted to be in the nation's capital when the ban was lifted. Unfortunately it never happened, and we are still here fighting the same battle. (How many military battles have lasted for 17 years?)

I congratulate all those "happy warriors" who have hung in there since the early days of GLBVA (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Veterans of America). I also congratulate and welcome all the new fighters who have joined the cause over the years, and who are still there fighting. We need you now more than ever.

Please feel free to contact me at any time regarding anything you would like to see in *The Forward Observer*. And, always remember that it is your newsletter. Thank you for continuing to serve your country.

Respectfully,

Jim Darby, Managing Editor AVER P.O. Box 29317 Chicago, IL 60615  
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## FROM CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY NICK JACKMAN

Fellow members,

My name is Nick Jackman, and I am the president of the Puget Sound Chapter. I am a candidate for the position of national secretary. I have been a member of AVER for over 6 years. I have served as the Puget Sound Chapter secretary, webmaster and president. I attended the national conventions in the District of Columbia and Los Angeles.

I am a retired chief petty officer in the U.S. Coast Guard. I seek the position of national secretary because I was recently moved by an article by Danny Ingram in the *Gay Military Signal*. The article was entitled "Battle of the Ban." It reminded me that although I do not have the youth and good looks of so many younger veterans, I do have "gravitas." I served in silence and am proud of my service to my nation. If they called me again, I would proudly and openly serve. And yes, I still look good in my uniform! I was one beginning to think that so many organizations are now fighting to end the ban, that maybe AVER was losing its voice in the din of our youthful stars. But then I was reminded I have "gravitas." I bring the experience, dedication to our cause, and respect for this organization that has led and continues to lead the way toward ending the ban!

On a personal note, I am the father of a 23-year-old son and I have a life partner of 15 years, whose support and love I count on every day. I had planned to attend the 2009 convention, but when the date changed, it conflicted with personal obligations beyond my control. If so honored by your nomination and support, I pledge all my efforts to see that American Veterans for Equal Rights continues to be a strong voice for lifting the ban. Thank you. Semper Paratus!

Respectfully,

Nick Jackman, CPO, USCG(Ret.)  
Chapter President, AVER Puget Sound

*Gravitas* is a word from ancient Latin that refers to depth of personality. Specifically gravitas refers to dignity, seriousness, and duty. It is one of several virtues that ancient Roman society expected adult men to possess.

## FROM CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT DANNY INGRAM

Greetings fellow members of American Veterans for Equal Rights,

My name is Danny Ingram and I am the president of the Georgia Chapter of AVER. I also currently serve as AVER regional vice president for the southeastern region, and I am a candidate for national AVER president.

First of all, I would like to encourage each of you to attend the 2009 AVER National Convention in Ft. Lauderdale, October 14–18. You can get more information about the convention and register at the AVER Gold Coast Chapter's Web site (<http://www.aver-fgc.us/convention.html>). The Gold Coast Chapter has been working very hard to put together a great convention. I am personally excited about getting together with other AVER members from around this great nation to plan the future of our organization.

There is much work to be done.

In addition to preparing for the next Battle of the Ban, we need to discuss the future of AVER beyond the end of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Along with the challenges of fighting for VA benefits that many veterans face, LGBT veterans face the additional challenge of “double PTSD,” the added stress of having to maintain secrets in the midst of the already very stressful situation of wartime soldiering. AVER needs to be able to help our LGBT service members returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan get all the help and services to which they are entitled. No organization will be in a better position to assist LGBT veterans than AVER. Though AVER has already obtained the 501(c)(19) status as a Veterans Service Organization, there is much work to be done if we are to become an effective VSO for LGBT veterans. In taking on this vital mission AVER will truly need all hands on deck if we are to accomplish this transition.

I know that many of you have questions about your ongoing support of AVER. I want to assure you that AVER is alive and active. Most of all I want to tell you that you are valued by this organization. No organization can function without the solid foundation and support of its members. I am well aware of that fact, and I also believe that there are no finer members of the LGBT community than those individuals who have taken up the call to defend our nation’s freedom, even when the military’s policies devalued our service and dishonored our sacrifice. Veterans are special people. I care about each of you and look forward to working with you as we fight to restore the dignity and honor of the United States military by removing an unjust policy that undermines its very reason for existence. Please continue to stand with us. You are respected, you are appreciated, and you are needed.

I have some ideas that I hope will help AVER accomplish our mission, ideas to increase membership, ideas to effectively combat the lies that will be told when the battle to overturn the ban heats up again. But I would also like to hear what you have to say. Your input is vital, and your counsel is much appreciated. You have my email address. Feel free to use it. I look forward to hearing from you.

I want to thank you, my fellow veterans, for your past support of AVER. Again, I encourage you to attend our national convention in October. If I am successful in my campaign for the presidency of AVER, it will be my great honor to serve such a fine group of people. There is no more vital mission and no more honorable duty than the defense of the Constitution of the United States of America. It is my honor to have shared that duty with each of you, and it will be my honor to serve with you again as together we continue to defend our nation’s freedom.

Respectfully,  
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## Former President Nancy Russell seated on AVER Board

On Friday July 17, 2009, AVER President James Donovan announced that former AVER president Nancy Russell will resume her place on the AVER Board of Directors as AVER past president. Ms. Russell had been removed as president at a former board hearing in 2004.

