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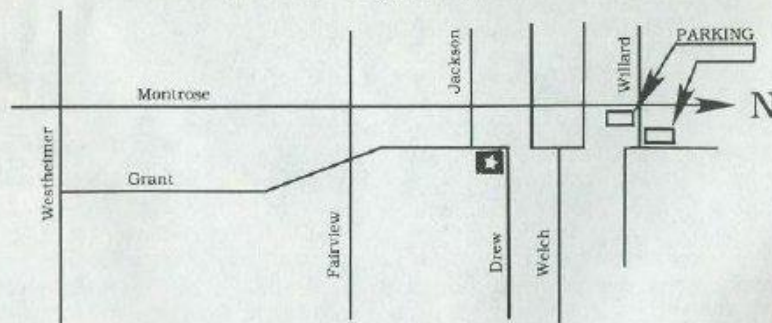
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An Interview With

LARRY BAGNERIS, JR.

Delegate, Texas Fifteenth Senatorial District,
Democratic National Convention 1980



Among other political milestones this year was the election of Larry Bagneris, Jr., to serve as delegate to the Democratic Party's National Convention from Texas's Fifteenth Senatorial District (in Houston). Mr. Bagneris is the first openly gay person to represent Texas at a national party convention. Upon his return from New York City, TWT Contributing Editor William French had the opportunity to converse with him regarding the convention and what is now to follow. Part One of their interview appears here with the concluding part next week.

TWT: You were the Democratic delegate from the Texas Fifteenth Senatorial District and were also the first openly gay delegate from Texas. Were there other gay delegates from Texas?

LARRY BAGNERIS: Two other individuals were elected as delegates but not as people who were openly gay. They were elected because they had been working within the party structure. Now, they've accepted their own lifestyles, but are afraid that they might lose the clout that they have in the party. So, we had one openly gay delegate, myself; two closeted gay delegates;

and, four alternates, all of whom were openly gay. (Two were from Houston, and two were from Dallas.)

Was your election as delegate a result of much politicizing?

Although there were a number of chicanos who wanted that position, they all supported me after I explained that the only place in Texas that an openly gay person could come from would be the Fifteenth Senatorial District, and that gays needed that seat. I was elected from my district with one hundred per-

cent support. Actually, the *community* got the support; it wasn't the person. **How well were you received by the rest of the Texas delegation?**

Extremely well. When I got to the National Convention, I was dealing with many delegates who were officials in the Democratic Party, high public officials who deliver large numbers of votes to the Democratic Party. The reception was excellent.

Did they know you and did they know that you are gay?

The first day, I decided not to wear any tags identifying me as a gay delegate, in order to let them get to know *me* as a person. The second day, after giving out an educational booklet prepared by us for the convention and making my speech, I had decided that I would then drench myself in gay buttons.

And, your reception upon coming out?

Even better, because then we began to communicate about the gay issue.

After the convention began, the National Convention Project, which had

been organized to coordinate the effort towards including a gay rights plank in the party's platform, was supplanted by the Gay and Lesbian Caucus.

When you speak of the "Gay and Lesbian Caucus" you're speaking of an entity that worked separate from and in addition to the National Convention itself. The various caucuses are, however, important in the convention process.

This was the first appearance of such a caucus at a national convention and it was closely watched in its development and activity by political observers. How did the party as a whole view the emergence of an in-house special interest group for sexual rights?

People were extremely receptive because they saw that, sexual freedom and rights, as an issue, an issue of private concern to citizens who represented 22 million gay men and lesbians. We were very well received. The delegates were dealing with it as a political issue.

Recognizing that the gay political effort is somewhat polarized in a national

perspective, how readily was the caucus brought together?

The Caucus was a brand-new caucus. Most of the delegates didn't know each other on a personal level, so when we caucused for the first time, our problem was organization. Friday evening before the convention, there was a cocktail party hosted by Jack Campbell of the Club Baths Chain. He threw the party so that the gay delegates, alternates, and the workers could get to know one another on a social basis. But, it was also a work session. Saturday afternoon, we had a reception at the United Nations Plaza. Sunday afternoon, we had our first caucus. We did a lot of arguing because we wanted everything fixed to our own perfection. We argued about word usage in the bylaws, and language in the regulations, and how much percentage would constitute a quorum, and the whole bit. We finally ironed all that out and had our first press conference.

How much of the Caucus's work at the

convention was public relations, in the sense of establishing a presence?

