

Thomas B. DePriest



Tom DePriest received his undergraduate degree from Duke University. He entered the University of Virginia School of Law in 1973 and graduated in 1976. Tom was admitted to the bar in Virginia and later in the District of Columbia.

Tom was employed as a lawyer for the Office of the General Counsel of the United States Department of Energy for many years. He sometimes appeared in regulatory hearings on behalf of the Secretary of Energy.

Tom's gay rights activism was done through a variety of organizations. One of them was the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties where in the 1970s he worked with other trailblazers such as Arthur C. Warner, Thomas F. Coleman, Michael Miller, Walter Barnett, Craig W. Patton, and Gerald Gerash. Together this team pushed for the repeal of sodomy laws and other repressive sex laws in states throughout the nation, including in Tom's home state of Virginia.

Tom was a founding member of the Virginia Gay Alliance. When it was formed in 1983, he was the organization's lobbying coordinator. Tom's first lobbying priority was the repeal of the state sodomy law, which, among other things, barred all private, consensual sexual acts between persons of the same sex. Also a priority was the repeal of a state liquor law provision that prohibits bars from employing or serving homosexuals.

The sodomy law was not repealed by the Virginia Legislature until 2013 – 10 years after such laws were declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

Tom met with Virginia Republican Congressman Thomas J. Bliley in 1983. Bliley had anti-gay positions and was aligned with the Moral Majority. Tom was able to secure an agreement from Bliley that he would not oppose a revision of the United States Code of Military Justice to decriminalize consenting adult sex of military members in private.

In his capacity as president of the Virginia Gay Alliance, Tom testified before the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate in 1984. At that time, the alliance had chapters in five of the state's 10 congressional districts. Tom testified in opposition to the confirmation of J. Harvie Wilkinson to be a judge on the United States Court of Appeals. Tom argued that Wilkinson lacked the necessary judicial temperament due to his prior public expressions of disdain for homosexuals.

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