

LISTENING IN/*George Vukelich*

Taking the Next Step

Tammy Baldwin is serving her second term as Dane County supervisor in the 8th District (largely a campus area) and chairs the board of social services. She is also in her final year at the UW Law School. Born in Madison in 1962, she graduated from West High in 1980 and earned her bachelor's degree at Smith College with a double major in mathematics and government. She spent a year in Gov. Tony Earl's administration as an assistant adviser on women's issues. An activist member of the gay community, Baldwin notes that Oct. 11 marks the first anniversary of the March on Washington for Gay Rights. Oct. 11 has been designated "Coming Out Day."

"The idea for a 'Coming Out Day' came up in a conference that was called the 'war conference.' A number of things were happening on the national front regarding gays, and many gays felt, not surprisingly, that a war had been declared upon them.

"In response to these things—which included the terribly anti-gay amendment in the U.S. Senate by Jesse Helms—the war conference concluded that there should be a 'Coming Out Day'

and its theme should be 'Take Your Next Step.'

"For different people in the gay community, this means dramatically different things. For that person who has never told anyone he or she is gay, it may mean just recognizing it and telling themselves—'coming out' to themselves or to a close family member.

"For others who are public figures and who have already 'come out' to many people, taking their next step might be adopting a gay rights issue and working on it very strenuously in the next year.

"Gays simply have to become more visible. We have always been misunderstood. We have always been stereotyped. We have often been afraid to 'come out' for whatever reasons.

"With visibility, we can eliminate the myths about the gay community. I want to quote Harvey Milk on the importance of this visibility. Harvey Milk was the San Francisco supervisor who campaigned as a gay activist, was elected and then, almost 10 years ago, was assassinated. Back in 1979, Harvey Milk made a speech he called 'Hope.'

"'Like every other group,' he said, 'we must be judged by our leaders, by those who are themselves gay and who are visible. For invisible we remain in



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Tammy Baldwin

limbo....A gay person in office can set a tone, can command respect, not only from the larger community, but from the young people in our own community who need examples and hope.'

"It's been almost 20 years since the 'Stonewall riots,' which for many people marked the beginning of the gay rights movement.

"Stonewall was a gay bar in New

York City, and in the 1960s there was a lot of police hostility toward gays in New York. Every night, the paddy wagons lined up, and everybody in the bar would be loaded into the wagons, and all their names would be published in the paper the next day.

"Finally there was massive resistance to these nightly police harassments. It came to be called the Stonewall riots, the Stonewall rebellion. It was the first time that numbers of gay people united together to fight a specific act of oppression in a way that made national headlines.

"These three anniversaries, the Stonewall rebellion in New York 20 years ago; the assassination of Harvey Milk in San Francisco 10 years ago and the March on Washington for Gay Rights just one year ago are so very important to the gay rights movement. We reflect on them and then we commit our energies to taking our next step in memory of these momentous events.

"Finally, I must say that the 'next step' is not just for the gay community, it's for the straight community as well. It's the understanding of gay politics, of the gay rights movement, of the gay person. And it's helping other parents, other brothers, other sisters, understand too." ■