According to Chief Donovan, "It gives me great pleasure to announce that LTC Nancy Russell is taking her place on the Board of Directors as past president. At the request of some members, the case against Nancy was reopened, investigated and discussed in full by the Board, and it was determined that her hearing was, in the opinion of the Board, flawed. Therefore, it was the unanimous decision of the Board to exonerate Nancy of all charges and to welcome her back as past president."

Past President Russell will head a committee looking into the possibility of establishing an LGBT veterans memorial in Washington D.C.

LTC Russell has a long proud history with AVER since 1992 when it was known as the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Veterans of America (GLBVA). The organization changed its name to the more inclusive American Veterans For Equal Rights (AVER) in 2003 under her leadership. According to a recent article in *Gay Military Signal*, Nancy Russell became vice president of GLBVA in 1993. She was elected president, for the first time, in 1994. In May of 1994, Nancy Russell traveled to Washington to give oral testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Oversight and Veteran Affairs. She was reelected president in 1995.

In 1997 she was elected vice president and was honored for her accomplishments: for spending five

years building GLBVA, for obtaining the 501(c)(3) status for GLBVA with the IRS, and for testifying on gays in the military and "don't ask, don't tell" before Congress. In 2003, in San Antonio, she was again elected president of AVER.

In her military career, LTC Russell was a member of the Women's Army Corps until it's integration with the regular army in 1978 when she became a member of the Adjutant General's Corps. During her twenty-year service, she commanded two companies and a battalion. She is a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College.

Nancy Russell has been a lifetime LGBT activist, having served as a Democratic Party precinct chair and as a delegate to Democratic conventions, having founded the Stonewall Democratic Club of San Antonio and having served as vice president of the Texas Stonewall Democratic Caucus, as well as having served on the Texas Democratic Executive Committee. She is currently on the Advisory Committee of the San Antonio LGBT Chamber of Commerce, of which she is a founding member.

## Opinion: Florida Gold Coast Chapter "Fights" Don't Ask, Don't Tell

by Andy Eddy, Florida Gold Coast Chapter

The Florida Gold Coast AVER Chapter continues to be involved in its drive to achieve the lifting of the codified "don't ask, don't tell" (DADT) military ban, which is solely based on the singling out of individuals because of their sexual orientation, not their impeccable credentials, honorable citizenship, nor exceptional performance.

Florida Gold Coast Chapter proudly offered its resources to our local Servicemembers Legal Defense Network representative. We reached out

to various city and county commissions asking them to draft and adopt local proclamations advising American citizens that discrimination in the military should not and can not be tolerated.

Obviously, discrimination based on prejudices raises its ugly head when enabled and promulgated by bigotry and hate, be it visible or subliminal.

While some people who support DADT have complained that skin color and gender are visible features that easily target an individual because of perceived prejudices, we understand that while sexual orientation is generally perceived as invisible, its victims are not!

The struggle for equality will not end until those who believe in the Constitutional guarantee of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" witness a realization. On that day astute members of the House and Senate will examine and admit to the entrenched intolerance and subliminal bigotry found in the unjust DADT ban.

With a stroke of his pen, President Abraham Lincoln ended legalized discrimination based on color. President Harry S. Truman allowed his pen to be mightier than the sword when ending military segregation based on earlier beliefs that black and white were not compatible—neither in or out of the military in this country.

The day will come when our Constitutionally elected members of the House and Senate along with the President of the United States will mend a hurt and put their pens to legislation terminating the DADT era. History will address this event as ending a legacy of intolerance based solely on sexual orientation and not a person's ability, honesty, nor good citizenship. This intolerance is especially apparent when viewed and bathed in the enlightenment of what has been and continues to be demonstrated in allied countries where there is no military ban.

## Chapter Reports

### Albuquerque

The Bataan Chapter (New Mexico) of American Veterans for Equal Rights culminated an active six months with their Pride 2009 activities. "We've done more in this past six months than we ever have," President Steve Loomis stated.

Chapter members Penn Baker, Dorothy Baker and Steve Loomis opened the 2009 year by lobbying the New Mexico Congressional delegation to support the Military Readiness Enhancement Act. On 13 March 2009, in cold wintry weather, they participated in the Rally Against Don't Ask, Don't Tell on the Capitol grounds in Washington, D.C.



The banner for the Bataan Chapter is proudly displayed during the lobby on the front of the U.S. Capitol.

The rally was sponsored by Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

As Albuquerque Pride 2009 approached, the chapter prepared its color guard to take its accustomed lead in the Pride Parade. Displaying its red, white and blue flag, its rainbow and chapter flags, the New Mexico flag, and its chapter banner, it received applause and salutes all along the route to the fairgrounds. The night before Gay Pride Day, the chapter provided its color guard for the dedication of the City of Albuquerque Gay Memorial, only the second in the U.S.

Veterans of the Bataan Chapter prepared a gay veterans history display



Bataan Chapter color guard at the dedication of the City of Albuquerque Gay Memorial. in the Pride exhibit hall. This display was twice as large as the previous year. Photos, awards, mementos of their service to our country, and books about gays in the military were gaily displayed in cases under the military flags of our country.

