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MASS THOMAS E. KILDUFF October 05, 2006

# Curt Rogers resigns over Romney/Healey gay domestic violence veto

## GAY MEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT DIRECTOR AND COMMISSIONER ON THE GOVERNOR'S SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COMMISSION, QUILTS IN PROTEST

Curt Rogers, a high-ranking commissioner on the Governor's Sexual and Domestic Violence Commission since 1997, resigned from his position on Monday, October 2 in protest to the decisions of the Romney/Healey administration. Rogers, the executive director of the Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project and a victim of abuse himself, took Healey to task for supporting Governor Romney's veto of an assured \$158,000 geared toward GLBT domestic violence services. It was the only line item under Domestic Violence services that was vetoed by the administration for fiscal year 2007. The vetoes also contradict an October 2005 Commission report that recommends expanding funding and services for GLBT victims statewide. Instead of directing more money to the problem of GLBT domestic violence however, the Romney/Healey administration cut existing funds, which Rogers has said were "inadequate already."

"Lieutenant Governor Healey has ignored the needs of GLBT victims," Rogers said, "and defended this horrific veto with untruths."

Rogers was building up to a resignation over the last four months during tit-for-tat correspondence with Healey, the lieutenant governor for Mitt Romney and the Republican contender for Governor in November's election.

The controversy began in June of this year, when Romney wielded his veto pen to obliterate anything serving the GLBT population for his fiscal year 2007 budget.

Of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault services, the GLBT line item language that Romney vetoed was an "infinitesimal" amount, said Rogers. "There is about 36 million dollars that go to these services and the part with specific GLBT mention represents less than one half of 1 percent." Rogers did say, however, that groups like the Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project and The Network/La Red were able to use a much larger piece of funding from the Department of Social Services; money that is not specific to the GLBT community.

On July 26, Rogers wrote a letter to Healey asking her to clarify her position on the vetoes. He also described his own involvement with the commission starting when he was appointed in 1997 by gay-friendly Republican Governor, William Weld.

"In 1997," he wrote, "many individuals and State agencies did not recognize the reality of GLBT victims due to homophobia and/or misconceptions about the role of gender in domestic violence. I am proud of the progress of the commissions over the past 10 years and especially the acceptance and recognition that the overwhelming majority of my fellow Commissioners now extend to GLBT victims."

"Unfortunately," he added, "the Governor is tragically out of step with his Commission. His veto of GLBT domestic violence services was the only reduction of funding within the domestic violence community and created the clear perception that the administration has no intention of responding to the real and critical needs of GLBT victims."

Rogers then informed Healey that many of his colleagues had urged his resignation as a statement to "such a blatant anti-GLBT position." Rogers told In Newsweekly that he felt he was giving Healey an easy way out, but in the end she defended Romney's decisions.

Weeks passed without a Healey response. Rogers went on vacation August 14 and returned on August 26. No response was received. Rogers finally emailed Healey's office and a letter dated September 6 from Dan Haley, Healey's Chief of Staff, included a letter "created" on August 2 by the lieutenant governor. Rogers said he did not receive the letter in early August.

In Healey's August 2 letter she responded with cliché support of Rogers' work, but in the third paragraph wrote:

"Throughout the budgeting process the Governor and I were very clear about our categorical distaste for the practice of earmarking. I do not know why a program that has been funded through a DPH line item was pulled out and earmarked at some point in the legislative process. But the Governor's veto of that earmark was consistent with his practice with regard to a large number of earmarks in the budget, the vast majority of which had nothing to do with the provision of services to the GLBT community. I regret that some members of that community evidently feel singled out. I can assure you however that this particular veto was entirely consistent with the Administration's aversion to the earmarking of departmental budgets."

Healey's true colors on the topic were ghastly and many fellow commissioners continued to urge that Rogers resign. Rogers took a few weeks to collect his temper before penning his resignation letter dated October 2. It included a critique of Healey's faulty logic with the vetoes.



Curt Rogers, former commissioner on the Governor's Sexual and Domestic Violence Commission (photo: Eric Hess)



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"First," Rogers wrote to the lieutenant governor, "the language vetoed from the budget was not an 'earmark' and, second, and most importantly, the vetoes were not 'consistent.'"

In legi-speak, an "earmark" within a line item designates that specific funds go to specific programs and are not subject to a competitive procurement process. Line Item 4513-1130, however, was "programmatic language," funds designated to a specific area, but in which organizations have to make bids, or that is subjected to a competitive procurement process. The line item discussed here reads "that not less than \$158,000 shall be expended for the public health model of community engagement and intervention services and crisis housing for sexual violence and intimate partner violence in the GLBT community."

Rogers continued, writing "There are only a handful of line items in the State Budget which pertain to domestic violence/sexual assault; the largest by far is the Department of Social Services line item 4800-1400."

He then listed nine earmarks (for specific agencies) which were spared the Governor's vetoes. Indeed if there is a pattern to the Governor's vetoes, it's definitely not the one that the lieutenant governor erected.

"Throughout the StateFY2007 budget," wrote Rogers, "there are countless examples of earmarks outside of domestic violence/sexual assault which were not touched by the Administration's veto pen; however, every clearly identified GLBT programmatic area was vetoed."

In a biting conclusion, Rogers wrote: "As a survivor of GLBT domestic violence, I can honestly say that I have always felt minimized, if not rendered invisible, by your exclusive policies and language. Until you embark on an inclusive path of advocacy, please do not promote yourself as a champion of domestic violence/sexual assault and never use this serious issue for your own political advancement."

The Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault "has between 250 and 300 affiliated members," said Executive Director, Marilee Kenney-Hunt. All commissioners with the exception of Kenney-Hunt are unpaid. In Rogers' top tier, there are 110 commissioners.

Kerry Healey did not return two Monday afternoon press calls made to her office. •

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