We were able to wear tags, red-white-and-blue tags, identifying us as gay delegates. At the reception at United Nations Plaza on Saturday, Senator Kennedy came; Midge Costanza and Bella Abzug were there, and Harry Britt. It was wonderful to be in that experience. It was there we decided to show the convention that we're working within the Democratic Party. We're working in every corner, and we want to learn the processes. Everywhere we met as a caucus, in the grand ballroom of the major hotels where all the rest of the caucuses were meeting, we had a huge sign saying "Lesbian and Gay Caucus". So, with the red-white-and-blue tags, our "GayVote '80" buttons, name-tags from the National Convention Project, and a big sign with 250 people in the room, our presence was known.

What issues became rallying points for the Gay and Lesbian Caucus? ➤

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Several people came to me and mentioned the idea of having the gay delegates, alternates, and others involved wear black arm bands to promote at this convention a reminder of the Fred Paez killing in order to show people how we can be discriminated against. I thought, "Damn it! Every time we talk about gay rights we talk about death, or going to jail, or something negative." There are so many of our people out there who need to feel good about themselves. That, to me, is the crux of the movement. So I expressed those feelings and said, "I want to see us do two things up here. I want to see us celebrate the fact that we have 77 openly-gay people that have been elected to this convention. Make them feel like we're in the system and we're working. The second thing is for us to educate. The only way you can educate is to not get involved emotionally—not turn yourselves off, not walk out of a convention, not do any of the negative things. Learn their system and use it for our benefit."

Our other business of issues was a matter of deciding whether we would go for a Vice Presidential nominee (which would give us visibility), go for a demonstration, or call attention to the situation of the female sailors aboard the *USS NORTON SOUND*.

How successful was the overall effort of the Caucus?

We were able to nominate a black gay man for Vice President which entitled us to two nominating speeches and his acceptance speech, following which we were allowed to have the entire Caucus demonstrate within the convention hall itself.

The specific success of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus is already well known. The civil rights plank of the Democratic Party platform includes for the first time reference to "sexual orientation". President Carter, as the nominee, however, is not bound by that platform other than within the parameters he set forth in his formal response to it. Recognizing that we have met a milestone in gay rights no matter what comes of

this particular platform, President Carter's stance is still of concern to some gays. How significant is a non-binding platform and of what merit is the gay rights plank therein?

You have to remember that this, the plank, didn't just happen over the week-end of the convention. The National Gay Task Force has been meeting with the President and his advisors for at least the last two years talking about this issue. After Carter witnessed 125,000 people who marched on Washington, he realized that he *had* to deal with the gay community. Carter has been exposed to the issue; he's been exposed and educated. They—Carter, his administration and advisors—had to make a decision to give us *something*. That decision—"What do we give them?"—was the only way to make sure that this issue was not a battle on the convention floor. It was decided that we were to get involved in the platform.

The platform, even though it's not the rules and regulations of the party, sets the tone for the next four years—the accomplishments, the targets that people might shoot toward. That tone is that people not be discriminated against for sexual orientation. What we do after putting that plank in the platform, after putting the Democrats back in the White House, will follow. The plank is ground-breaking; now, what building do you want to put on that ground that's been broken?

Tell us how the convention worked. Is there such a thing as "a typical day in the life of a delegate"?

Sunday afternoon, Texas caucused for the first time. It was chaotic. We brought 152 delegates into the grand ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in Rockefeller Center. There were 500 chairs set up, and there wasn't a chair empty. All around the room was jammed. The five of us who were there (myself and four alternates) at the time, we sat in the front row with our red-white-and-blue tags on.

Monday, the opening day of the con-

vention, the Texas delegation met at ten o'clock and received information regarding what was going on that day. We were issued our credentials and identification. At eleven o'clock, the convention opened. The Gay and Lesbian Caucus met at that same time and, after concluding our business there, we were back in the convention center until twelve-thirty the next morning. Jump on the bus, get back to the hotel about one o'clock.

At the hotel, you're so hyper from having spent the day arguing points and seeing what's going on, that you stop to have a drink or two to settle down. This is where your communication comes in. You've been sitting next to these straight delegates for fourteen hours; you've been talking about various things, agreeing and disagreeing on various issues; now they get to know you as a person.