The chapter's booth on Main Street of the State Fairgrounds was shared with Servicemembers Legal Defense Network. There we obtained several hundred signatures to repeal "don't ask, don't tell" and answered numerous questions about gays in the military. We handed out literature and our local mailing list of gay veterans was significantly enlarged.

Within days of Pride we received word that New Mexico Congressmen Ben Ray Lujan and Martin Heinrich had signed on to be co-sponsors of the Military Readiness Enhancement Act.

At the end of June, the chapter had its



The newly sewn chapter flag for the Bataan Chapter is shown prior to the Albuquerque Pride Parade. Each star over the rainbow represents one of the U.S. military services that gays have proudly served with.

annual pool party and barbecue hosted by long-time supporters Jerry Ginsburg and Steve Foster. Great weather, fellowship, and five new visitors attended.

Service awards were presented to Dorothy Baker for her support to the chapter as a spouse and to Ginsburg and Foster for their support and hosting over the years.

Plans are in place to participate in the march on Washington in October and also in the Albuquerque Veterans Day Parade in November.

—Steve Loomis, President, Bataan Chapter

### Chicago Chapter



So far 2009 has been a busy and exciting year for the Chicago Chapter.

Our first big event of the season was the City of Chicago's 12th Annual Memorial Day Parade. We were just one of the 225 entries to march down State Street. We were joined by Congressman Mike Quigley. This is a very important event in Chicago, and a great opportunity for us to let everyone know that LGBT veterans have also served.

Also, a dozen members participated in the 16th Annual Remembrance Ceremony on Memorial Day for Allen Schindler in Steger, Illinois. Allen's mother Dorothy graciously thanked everyone at the end of the ceremony for remembering her son.

This year, Pride Month in Chicago was truly over-the-top. The number and breadth of activities kept everyone going for days. To start with, a dozen veterans attended the Mayor's Reception for the GLBT community at the Chicago Cultural Center on Tuesday, June 30th, and, of course we had to have a photo with  
*(continued on page 9)*



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

## House of Representatives

### Recognizing American Veterans for Equal Rights

HON. MIKE QUIGLEY

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 27, 2009

**Mr. QUIGLEY.** Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Chicago Chapter of the American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), an organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, on the occasion of the City of Chicago's annual Salute to LGBT veterans.

Founded in 1992, the Chicago Chapter of AVER provides support to LGBT veterans in the Chicago metropolitan area. Members of AVER have served in every war from World War II to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Each year, AVER members march in Chicago's Memorial Day Parade and in Chicago's Gay Pride Parade. By doing so, AVER members bear witness to the fact that gay and lesbian Americans have served throughout our history to defend the United States in time of war and to preserve our freedoms and democracy.

AVER fights not only for LGBT veterans but also for gay and lesbian soldiers currently serving in our armed forces, especially those who are in harms way in Iraq and Afghanistan. AVER

members travel to Washington every year to lobby members of Congress for an end to the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

For fifteen years, AVER has fought against this detrimental policy that requires gay and lesbian service members to deny who they are and to lie about their lives. Our democratic allies – from the United Kingdom to Israel – allow gay and lesbian soldiers to serve openly without any adverse effects on military preparedness or morale. This is the basic fairness and justice that AVER seeks for gay and lesbian American soldiers.

Madam Speaker, I also want to recognize Jim Darby, the founder of the Chicago Chapter of AVER and a Korean War veteran. Jim served in the Navy as a Russian-language specialist. Along with all the other AVER members, Jim has fought tirelessly to educate the general public and the Congress about the plight of LGBT veterans and active service members. What AVER seeks is what we should all seek: respect and honor for all those who have served and who are serving the United States of America through our Armed Forces.



## Chicago

(continued from page 7)



Members of AVER Chicago and Congressman Quigley at Memorial Day Parade.

the mayor.

On Saturday, June 13th, we celebrated our 13th Annual Flag Day Beer Bust and BBQ at Buck's Saloon with beer, hot dogs, brats, hamburgers, potato salad, beans, pies, cakes, and so forth. What a picnic! Buck's Saloon is so good to us.

On Friday and Saturday, June 26th and 27th, AVER members staffed a booth at the Pride Fair. We were pleased with the number of members who turned out to help us spread the word about who we are and what we do. Pride Fair on Halsted Street is always such an "interesting" experience.

On Sunday, June 28th, we marched in Chicago's 40th Annual Pride Parade, and carried GUS, our giant 50 foot flag. Special thanks to the 38 volunteers who helped carry the flag for a mile and a half.

Although we veterans intended to ignore the phalanx of religious bigots lined up at the end of the parade, one member did respond to the bigots' leader by yelling "Thanks to our military service and sacrifices, you have the privilege of spewing your vile venom. In many countries around the world, you would be thrown into prison." Their response



GUS at 2009 Chicago Pride Parade.

was "You are all unfit to serve."

Our seventh annual With Liberty and Justice For All—Salute to LGBT Veterans was held on August 5th at noon in Daley Plaza. Too many superstars to mention, but special thanks to Congressman Quigley and Luke Visconti, U.S. Navy diversity officer who flew in from New Jersey for the occasion.

