

The **ACLU** News

Annual Meeting to Feature Senator Dick Durbin

We are honored to have Senator Dick Durbin as featured speaker for our annual meeting on April 17th. Departing from our traditional Sunday evening cocktail, dinner and awards event, this year's meeting will be a brunch at the new Great Impasta banquet facility in downtown Champaign. A registration form is provided in this newsletter, or you may register on-line at www.aclu-cu.org. Seating is limited to 150, so please register early if you plan to attend.

Recently elected Senate Democratic whip, Senator Durbin's rise to leadership represents a great opportunity to challenge the administration's continuing assault on civil liberties. As his political views have evolved since his first election as US Representative from Springfield in 1982, his commitment to civil liberties has become more resolute—from his opposition to racial and ethnic profiling to standing up for reproductive rights, to more recently challenging extreme nominees from his position on the Judiciary Committee. For this reason, the Chapter will present Senator Durbin with our highest award, the Victor J. Stone Award for lifetime service in the cause of civil liberties.

The Steering Committee also voted to award the W. Ellison Chalmers Award for exceptional contributions to the local community in the cause of civil liberties to Brooke Anderson, for her important work with Champaign County Health Care Consumers on reproductive rights and access to health care, and for her work with the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative and other community groups to address issues of racial inclusion and women's rights.

Other business to be conducted at the meeting in-

cludes election of officers and Steering Committee members and presentation of annual reports, including a summary of activities and accomplishments.

STATE-WIDE EMERGENCY SUMMIT TO BE HELD IN CHAMPAIGN APRIL 9

ACLU members from across the state will meet in Champaign at the Hawthorn Suites Conference Center on Saturday, April 9th, to discuss issues of national, state, and local interest. Registration is required, but there is **NO CHARGE**, thanks to a generous donation by the Libra Foundation of Chicago. Breakfast and lunch is included.

There will be small group discussions on specific issues ranging from religious liberty to national security to reproductive freedom and more. In addition, we will be able to caucus by city to discuss local concerns. An afternoon session will focus on learning to be persuasive on ACLU issues through effective communication, lead by a national communications strategist, a local journalist and a state legislator.

In an attempt to be more inclusive, Champaign was chosen as a geographically centered location even though the vast majority of Illinois ACLU members are in Chicago. As we view this as a great opportunity to strengthen our influence locally, our goal is to have at least 80 Champaign County members in attendance. Please register today: on-line at www.aclu-il.org/conference or call 312-201-9740. **Registration deadline is April 2!**

MARRIAGE EQUALITY FORUM FILLS LIBRARY AUDITORIUM

“Leave no Family Behind” was the theme for a series of forums brought to several downstate communities this year by the Illinois ACLU. On December 2nd, the forum held at the Champaign Public Library featured two local couples in addition to Presbyterian minister Steve Shoemaker, UI Professor of Family Studies Ramona Faith Oswald and other experts.

Rev. Shoemaker, who has performed dozens of same-sex unions, and Prof. Oswald, who cited more than two decades of research on same-sex couples with children, shared their considerable experience with the audience. Prof. Oswald’s research found “virtually no differences” between children raised by same-sex couples and those raised in different-sex families. In fact minor differences were largely positive for children of same-sex couples studied, having somewhat better social skills and being less likely to have gender stereotypes.

The two local couples put a very human face on difficulties faced by not being allowed to have the same legal rights and responsibilities as married couples. Even though they have a number of legal documents drawn up for various contingencies, couples face surprises

such as not being allowed to make funeral arrangements for a deceased partner (since the power of attorney ends at death).

Panelists often made the distinction between religious marriage and civil marriage, noting that there is no proposal to force churches to perform same-sex marriage. Civil recognition would automatically apply “hundreds” of references to marriage under Illinois law, which support stable relationships and families, to same-sex couples. Rev. Shoemaker said that his church does not recognize same-sex marriages, but other churches already do. That decision would still remain with the church.

At the first such forum after the November election, panelists noted a jump in interest in immigration to Canada. One audience member asked if maybe we were moving too fast. Panelists suggested we need to tap into local strategies to prevent misinformation, whether those localities are in red states or blue states. The concerted efforts of those at ACLU-Illinois to bring these forums to communities downstate seems like a good start.



“President Bush never would have said he wasn’t opposed to civil unions if he didn’t think the issue of marriage was a credible one.”

- Heather Sawyer, Lambda Legal Defense attorney



“It says something truly profound about a society that needs to call the same thing [marriage] something different simply in order to let those people know that they’re really not viewed the same.”

- John Knight, Illinois ACLU Project Director



“Same-sex marriage is pro-family.”

- UI Professor Ramona Faith Oswald, noting that in Champaign County there are an estimated 130 same-sex couples with minor children who do not have family privileges.

Voting from Jail Options Explored

Last fall it came to our attention that inmates being held for trial at the county jail are not treated equally when it comes to voting rights. If an inmate resides outside of the county in which they are held, they qualify to request an absentee ballot from their county of residence, but there is no provision for those inmates confined in their county of residence. We referred this problem to ACLU attorney Sarah Schriber. Resulting research found that in Cook County, voting machines are placed in the jail, and some other counties allow absentee voting for all awaiting trial (by law, somebody actually serving a sentence can not vote). Champaign County Clerk Mark Shelden is unwilling to allow absentee ballots, stating that statutes do not allow it. He assured us that the State Board of Elections has this issue on their legislative agenda, so he is waiting for direction. We asked ACLU legislative director Mary Dixon to keep us informed on any such legislation.

ACLU Officers & Steering Committee

The local ACLU Steering Committee meets on the first Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm, in the conference room at Campbell Hall (WILL studios) in Urbana. Meetings are open to members—if you would like to be placed on the agenda, please contact Steve Portnoy or any other committee member ahead of time.

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RICHARD CLARKE DRAWS OVERFLOW CROWD ON CAMPUS

Despite a late change in location due to accidental double booking of Foellinger Auditorium, on March 8th, terrorism expert Richard Clarke, the only government official to apologize to the American people for failures that lead to the attacks of 9/11, attracted some 600 students and community members to two lecture halls at Loomis Lab. The talk was co-sponsored by the student ACLU and other UI organizations.

Advisor to four Presidents and author of “Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror”, Clarke presented his insider’s view of working with the various administrations and provided an overview of the challenges ahead. Suggesting that because terrorism is a tactic, there can be no “War on Terrorism”, Clarke outlined the structure of Al-Qaeda and the Jihadist Movement. He emphasized that with hundreds of millions of supporters of the movement, the only effective strategy is a “War of

Ideals” which must include the support of non-governmental organizations since 80-90% of the Islamic world finds the US government non-credible.

Finally, recalling that Congress “passed too quickly” the Patriot Act, he noted there will likely be another significant attack on US soil and “[after the next attack] is not the time to make decisions about our civil liberties.”

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OUTREACH

Members of the UIUC Student Chapter are available to come to high school classes and organizations to lead discussions on student rights, censorship, and other ACLU concerns. If you are a teacher or sponsor in the Champaign County area, please contact Maeve Anderson at 413-1883, mmndrsn2@uiuc.edu for more information.