Tuesday morning comes. You dress yourself in all your tags and things, and you go to your first rounds of caucuses for that morning. I, as promised before I left Houston, went on Tuesday morning to the Black Caucus. While with the Black Caucus, I made a presentation on the booklet [*The Gay Community/The Democratic Party*] we had printed for distribution and passed the booklet out. After doing that, they'd say, "You're gay?"

"Yeah, that's why I'm here. The gay community sent me here. And, it was done with the support of other people in the delegation."

"Well, that's wonderful!"

I did the same thing later on that afternoon with the Hispanic Caucus. The hispanics were mostly already aware because I had worked in politics with them before. I was sitting in front of another Texas delegate, a Mexican-American, and he leaned forward to me and asked, "You're gay?" When I said I was, he said, "Two years ago, I would not have even talked to you," to which I said, "Well, do me a favor. Turn around and don't talk to me now. You're bothering me." By making a joke out of it—he laughed, I laughed, the women on

either side laughed—we communicated. That's the whole idea behind beginning to relate to one another as human beings. No longer did that stereotype of a gay man sit there; Larry Bagneris sat in its place.

Tuesday afternoon, I had to rush back to the Gay and Lesbian Caucus and plan for the "presidentials," the nominating process. We got a candidate to run for Vice President. We needed 327 signatures so we passed out petitions. This was where the real education came in, where I'd go to a Texas delegate and ask them to sign the petition. When asked what it was about, I'd tell them, "The petition is about nominating a black gay man from Washington, D.C., for Vice President." When asked for the reasons for such a nomination, I'd tell them:

"Because we're included in the platform. One of the reasons we printed our booklet is so that when you go back to your district and are questioned on the issue, you'll have the information to back you up. But, we need to ensure that states unaware of this booklet are likewise exposed to the gay issue and our discrimination. You can help us do that. We want to work in the system. We don't want to be outside carrying picket signs. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but we feel like we've added enough as far as delivering votes to the Democratic Party that we want to work in the system."

That kind of education worked. We got 66 signatures from Texas, which outdid any other state. Those signatures represented women, who were supportive because we supported ERA everywhere we went. They represented racial minorities; not just because there is a representational percentage required for them, but because they understood that our issue was of a private concern. The government has no right in my bedroom telling me what to do.

"At the same time, by signing this petition, you're guaranteeing me that I'm going to be able to save my job because what I'm fighting for is the security of my income. Now, I've got broth-

ers and sisters and nieces and nephews, and I want them protected, too, against people who would try to in any way take them on the side and do something that would be illegal. But there are already laws to protect them. The laws we're talking about are for people who are being fired from their jobs not because they broke any law but because people don't understand that gay people come from every walk of life and we are as diverse as America itself."

These people would listen and they would take the time. They represented a multitude of constituencies, either because they were elected public officials or were sent here by their district's Democratic voters. So, we spent all day Wednesday getting signatures on the petitions.

On Thursday, we had an opportunity to celebrate after getting the required signatures. Then there was rush to get the signs together for the demonstration—"We Support Boozer For Vice President"—and to organize a positive demonstration. The nominating speeches were made by Ginny Apuzzo and Bill Kraus who were the co-chairs of the Lesbian and Gay Caucus of the National Democratic Party. Then Boozer himself got on the platform and made an excellent speech. He told of knowing how it was to be called a "nigger" and also knowing how it was to be called a "faggot". To hear that sort of terminology going to a convention full of thousands of delegates—you can imagine the impression it had. Everybody, the important people, was there—the public wasn't there in force, but the delegates were. The delegates are the management of your political party. We were talking to the people that press the buttons and make the machinery of the Democratic Party work and we were doing it from the top down, not from the bottom up.

NEXT WEEK
A Look at
The Political Future



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PART II of An Interview With

LARRY BAGNERIS, JR.

Delegate, Texas Fifteenth Senatorial District,
Democratic National Convention 1980



Larry Bagneris Jr. of Houston was the first openly gay person elected to any Texas delegation to a Democratic Party National Convention. In last week's TWT, he gave readers a personal insight into how politics work on a practical level. This week, in the conclusion of his discussion with Contributing Editor William French, Mr. Bagneris provides an assessment of the reality of gays' political status and the need for gay voters to become involved in the political structure in order to achieve and maintain our objectives.

In order to recognize the important contribution of all gay Texans, TWT wishes to supplement last week's part of the interview which stated that, in addition to Larry Bagneris, there were two alternate delegates from Dallas and two from Houston. We have been informed that, after the convention began, two additional alternates from Austin were seated.