September is election month for the Chicago Chapter. It is an honor and a privilege to be an officer in AVER and all members are encouraged to run for an office.

Several members of the Chicago Chapter are planning to attend the march on Washington in October and then drive on to Florida for the AVER Convention.

A number of events are planned for the fall, including our 17th Annual Veterans Day Dinner.

Thank you for continuing to serve your country

—Jim Darby, President, Chicago Chapter

## Florida



It's been an exciting several months for the members and friends of Florida's Gold Coast Chapter. Our club participated in a wonderful program that delivered hundreds of gift packages to our troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Adriane Reese presented a certificate of appreciation from our Broward County Sheriff, Al Lamberti, along with an autographed picture expressing his thanks for AVER's involvement in Operation Sunshine Hugs. The venture brought our membership to the table with a number of other organizations and broadened support for what we do as veterans and servicemembers who care

about those who live under the shadow of DADT regardless of their sexual orientation.

Several members participated in a recent VSO luncheon and as a result of that involvement we continue to gain support from other veterans and the organizations they represent. According to Dil Hatchett, the club's treasurer, this is simply a needed tool in AVER's outreach and educational effort. President Mark LaFontaine sees our continuing participation resulting in a growing interest in what we are planning for AVER's upcoming National Convention in Fort Lauderdale.

Special thanks to Maribel Prado and Ken Morris for their time and service on behalf our volunteer 4th of July fundraising committee which resulted in a financial success and a day of fun. Those dedicated volunteers did a fantastic job. Carol Moran, owner of the New Moon, has been a most generous supporter of our organization and our fundraiser would have never been possible without her kindness.

We were proud of those who participated in the Stonewall Street Festival and Parade. Our AVER color guard kicked off the parade on a warm and crowd-packed Saturday evening. The colors were followed by our float and marching contingent. On the following day AVER shared a booth with SLDN at the day-long street festival. We are raising awareness relative to our joint efforts to lift the ban. We are likewise working closely with SLDN on a project to secure proclamations from local city and county commissions agreeing with those of us calling for equality of treatment and inclusion noting that "don't ask, don't tell" isn't working.

AVER Gold Coast Chapter members are now looking forward to a successful national convention. We could not extend enough thanks to the volunteers whose energy, enthusiasm and devotion are working to make the 2009 event a smashing success.

—Andy Eddy, Secretary, Florida Gold Coast Chapter

## Georgia Chapter



AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

### Georgia Chapter

"My Duty, My Honor, My Right"

AVER Georgia's participation in the annual 2008 Veterans Day Parade went very well.

I want to thank everyone who helped make our fourth time in the parade a great success. Melinda Morgan and Lori Sinnen (Sherri's extremely patient partner) carried the AVER banner to which we had attached a long streamer that read AVER REMEMBERS MAJOR ROGERS. Corby Hall carried the POW-MIA flag and Sherri Boucher carried the U.S. flag. Richard Lang drove the VIP vehicle in which rode Jack Strouss, Carol Cornelius, and Eric Van Pelt.

I walked behind with a portrait of Major Rogers and Samson, the riderless horse, who was led by my old high school friend Dede Fauconnet and her friend Alice. Samson wore a blue blanket with white trim, a saddle that featured two backwards-facing riding boots, a U.S. Army sabre, and two small placards with information about Major Rogers. I wore my dress blue uniform. We looked very good. Dede's husband LTC Larry Fauconnet (Ret.), who watched the parade as a spectator, said that we looked as good as any of the professional color guards in the parade.

Samson was a beautiful, charming, and affectionate animal. I think I understand what the Equus story is about now. Samson loved all the attention. He liked to be petted, and if you stopped he nudged you with his nose. He was great and behaved beautifully.

Most of the people along the parade route were very respectful toward us. Many cheered, several said "thank you," and one person with a bugle played Taps



as we passed by. Many veterans saluted. One person said "shame on you for making a political statement on Veterans Day." This was particularly surprising since we didn't even have a rainbow flag with us this year. When we passed the review stand the announcer did not announce our name, but he did say "and we honor those who didn't return" when Samson passed by. I heard from Veterans For Peace that they didn't announce their name either.

Coordinating our participation in the Veterans Day Parade is a lot of work. I really appreciate all those who participated and I thank you for helping AVER Georgia in its important role of educating the public about who we are and what we are about. As always, we made a great impression.

—Danny Ingram, President, Georgia Chapter



## New York



The New York chapter of AVER, AVER-NY, serves the metropolitan tri-state area including New York City (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and Bronx), northern New Jersey, Connecticut, Westchester and Rockland Counties, and Long Island. A Long Island chapter is in formation at the Long Island GLBT Center in Bayshore, Suffolk County. To contact AVER-NY visit us at [averny.tripod.com](http://averny.tripod.com) or call 718-849-5665. To inquire about the Long Island group, call 631-665-2300 and ask about the LGBT Veterans Support Group.

AVER-NY marched in NYC Summer Pride parades in June, in Queens and in the huge Heritage Of Pride Parade in Manhattan which celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 with over 100,000 marchers and three million spectators. As always, we were greeted on every street of the 70-block, four-hour march by thousands cheering and shouting, "Thank you for serving!"

