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HEADLINE: US SENATORS TARGETED IN OUTING' CAMPAIGN

BYLINE: FRANCES DICKENSON AND CAZ GORMAN David Knight, right, the son of a California state senator who opposes **gay** marriage, takes his wedding vows with his partner in San Francisco LIZ HAFALIA/AP

BODY:

Michael Rogers lives on the top floor of a block of flats in Washington DC, with a balcony and a fine view of the city whose secrets he is systematically giving up. Mr Rogers, who is **gay**, is waging a controversial "outing" campaign against **gay** Senators, members of Congress and Capitol Hill staffers who support the presidentially sponsored campaign to ban same-sex marriages.

The headquarters for his campaign is a workstation in the corner of his sitting room. From here he sifts tips-offs, updates his blog site (www.blogactive.com) and above all makes the phone calls that **gays** on the Hill have come to dread.

"It's about exposing hypocrisy, about ending a conspiracy of deceit and silence," Mr Rogers says. "These people work for politicians who are working to discriminate against **gays**. Then they seek protection from the very people their bosses are trying to hurt. It's surreal."

Mr Rogers's first target was Jonathan Tolman, a senior aide for a senate committee chaired by Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma, one of the most conservative Senators. A couple of years earlier Mr Tolman had posed for a risqué photo-spread in a Washington **gay** magazine. Mr Rogers posted this information on his website.

Senator Inhofe's office issued a statement that he did not hire openly **gay** staffers in case of conflict of agenda. When we contacted the office, his press officer told us: "The statement stands. You have the Senator's position on that."

Although a move to amend the Federal Marriage Act - which would have outlawed **gay** marriage nationwide - was narrowly defeated in the Senate three weeks ago, the issue has not died. Its passing or defeat was never the point. The point was to make it a rallying cry for the Republicans in the run-up to the elections, in particular the four million evangelical voters who did not bother to vote in 2000.

Republican activists are now agitating for anti-**gay** amendments to local laws in crucial swing states, keeping the issue hot. On Tuesday, record voter turnout in Missouri, the first state to vote on the issue, suggests the strategy is working. According to The New York Times, 41 per cent, instead of the usual 15-25 per cent, of registered voters turned out, many of them religious. They swung the ballot, making **gay** marriage illegal in that state.

Gay activists understand the strategy too and have turned up the gas. **Michael Rogers** is not the only

Washington "outer". John Aravosis has also entered the fray. A political consultant, lawyer and former staff lawyer to Republican Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, his spur to action was "Watching Bush announce it his support for the Federal Marriage Amendment from the White House. It was as if he was defiling the Oval Office."

Outing has always been a unsettling tactic and Mr Aravosis has some qualms about naming people, but President Bush's declaration convinced him it was time to "stop being nice to the enemy within". It was Mr Aravosis who was behind a recent ad in the **gay** weekly Washington Blade, which declared the new zero tolerance. The ad ran: "For years our silence has protected you. Today that protection ends."

Between them, Mr Aravosis and Mr Rogers have outed about 20 staffers and politicians, including Congressman Mark Foley, a Florida Republican, and Democrat Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland. Mr Foley's office has since confirmed he is **gay**, but Senator Mikulski has not commented on her sexual orientation. Both were targeted because they had not spoken out against the Federal Marriage Amendment. They both subsequently did.

Other outed staffers include Jay Timmons, the executive director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. The NRSC exists to ensure the election of Republican candidates to the Senate and, according to the Blade, "has declared its intention to seize upon the issue of same- sex marriage to motivate conservative voters to unseat congressional Democrats". Mr Timmons has declined to comment publicly on his sexuality and did not return our calls.

The effect of this outing campaign has been electrifying. "People are worried, not wanting to answer the phone," says Lynden Armstrong, the administrative director for Senator Pete Domenici, a New Mexico Republican who opposes **gay** marriages. Mr Armstrong also co-chairs the **Gay**, Lesbian and Allies Senate Staff caucus. "People are uncomfortable going to places such as the Duplex a restaurant popular with **gay** staffers , thinking, what if one of these activists sees me?"

Chris Barron, the political director of the conservative **gay** group Log Cabin Republicans, says: "The outing is outrageous. It's a partisan attack. It's hateful and unnecessary. Anyone I know who is straight can't believe **gay** people can do this to each other. This is just someone looking for their 15 minutes of fame."

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