We saw in the convention overall tones of division. Did the unity of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus feel the strains of that polarization?

I think the Caucus was strictly for Kennedy. When Kennedy lost the nomination, the gay delegates accepted that they were going to have to deal with Carter. But, we also realized that the best way to deal with Carter is to let him know that we expect him to deliver what he promises and that we expect him to at least take into regard everything that is spoken to in the platform. **How is it expected he will regard the platform's gay-supportive position?** Gay rights, defined as "sexual orientation," is part of the platform and the President

has agreed he can live with this. Carter made a compromise with Kennedy's support. We had both candidates' support for our inclusion in the platform. There was no "platform fight". When President Carter made his speech accepting the nomination, he mentioned discrimination against "other minorities". He's bending the issue slightly in order to be able to feed the American people something. For 200 years, we, as gay people, by staying in our closets, have let negative rhetoric build in people's minds. We have to start tearing that down.

How will guarantees against discrimination be made to us?



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If not by Executive Order, then by inclusion in a Civil Rights Bill.

An Executive Order would lay groundwork for legislative protection inasmuch as, once an Executive Order is issued, the matter at hand becomes *de facto*, and subsequent legislation would not be a radical departure from the status quo. An Executive Order, however, lacks the statutory power of a legislative act. This appears to be the advantage of a congressional bill. What seems to be the inclination of national gay leaders as to which of the two they will seek for our goals?

You've got to remember that across the nation—in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Houston—the gay rights issue is perceived differently. In Houston, we are a grassroots community. New York City has 50 organizations killing each other by competing against one another. L.A. and San Francisco are just getting to a point where they're coalescing, bringing more unity to the West Coast. But, I think the consensus of national gay leadership would be an Executive Order, which would not be given the same publicity as a Civil Rights Bill.

Does Kennedy's defeat mean that, when we go to the polls in November, we will face a choice of the lesser of three evils?

My own personal view on that is when I start looking at the candidates—Anderson, Reagan, and Carter—I don't look at the man, because as far as charisma, speech-delivery, and so on, Anderson tops both Reagan and Carter. As far as image-making and "Hollywood", Reagan would do a better job than anybody else. It's in Carter's favor that we don't have time to wait for someone to find where the necessities are and how to make them work. I think Carter's got that on Reagan.

Kennedy fought hard and lost well. When the nomination slipped from his reach, he fought at least as hard, if not harder, for the platform Minority Reports which contained the essence of his position on the issues. Was this, the ideological orientation of the party, Kennedy's primary concern after all? The reason that Kennedy ran to be the Party's nominee was to make sure that the party bent some to the Left (where it's supposed to be), to guarantee a look at issues Carter would probably have wanted to sidestep: jobs, abortion, ERA. These issues would be easiest dealt with if not dealt with at all. Sure, they were part of Carter's campaign four years ago, but why bring them out again? Kennedy and his supporters worked to make sure that the issues dealt with in the platform would be upfront in the campaign and that Carter would run on that platform solidly.

Consider, for instance, Proposition 10,

which relates to the funding of people running for state offices and was a Minority Report from the Kennedy camp. It states that no funds be given to these people if they don't support ERA. The Carter people were against that. It was due to Kennedy support that it was included in the platform. Another platform proposition dealt with the abortion issue. Carter would rather not have dealt with that, especially with the Republicans not dealing with it at all. The Kennedy people, the Gay Caucus, other Kennedy supporters, all of them supported that issue. The jobs situation, where every man and woman should be provided guarantee of a job or hopes of a job, the Carter people didn't want to deal with that, because, they say, at this time, we can't afford to have this type of plank in the platform. It was brought about by the Kennedy people. Now, the attitude of the Kennedy delegates was: "You're going to run on this platform, and we're going to watch and see if you deliver. The more enthusiastically you push that platform, the more enthusiastically those of us doing the work will push your candidacy."

The convention is over. What direction is the gay movement going politically? Will the politically shrewd among us seek to re-elect Carter...

I have to stop you there. I don't think it will be "re-elect Carter". There are many people in the gay community who feel that the Democratic Party and Jimmy Carter are going to take the gay community's votes for granted. I don't think that's true, but those who do are very visible. They're visible in Austin, in San Antonio, in Dallas. Those are people who are joining the rank and file of Anderson supporters.

How much damage is Anderson doing in terms of luring gay voters away from a major party which has proven its position on the gay issue?