We were joined on the Manhattan march by Florida Gold Coast Chapter Vice President Ken Morris who led our contingent carrying our American flag. AVER-NY president Denny Meyer brought up the rear in the AVER-NY Disabled Veterans vehicle which was decorated with posters memorializing two gay WWII veterans, Bill Horne and Major Willet Fields. AVER-NY Secretary Tony Breton, serving as street marshal, rallied the troops in the summer heat.

*(continued on page 11)*

## New York

(continued from page 10)

In the upcoming New York City Veterans Day Parade, AVER-NY will welcome being led by Lieutenant Dan Choi and the participation of LGBT New York City police officer members of Gay Officers Action League. Following the parade, AVER-NY marchers will unwind at Julius' Bar, on West 10th, one of the oldest LGBT bars in America.

AVER-NY, which instigated the nation's first city DADT repeal resolution in the New York City Council in 2005, continues to aggressively advocate for the rights of LGBT veterans and DADT repeal. In 2008 AVER-NY provided testimony and speakers during hearings for the New York City Council's second DADT repeal resolution. AVERNY has provided consultation and information to local veterans centers and city-sponsored mental health services seeking to better serve LGBT veterans.

## Region I Report

AVER Region I is the northeastern United States including Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

There are currently Region I chapters in Cleveland, Ohio, and in New York, New York.

If you are a veteran in the northeastern United States and would like to start an AVER chapter to bring together fellow LGBT veterans, please contact Denny Meyer, AVER Region I VP, at [dennymeyer@aver.us](mailto:dennymeyer@aver.us) or phone 718-849-5665.

## Veterans Affairs Report

AVER Veterans Affairs provides information and referrals to all veterans. We continue to receive inquiries from veterans of all ages, sexual orientations and gender identities. We have recently gotten inquiries from straight veterans and their families and were able to provide



information regarding their needs and questions.

Recently, a local veterans center requested our assistance in helping them determine how to better serve LGBT combat veterans—both those currently returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and those who served in earlier conflicts including the many who served in Vietnam. We provided AVER contact information and noted that in addition to the usual needs, LGBT vets have additional issues.

These include untreated long-term PTSD, particularly for older veterans, and the need for LGBT-sensitive counseling and assurance that LGBT veterans are made to feel worthy, welcome, and proud. LGBT veterans returning to civilian life have often discovered their sexual orientation or alternate gender identity while in the service. Many may feel disinclined to return home to small town America realizing that they would not be able to be free and open about themselves there. Consequently, they try to relocate to big cities after discharge from active duty. As a result, some LGBT veterans find themselves more isolated from friends and familiar people than others, and may be struggling to find housing and employment in an unfamiliar place. Some LGBT veterans, particularly transgender veterans, experience discrimination at VA medical centers.

AVER Veterans Affairs maintains consulting and referral contact with selected veterans centers and VAMC programs around the country that have or are developing specific programs supporting the needs of transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual American

veterans.

Additionally there are limited resources for referral for legal assistance in disability claims, discharge upgrades and related issues.

Professionals wishing to participate in supporting the needs of LGBT American veterans are welcome to contact AVER Veterans Affairs. Please direct all inquiries to [vetsaffairs@aver.us](mailto:vetsaffairs@aver.us). VA Suicide Prevention Hot Line: 800-273-8255.

## Public Affairs Report

In addition to ongoing media interviews, and press releases, AVER Public Affairs has attended an international conference in Washington D.C. on the transition to open service by LGBT servicemembers in America's allied countries, and participated in several forums about LGBT aging, bisexual awareness, and transgender issues in which we spoke out to increase awareness of both older LGBT veterans and transgender veterans and their respective concerns.

In March 2008, AVER Public Affairs went to Washington DC to attend "Sexual Orientation and Military Preparedness" an International Perspective Conference at Georgetown University Law Center. Speakers from Australia, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom detailed how their nations transitioned to open service of LGBT service in their armed forces. In brief, compared to the ongoing perverse "don't ask, don't tell" policy in the US—now in its 16th year—these other nations had relatively swift, straightforward shifts to open service along with legal recognition of the rights of their LGBT patriotic volunteers. Beginning in the early 1990s, in those allied nations, the respective parliaments took into consideration their own national and international human rights laws and progressive societal perspectives on the rights of homosexuals, women, and minorities. After studies, hearings

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## Public Affairs Report

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and court cases in each country, the parliaments, prime ministers, or military leaders determined that there was no longer any justification for continuing to ban or limit the service of homosexuals in their armed forces. Following that determination, the bans on homosexuals serving in those countries were lifted, essentially without the necessity of any major legislation. Although senior military personnel and some religious leaders did raise objections, the subsequent experiences in these countries proved that concerns about privacy, unit cohesion, recruiting and retention, preparedness, and operational readiness were overwhelmingly unfounded. The relatively calm transition to open service by gay and transgender volunteers in the militaries in these allied countries is in stark contrast to the situation in the United States where political ideology continues to prevent the logical conclusion and transition that those nations began to successfully put into practice nearly two decades ago. (To read the full story see: <http://www.gaymilitarysignal.com/0804GULCcon.html>).

