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Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records
Subgroup/Office of Origin: National AIDS Policy Office
Series/Staff Member: Patsy Fleming
Subseries: National AIDS Strategy

OA/ID Number: 10182
FolderID:

Folder Title:
Gloves Incident - Patsy, Secret Service

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**Statement by Patricia S. Fleming
National AIDS Policy Director
Regarding Use of Gloves by White House Guards**

"The actions of the individuals involved were totally inappropriate and insulting. This incident shows the lack of knowledge about HIV transmission and how it occurs. It demonstrates the need for the Federal Workplace HIV/AIDS Education Initiative that the President began in 1993. I will be contacting the Treasury Department to make sure that all personnel, including the Secret Service, are trained in this matter."

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6/16/95

White House Inhospitallity

Those uniformed Secret Service guards who donned rubber gloves to greet a delegation of gay elected officials shamed their service and embarrassed the White House they are supposed to protect. The guards presumably thought they were protecting themselves against the AIDS virus should any of the visitors be infected. But their actions revealed either a deplorable ignorance of how AIDS is spread, or a malicious determination to denigrate a group of respected officials who had been invited to the White House as a peace overture to the gay and lesbian communities.

The incident occurred on Tuesday as some 40 gay leaders arrived for a daylong conference with senior Administration officials, including Cabinet members and Vice President Al Gore. Several guards put on rubber gloves before inspecting the guests' bags and briefcases. One guard reportedly explained that they were using the gloves "for protection."

This was a ludicrous proposition. The AIDS virus is spread only through an exchange of bodily fluids, as in sexual intercourse or the use of hypodermic needles contaminated with the virus. It is not spread through casual contact, such as handshakes, touching an infected person, or inspecting

an infected person's briefcase. Mr. Gore illustrated that point by shaking the hands of every gay official he could find at the evening reception.

The White House and Secret Service expressed regret for the incident, and the Treasury Department, which has jurisdiction over the Secret Service, is investigating how it happened. The offense clearly justifies stern disciplinary action. If this was an act of stupidity by low-level guards, then special training and administrative punishments seem in order. But if this was a calculated attempt to insult homosexuals, dismissal from the service is the only fit response. If Secret Service superiors sanctioned use of the gloves in advance, they, too, should be disciplined or dismissed.

That such an event should happen not in some benighted backwater but at the gates of the White House is a shocking reminder of how intolerant this society remains toward its gay citizens. The White House press secretary said officials were "distressed" about the incident. But this is a matter upon which President Clinton should speak for himself, as he surely would if foreign guests or members of an ethnic minority or religious group had been insulted in his house as a result of ignorance or malice.

Gays get rubber-glove treatment at White House

By J. Jennings Moss
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A group of homosexual elected officials who went to the White House for a meeting with senior Clinton administration officials Tuesday said yesterday that they were offended when officers at the White House greeted them wearing rubber gloves.

The gloves, which the officers wore apparently in fear of exposure to the AIDS virus, set off a chain of events that led White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta to ask Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin to investigate the incident.

"It's safe to say that the chief of

Guards' protection offends officials

staff or others were distressed by that," White House spokesman Michael McCurry said yesterday. "And it seems to have been an error in judgment."

Four or five uniformed officers put on the gloves when the first members of the group arrived at the tourist entrance to the White House, said several people who were on the tour.

George Eighmey, a state representative from Oregon, asked the officers why they were wearing the gloves, and the officers said they were doing it to protect them-

selves. The AIDS-causing human immunodeficiency virus is not believed to be spread through casual contact unless open sores or cuts come in contact with the virus.

Mike Nelson, an alderman in Carrboro, N.C., who was with Mr. Eighmey on the tour, said he was "offended and disappointed."

"Disappointed because of the clear lack of understanding about the transmission of HIV which the guards were exhibiting. ... Offended because it showed how far gay people still have to go and it was an insult as well to assume

that everyone who is gay has AIDS."

A spokesman for the Secret Service was not available for comment.

Coincidentally, as Mr. McCurry explained the administration's response to the incident, President Clinton issued an executive order creating the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS.

The homosexual elected officials approached the White House with a wary attitude, one of them said. Last week they reacted angrily when Attorney General Janet Reno announced the adminis-

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tration would take no role in the Supreme Court case to determine the constitutionality of a Colorado measure prohibiting cities from enacting laws making homosexuals a protected class.

The tour of the White House for the 40 or so elected officials and their guests was taken at the start of an afternoon of meetings with senior administration officials.

When the elected officials were done with the tour, they walked to the Old Executive Office Building, next door to the White House, and again were cleared by the Secret Service. This time the officers were not wearing gloves, the participants said.

The homosexual representatives met with a number of senior administration officials and had a 10-minute visit with Vice President Al Gore at an afternoon reception.

"The White House view is that the meeting itself was very good in providing a further basis for discussion," Mr. McCurry said.

"It seems to have been an error in judgment."

— Michael McCurry

Some participants praised the White House for having a "real honest dialogue" with them. Others said they were still angry.

"We worked hard for Clinton's election in 1992, and there wasn't anything said that showed they were working hard for us," said a participant who asked not to be identified.

The relationship between Mr. Clinton and the homosexual community has been rocky from the beginning. Homosexuals embraced his candidacy with money and votes, hoping he would follow through on a number of sweeping promises, such as ending the military's ban on homosexuals and working to enact a federal law protecting homosexuals.

But once in office, Mr. Clinton learned that many of his promises were unpopular with the public

and on Capitol Hill, and his political advisers told him that redeeming the promises could hurt him among middle-of-the-road voters.

On the military ban, Mr. Clinton developed a compromise known as "don't ask, don't tell," which satisfied few people on either side. Since then, he has rarely spoken about sexual orientation in public.

Several of Mr. Clinton's backers, among them Rep. Barney Frank, Massachusetts Democrat and one of Congress' three openly homosexual members, have argued that criticism from the homosexual community is shortsighted and that Mr. Clinton has done more to help homosexuals than any previous president.

One of Mr. Frank's homosexual colleagues, Rep. Gerry E. Studds, Massachusetts Democrat, noted during a reception for the elected officials Monday night that while Congress is now under Republican control, the White House is still in Democratic hands.

"These are the good guys, and that — notwithstanding the drink [in your hand] — is a very sobering thought from time to time," Mr. Studds said.

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE**

I regret the unfortunate actions that were taken yesterday when several visitors arrived at the White house. It is not the policy of the Secret Service to wear gloves merely based on known sexual preference. The Uniformed Division Officers of the United States Secret Service have discretion to wear protective gloves in the performance of their duties.

At the Secret Service we take seriously discrimination of any sort.

Officers receive training with respect to health and safety issues and this training includes developing a sensitivity to issues relating to discrimination and dealing with the public. This training is important to our agency and continues to be a high priority. I will hold a special training session directed specifically at these matters.

**Eljay B. Bowron
Director**

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