I'm involved on a national level so that's how I look at it. It's very discouraging. But, I can't deal on a national level because my work has to be done here in Houston, with the gay community here in the Montrose. On a national level, though—California, for instance—Harry Britt told me himself that Carter was not acceptable to take back as a candidate because Anderson is so strong in that state. The people in Austin made the same remarks, that Carter didn't exactly satisfy them. So, I'm not going to deal on a national or state level; I'm going to deal with what I can do, on a local level, with what we can do as a community. But, yes, I would say that the Anderson candidacy is a threat.

History shows that third-party and indepen-

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int candidates are rarely elected, so we
ay anticipate Anderson's campaign to be
well-organized failure. Anderson presum-
ably knows as much. He does, however, of-
fer an alternative, a salve for the political
inscience as it were, to the voter who
ires for neither major party's candidate.

as far as the realities of what I deal with—
arty structure, machinery, delivering the
ite, and who is going to get out to do the
ork—wherever the work is done is where
e payment is going to be made. In other
ords, if the gay vote, the gay money, the
y volunteers, all go to the Anderson cam-
paign but Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan
ns, gays can say they cast a dissenting
te, but, in fact, they just wasted their en-
gy. People will probably disagree with
e, but the reality of it is that, if you learn
e system and you work within the party,
ter you've done the manual work to deliv-
the vote to the party—voter registration,
mpaign literature, rallies—then you can
and claim your fair share of the pie be-
cause you've done your fair share of the
ork.

**hat you say is true but is stated theoret-
ically. What does it mean in terms of politi-
cal practicality?**

hen we start talking about the fact that
e next President of the United States is
obably going to appoint four Justices to
e Supreme Court, you first consider that
sue, then make a decision to vote Demo-
atic or Republican. After suffering
rough all these years of Nixon's Supreme
ourt appointees, I would think that our
mmunity would be smart enough to
and rank-and-file, not for Jimmy Carter
it in the rank-and-file of the Democratic
rty, and to vote not for Jimmy Carter but
r the Democratic Party which included us
its platform. What good does it do to win
y rights in an Executive Order or in a Civil
ghts Bill when any case that's tested will
taken to a Supreme Court with Reagan's
pointees, a totally conservative Supreme
ourt? If the Supreme Court today, which
split nearly evenly with liberals and con-
servatives, won't even give an eyelid to a
mosexual case, what is it going to do if it
nds all the way to the right? If you think
i're not listened to now, imagine what's
ing to happen if it becomes a totally
nservative court.

If conservatives start redistricting, we
so lose. Imagine if Westheimer were a
litting line, and the Montrose were divid-
straight down the middle. The Houston
y Political Caucus might as well shut its
ors, because there's no way to bring in a
lid majority vote if our community were
lit right down the middle. Re-districting
er the census this year may mean de-

stroying our community's complete politi-
cal base. With conservatives in office who
know that gay politics are a liberal machine
working in the liberal factions of the Demo-
cratic Party, everything that can be done
will be done to dilute our strength.

Let's talk economics. When it comes to
economics, I work with an extremely con-
servative view. I work in the insurance in-
dustry. As a matter of fact, when it came
time to vote for the Kennedy Minority Re-
port about the national medical health in-
surance program, my conscience told me
to vote for it, but my reality told me I work
for the insurance industry, that I'd be
voting myself out of a job. After fighting the
issue, I realized that what I was fighting
was nothing more than a look into the *pos-
sibility* of how we can cut medical costs
down, not how we can destroy an entire in-
dustry. So, I was able to vote for it on that
premise because I wasn't saying I support-
ed a national medical health plan. We can't
afford it. We don't have the funding nor the
tax base to do it or we wouldn't be red in
the budget right now.

The type of program Kennedy is trying to
push looks like very liberal economics. The
reality of it is that, whether the Democrats
or the Republicans are in office for the next
four years, we're going to have to tighten
the belt because inflation has gotten out of
hand. Economically, the gay community is
hurt worse. I, as a single person, know I
make a good salary, but, when it comes to
taking taxes out, the guy that works right
next to me might make the same salary but
take home fifty, sixty dollars more a week.
Just because I'm single, I'm taxed that
much more.