At a forum on transgender issues, AVER Public Affairs, in conjunction with TAVA media relations, spoke briefly about the roughly 300,000 transgender American veterans who have proudly served in our armed forces. This was done as a part of an ongoing process of increasing awareness regarding the contribution of patriotic transgender



servicemembers.

At a forum on health and housing concerns affecting LGBT seniors, AVER Public Affairs presented a white paper briefly outlining awareness of the issues affecting the more than one million living LGBT veterans who have served in our armed forces since WWII. In October 2008 AVER Public Affairs will attend a national conference in New York City, hosted by SAGE on LGBT seniors.

AVER Public Affairs receives constant inquiries from and gives interviews, news, commentary, and referral to AVER spokespersons, to mainstream media such as CNN, MSNBC, national network local TV and radio affiliate stations (for example, ABC TV in Norfolk, Virginia), NPR, and newspapers including the Washington Post, San Diego Union Tribune, and the Sacramento Bee, among others around the country. Additionally, international media have interviewed AVER Veterans Affairs including German and French TV news media, and New Zealand radio. In addition, we are providing interviewees for a BBC radio series on DADT. Contact us at [PublicAffairs@aver.us](mailto:PublicAffairs@aver.us).



### Gay Military Signal

Gay Military Signal is an independent webzine edited by Denny Meyer, featuring stories about patriotic LGBT veterans ("Profiles in Patriotism"), interviews with members of Congress, and commentary on DADT by historians and leaders in the DADT repeal movement. See Gay Military Signal at [www.gaymilitarysignal.com](http://www.gaymilitarysignal.com).

If you would like to tell your story on Gay Military Signal, please contact us at [gaymilitarysignal@yahoo.com](mailto:gaymilitarysignal@yahoo.com).

—Denny Meyer, President, AVER-NY

### Palm Springs Chapter

On January 12th the Palm Springs Chapter received The Palm Springs Human Rights Commission

Award of Recognition for service to all of our veterans.

President Mel Tips and Treasurer Mel Reiser won two free nights and buy-one-get-one-free flights to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida on April 22nd. They spent one week in Ft. Lauderdale and visited Orlando.

A July 4th. party was held at the Tips residence. A big turn out enjoyed the barbequed ribs, hot dogs and salads.

All members of this chapter mourned the passing of Capt. John C. Siebert. A memorial service was held on Saturday, April 25th at St. John's Episcopal Church in Chicago. Art Bolden, John's partner for over 20 years, attended along with family members and friends.

On August 5th an article concerning DADT and bearing the headline "Gay, Lesbian, Veterans Speak Out" appeared in the local Desert Sun newspaper. This chapter was mentioned and the article contained comments from some of our members.

Chapter meetings have been held monthly on the second Friday at The Golden Rainbow Senior Center in Palm Springs. The next meeting will be on Friday September 11th. at 1:00 p.m.

The adventure continues. All the best.

—Mel Tips, President, Palm Springs Chapter

### Puget Sound Chapter



Members of the Puget Sound (Seattle) Chapter mounted a splendid color guard for this year's Pride Parade. President Nick Jackman was pleased with the performance.

The Puget Sound Chapter will have their next meeting on Friday, Sep 18 at

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## Puget Sound

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7:00 p.m. at the Jim Wiley Community Center, 9800 8th Ave. SW.

—Nick Jackman, President, Puget Sound Chapter

### San Antonio Chapter

The Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard has been serving the GLBT community for 10 years. It is most often seen in Pride Parades throughout Texas.

The brainchild of Wes Giles, who was a former executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center, a former chairman and

co-chairman of San Antonio Pride-fest, and was always active in GLBT rights, Wes Giles passed away in mid-2006 and the color guard was renamed the “Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard” in his honor—after all he (and Robert) started the color guard and was instrumental in forming the AVER Chapter in San Antonio—cheers Wes!



Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard. Austin Pride Parade 2008.

Meetings of the San Antonio Chapter are held the first Saturday of the month at Mad Hatter’s Tea (S. Alamo and Beauregard in Southtown.) Social hour is at 5:00 p.m. and our meeting is at 5:30 p.m.

### Tennessee Chapter



#### Introducing AVER Tennessee

In 1647, Oliver Cromwell’s soldiers addressed the English Parliament. A line from their address impresses me as a former Marine and gay man: “On becoming soldiers, we have not ceased to be citizens.”

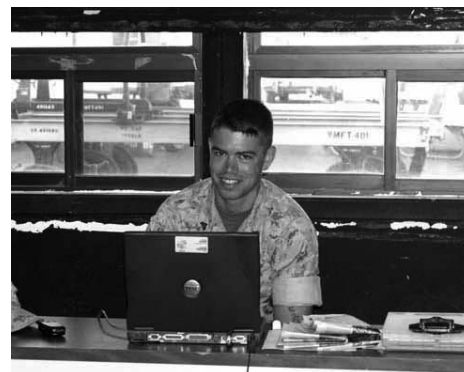
Indeed, the backbone of this country has been and will always be its “citizen soldier.” As such, it is important to remember that while we may give up a comfortable bed, regular nights at

home, our choice of hairstyle or attire, we should never be forced to give up our unique identities as gay Americans. At the dawn of this new and historic presidential administration, a slow but sure sea-change is coming. But it will not happen without dedicated veterans such as you and me continuing to fight on in this new battle.

