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The Kicker

AUGUST 29 [SUNDAY]

Log Cabin Big Tent Party II

by Benjamin Ryan

8/29, 1pm, Bryant Park Grill

Impeccably dressed gay Republicans and their "inclusive" elected official pals descended upon The Bryant Park Grill, at 25 W. 40th Street, from 1 to 3 pm on Sunday, August 29, for the Log Cabin Republican "Big Tent Event."

While sampling hors d'oeuvres, right-wing gays and lesbians celebrated the art of political equivocation and did their best to the highlight silver linings of their ideology in the face of the Republican Party platform's fierce opposition to marriage between same sex couples.

If George W. Bush and the platform authors are at the red end of the gay pride flag, the several hundred Log Cabin Republicans are certainly all the way over on the lavender side. However, yellow they are not. They intend to keep courageously reaching out, proudly demanding that the party they love just might show them commensurate affection. To try to get a word in edgewise, New York State is sending nearly 50 openly gay or lesbian delegates to the floor of the convention this week, according to LCR executive director Patrick Guererro.

A crop of mostly male, clean cut LCR's ebulliently hooted and hollered in a manner befitting a Southern Baptist church during speeches from the likes of New York Governor George Pataki, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter and former Massachusetts Governor William F. Weld.

A notable no-show, however, was Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who according to LCR Christopher Barron will not arrive in New York until Tuesday. Whether or not he believes gay Republicans are "girly men," like those California Democratic leaders who stalled his budget proceedings, thus remained a mystery.

Mr. Bloomberg said that "A house divided cannot stand," quoting Abraham Lincoln in an attempt to highlight the politics of inclusion, the major theme of the afternoon. After drawing hearty laughter and cheers with his statement that "a few years ago I came out as a Republican," the mayor said he would support "inclusiveness" in New York City "regardless of whether it has to be politically correct or not."

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Less politically correct than politically prudent was a beaming Gov. Pataki, who made only the vaguest allusion to gays during his speech. Instead, he waxed poetic about the splendorous wonder of the "greatest city in the world," which he touted as the safest large city in the country thanks to Republican policies.

Mr. Guerrero, whose tanned face was swathed in beige pancake make-up for his moment before the cameras, said he hoped to "flash a spotlight on the fact that there are two Republican parties. The party has to make a choice: Is it an inclusive Republican party, or one hijacked by the radical Right?"

Owing to the president's steadfast support of the Federal Marriage Amendment, the LCR has not endorsed his campaign. Mr. Guerrero says their final decision on whom to support in the presidential race is imminent, and that they may stay neutral on the matter.

"The president has jeopardized that endorsement in light of his campaign strategy," he said. Then he added, "Sorry about the melting make-up."

Steve Gunderson, the former openly gay Republican Congressman from Wisconsin, said that in his days in Congress, he saw this "inclusive" side of the Republican party many times, though it was largely kept in the closet.

"Some [congressmen] support some legislative activities that may not even reflect their own personal feelings, because they feel they have to, quote, 'represent their constituents'. It's picking your battles," he said of Republicans who make anti-gay votes. He reported that many times his fellow representatives would privately apologize to him for their negative votes on gay issues, claiming they didn't have the political capital to go with their conscience.

Also in attendance was Republican New York State Assemblyman Howard Mills. It was significant that no one asked him to speak, since it is an esoteric fact that he is running (uphill) for Senate this year against the outlandishly funded incumbent Senator Charles Schumer. Mr. Mills recently garnered an endorsement from LCR and said he could play ball alongside Senator Hillary Clinton when it comes to gay issues.

Keeping the theme of a Right Wing with a coat of many colors, Mr. Mills said, "I think it would be a very positive thing for the Republican Party naturally to have a New Yorker in the Senate majority in Washington who's supportive of gay rights, who does have a different view, who's very much in synch with New Yorkers' brand of Republicanism."

While the politics of inclusion continued inside, out on the 5th Avenue steps of the New York Public Library, a group of "radical queer and trans-identifying people" who go by the name Queer Fist! protested the event. A flyer publicizing the demonstration claimed the LCR's "are a group of privileged individuals who use assimilation to further marginalize people while claiming to defend them."

On hand was ACT-UP veteran Ann Northop, who in an interview earlier in the day said she was taking to the streets, yet again, to voice her opinion that Mayor Bloomberg is out to get the gays, most notably for vetoing the Equal Benefits Bill, which would require city contractors to give domestic partners of their employees the same benefits that they give to married spouses.

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