Reality is that there are laws on the
books that are unjust laws. Those are laws,
like 21.06, which deny me the right to do
something that a heterosexual can do be-
hind closed doors. There are other laws,
which have not been proven unconstitu-
tional, which are provisions to make sure
that an individual who takes his clothes off
in public, or has sex in public, or whatever
other offense, is subject to punishment.
We cannot go to court and fight a case for
an individual who has broken a law that is
not unconstitutional. You've got nothing to
back you up on it. But, if you go to the court
based on the loss of your job for being gay
or because you and a consenting adult
committed an act in private, then it be-
comes a different thing. Once our commu-
nity is educated to that, then we will be
able to make the distinction between what
gay pride is, and how far we can go, and
which laws are unjust, unconstitutional,
and which laws are just.

Now that our effort in mainstream politics

**has a tangible result, what is to be done?
What work, and in what ways?**

There are two jobs, both under the head-
word of "education". We will talk about is-
sues which will help us get away from the
personality votes. Look at the reality of
practical politics embedded in the system,
such as re-districting, such as the Supreme
Court, such as the tax base. We're not talk-
ing about Jimmy Carter the man, and we're
not talking about Reagan the man or An-
derson the man. We're talking about the
practicalities of the machinery of the politi-
cal world at work out there. A lot of our peo-
ple out there aren't educated on that. They
vote in the instance of personality.

What's to be done to change that?

Something I learned from every campaign
I've been involved in this—the only way to
remove the myths about the gay communi-
ty is to be involved with the general com-
munity on a personal level. Join the GPC;
get involved in campaigns; work in cam-
paign headquarters. *Stop* voting personal-
ity; *start* voting where the gay community
can see its destiny. Its destiny is in the
Supreme Court; its destiny is in an Execu-
tive Order; its destiny is in all of the things
we talked about earlier.

**Isn't our progress towards that destiny
sometimes a three-up-one-back situation?
How much of that retroactivity is our own
undoing? There has been a high-visibility of
the more sensational elements of our com-
munity. This lends us all an image that falls
just short of notoriety, one that is easily
twisted out of context and used against us,
as was done in the CBS Reports documen-
tary of the subject. When the issue of gays
and homosexuality is raised, do the more
extreme examples amongst our numbers
tend to alienate the voters who are depen-
dent on information, not experience?**

I would say that they are not that alienated.
A lot of times, it actually affects those in
our community more because they see it
more. There may be an article once a year
or a CBS program, I pray to God, maybe
once in a lifetime that ever brings up those
aspects. The problem is that people's con-
sciousness have to be brought up to see
what is gay pride. Gay pride is not any kind
of public display which defeats our conten-
tion that it is a *private* issue, that what I do
in private is my business, that it should not
affect what kind of job I have, where I live,
whether or not I go out—all of the rights in-
volved in the Civil Rights Act. Many people
think that they can go anywhere they
choose and that gay rights give them li-
cense to take their pants down or have sex
in public. But, they don't have that right.

On the other hand, it's our duty to keep

track of what we've done, so that, once that work is over with, once we've done the education on the one side, we can show the party that we delivered so many votes, that we've licked so many stamps, that we've made so many contributions, that we've registered so many voters, and that we're working in the party. We need to demonstrate the good work that we're doing by politicizing our community.

Houston, as you said, enjoys a grassroots political base. The municipal, state, and, for those such as yourself, national political levels have been brought a bit closer to the voters in the precincts. Gay Houstonians know who represents them. Informal name-recognition surveys conducted here have shown widespread familiarity, if not outright personal acquaintance, with our elected officials. Does this cause a different sort of political enthusiasm or awareness? Is there a greater complacency or an increased rallying-spirit?

The exposure at rallies of Lance Lalor, of Eleanor Tinsley, of Kathy Whitmire, gives us a personality to identify with, one that is all ours. We're members of the gay community and how long did it take us to be comfortable with ourselves—let alone with our lifestyle, let alone with our community—after all the lies we have been told about our lifestyle? I pity the kid coming out today, the one that missed Stonewall and that age when police would just walk into a bar and treat you like shit, step on you, the whole bit, and nobody would say anything because there wasn't anything anybody could say. You believed you didn't have any rights. They taught you that. This kid is coming out now and does not know any of that history. All he sees is big discos and poppers and everybody's free and easy. It's taken us years to get three thousand people dancing in one bar. These politicians being exposed to our community, they realize, "My God! These kids work their asses off for their cause. They're committed! And, they *don't* do they things that we were taught they do." That exposure is good because that's education.