For the majority who do not know me, my name is Tim Smith. I am acting president of the newest chapter of the American Veterans for Equal Rights, AVER Tennessee. I served four years and three months in the United States Marine Corps from May 2001 through August 2005. At the time of my discharge, I was a corporal and the S4 chief for VMFA(AW)-332 at MCAS, Beaufort, South Carolina. We were 23 days from leaving for Iraq, and I had just extended to re-enlist when the notice of discharge came.

A retired naval captain and former head of the Tri-Command Area’s Chaplaincy Corps turned local minister officially “outed” me to my command. What followed, as they say, is history. I received an honorable discharge but accompanying it were the words “Homosexual Admission” and the letter code “RE4.” My quest for a full, 20-year career halted.

But the hope for it did not end. I jumped headlong into my new role as a soldier in what has now been dubbed “The Battle of the Ban.” I worked as a founding member of the nationwide, spring 2006 Call To Duty tour. I spoke



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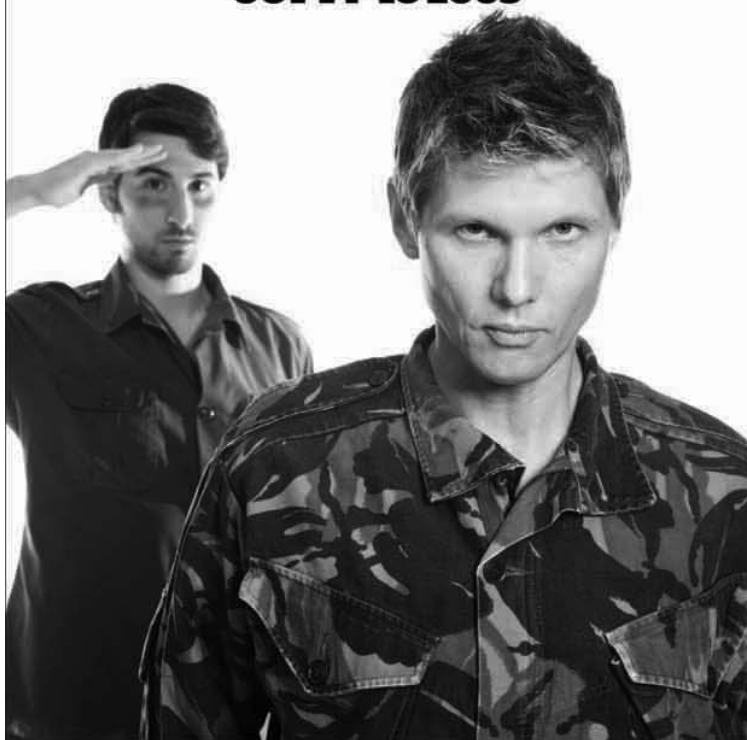


# CALL TO ACTION!!



AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

**NATIONAL CONVENTION  
COMING TO  
FORT LAUDERDALE!  
OCT 14- 18 2009**



**FOR MORE INFO GO TO [WWW.AVER-FGC.US](http://WWW.AVER-FGC.US)  
OR CALL MARK LAFONTAINE 954.903.8310**

PRESENTED BY:



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## AVER 2009 National Convention

**October 14-18**

**Registration Fee \$75.00 per Person**

### Convention Agenda

Date	Event	Location
Wednesday, October 14th	Early Registration	Coconut Cove
	Welcoming Dinner	Rosies' Dinner
Thursday, October 15th	Late Registration	Coconut Cove
	Breakfast Buffet	Courtyard Café
	National Business	GLCC Campus
	Billie Swamp Safari	Everglades
	Dance Party	MilitarySea Monster
Friday, October 16th	Workshops	GLCC Campus
	Happy Hour	New Moon
	Liberty	Dinner on the Drive
Saturday, October 17th	National Elections	GLCC Campus
	Lunch Panel	GLCC Campus
	Military Ball-VIP	American Legion
	Reception	Post 222
Sunday, October 18th	Silent Auction	
	National Business	GLCC Campus
	Brunch	

AVER's 2009 National Convention is being hosted by the Florida Gold Coast Chapter. We are happy to report that at least two of the Fort Lauderdale Rainbow Alliance Hospitality Properties have consented to be our host properties with outstanding discount rates starting at \$99.00 per night. Most rooms have one queen- or king-sized bed. A limited number of rooms have two beds. Handicapped or disabled persons will be given priority on first floor units, so please advise the property managers. These properties are just a half block from the beautiful beaches that Connie Francis sang about in *Where the Boys Are* and for which Fort Lauderdale is so famous.

The Florida Gold Coast Chapter has been busily arranging hospitality, and meeting spaces supporting the GLBT community of South Florida and the mission of AVER National. Due to a heavy political year, many politicians have not replied to us about appearances, but thanks to some national members and some of our Local AVER-FGC members, we are preparing a great workshop and speaker schedule.

Please contact us with your interest in attending the Bi-Annual AVER National Convention, October 14-18, 2009.

Nathaniel Frank, Senior Research Fellow at the Palm Center, University of California, Santa Barbara (<http://palmcenter.org/people/dr-nathaniel-frank>) has confirmed that he will attend the convention as a speaker. Dr Frank wrote the book *Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America*, published in 2009 by St. Martin's Press.

## Tennessee

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with small groups, radio hosts, newspapers and magazines including *The New York Times* and *The Advocate*. Shortly, I am appearing on a billboard in Memphis, Tennessee as part of the Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center's new campaign to promote awareness and diversity within the community. My role is to promote awareness of the service of gay veterans. (A total of five billboards bearing differing messages about diversity will be displayed from September through National Coming Out Day on October 11<sup>th</sup>.)

My hope is for the gay veterans of Tennessee to rise to the occasion of our storied history as "volunteers." I envision a group of gay veterans sitting in the offices of our state and national congresspeople on Lobby Days. And I envision AVER representatives speaking at local colleges and VFW and American Legion chapters, and participating in local festivals throughout the state. Most of all I see AVER uniting into a formidable, cohesive unit—the current band of brothers and sisters loosely knit together by geography, but tightly held by bonds of service.

But my vision requires volunteers; and we have never needed volunteers as we do now!

If you would like to become a member of AVER Tennessee, contact me at [avertn@yahoo.com](mailto:avertn@yahoo.com). "Veterans and Volunteers... Always."

### Attention Readers!

Please send us your e-mail address to receive *The Forward Observer* online.

Simply send an e-mail with "My E-mail Address" in the subject line to [editor@aver.us](mailto:editor@aver.us)

## 2009 March on Washington, Equality across America

This October lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans from across our country will gather in our nation's capital to march with one simple demand: Full federal equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans in all matters governed by civil law. Now.

LGBT veterans have participated in all the marches on Washington—in 1987, in 1993, and in 2000. We will be there again this year, 2009!

The March will take place in Washington, D.C. during the weekend of October 10 and 11. A variety of events for veterans are planned. Lt. Dan Choi has graciously agreed to be the veterans chairman.

On Saturday October 10, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., there will be a veterans history teach-in, which will include an overview of the military's discrimination against LGBT people, as well as lobbying tactics to repeal "don't ask, don't tell."

On Saturday, October 10 at noon there will be a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington Cemetery. This is a 15-minute ceremony conducted by Lt. Dan Choi and other former servicemembers who were discharged under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

On Saturday, October 10 at 2:00 p.m. LT Dan Choi, Master SGT Vince Patton and others will hold a memorial service honoring SGT Leonard Matlovich at the Congressional Cemetery.

On Sunday, October 11 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. there will be a candle run with LGBT servicemembers and veterans. This is a military-style run around the monuments and memorials on the National Mall. The run will start at the World War II Memorial. *All* are



welcome. The run will consist of a fast group, slow group, and slower group.

Military service organizations such as Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, Knights Out, Servicemembers United and American Veterans for Equal Rights will be participating in these events.

Attention, servicemembers! JOIN US in uniform! We will lead the March and stand on stage during a salute to service.

Remember: *Full federal equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans in all matters governed by civil law. Now.*

Further information is available at [www.equalityacrossamerica.org](http://www.equalityacrossamerica.org).

## Membership Renewal

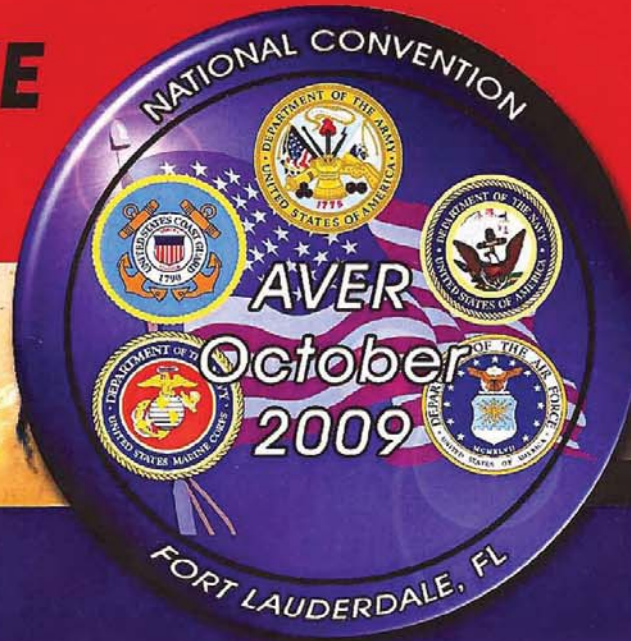
September of every year is membership renewal month. This is a very crucial year for the gay veterans movement.

We need your support. We need your financial and moral support to continue to put pressure on all of our politicians. Too many of them are just "dancing" around our issues without truly committing themselves. Wherever you live—help us to keep their feet to the fire!

Please check the date on the mailing label for this newsletter. If it is 09/09 or earlier, please send your \$35.00 dues to your local chapter. Ability to pay is always considered.

**SAVE THE  
DATE**

**FUN IN  
THE SUN**



**OCTOBER 14 - 18, 2009**

**AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS**



**AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS**

**Florida Gold Coast Chapter**

P.O. Box 11247  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33339

**We are Proud and Excited to announce the  
hosting of the AVER - National Convention 2009,  
here in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.**

**Mark your calendars for October 14 - 18, 2009  
Come and join us for a little Fun in the Sun.**