I remember one night at the Tinsley campaign working with about 25 people sending a mail-out. We were all listening to *Wilde 'n' Stein* on KPFT radio. After the program was over, one straight woman said, "I don't believe this. I've never been around gay people in my life and here I am listening to that radio show. This is wonderful." This one-on-one education, this is the base education that's needed. I wish more gays and lesbians would work in campaign headquarters because this gives us a one-to-one basis, whether it be in the Republican Headquarters or the Democratic Head-

quarters. On a one-to-one basis you can educate people that gay people are all colors, all backgrounds, all economic levels, that they've got brains, they can think, their minds are not on sex all the time.

1984. Orwellian omens notwithstanding, what will happen? What are we looking at? I'm glad you asked that question. At the convention, I got the opportunity to see what we're looking forward to. This says it all: [Reads from Kennedy '84 campaign button] "The hope still lives, and the dream shall never die." The hope is that, someday, we—all Americans, the strength of America in its diversity—that we will all be able to look at one another and have that hope of having the Constitution and Bill of Rights speak to all of us, that all men and women—whether gay, straight, black, white, brown, or whatever—that all persons be judged on their positive contributions and thereby be given their rewards, or be judged on their negative reductions and thereby have rewards taken away. "The dream shall never die," because that's what America has been about. The Statue of Liberty, the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, have always talked about "we, the people," who have inalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those words say a lot.

For me, the most meaningful part of the whole convention was remembering how, as a child, I sat and dreamed of going to a national convention. I don't know what it was in me, but as I grew up in Louisiana, something kept telling me, "God! If I don't fit in the black community, and I don't fit in the white community, just think if they find out I'm gay!" I mean, that's the bottom of the pits. And, now, here it's 1980—thirty years later—and I'm participating in the system because I believed in that Constitution and I believed in that Bill of Rights. Those documents tell you that you have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. My happiness may be pursued in ways totally different from yours. But, I've got my space, and you've got yours. As long as we don't take away from each other's space, then we should each continue in our own pursuit of happiness, regardless of what it is, within the letter of the law.

After fighting to get an education because I was a minority, after fighting doubly hard to get a job because I was too black to be white and too white to be black and nobody wanted to hire me for the job, after fighting damned aggressively to prove myself in my job and now having to fight to hold on to that job, if the government starts intruding on the privacy of my life and it means fighting for the pursuit of my happiness, I'll fight. I don't want to see anyone go through what I went through. I want to make sure we stick to what the laws of the land are and those things, those inalienable rights, are important to me.

Such ideals of humanitarian politics are particularly precious to gays, I think. What else is important to you?

If I can do anything to spend my time with the rhetoric of making people feel comfortable about their lifestyle so they can feel comfortable placing themselves into mainstream society. This is why I sometimes use myself as an example. I wasn't comfortable living between the black and white communities in New Orleans. I wasn't comfortable coming here and, even though I am not chicano, having the chicano community think I thought I was better than they because I don't speak Spanish or had no desire to speak Spanish. I'm deaf in one ear and can't pick up the language. I wasn't comfortable with the blacks thinking I was chicano. And, I wasn't comfortable with the whites thinking I wasn't white. But, that's an experience that I want to share with this community to let people know that, once they feel good about themselves and their total lifestyle, that joy will spread to other people. If you feel good about yourself, it's the "I'm okay, you're okay" syndrome.

Then nobody's a problem and when the chicano delegate in New York leans up and says "Two years ago I wouldn't have even talked to you," I can say, "Well, good. Turn around and don't talk to me now." Friendship, humanness, human involvement, these are important.

What direction do you go from here? Having made such remarkable contributions thus far, what projections can you make for yourself personally?

I've already engaged in Greer Price's move to New Orleans where there has since been organized the Louisiana Gay Political Caucus. New Orleans is my home, and enroute to the convention, I was there speaking with the leaders of the community. I'll be speaking more in that area and trying to help as far as organization there is concerned. Ron Burnett just left Houston and he's now working in Phoenix, Arizona. There's a bad need for gay activists in that area so I'm trying to feed him information. On a local level, I will be working with the Gay Political Caucus, working in the political campaigns, and speaking about everything we've talked about today. I'm going to be using my vocal cords to try to bring the gay community a consciousness of what the issues are in 1980 and where we go from here. ▼

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September 16**

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Wednesday, September 17

COPA 9PM-1AM

Saturday, September 20

CLUB HOUSTON 9PM-1AM