

the rest of our world

New Report On Black GLBTs

NEW YORK - Significant prevalence of parenting, high levels of political participation and widespread experiences of racism and homophobia are among the findings in a study of black gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people released last month by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF). *Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud* is a collaboration by nine black GLBT Pride organizations, a team of black researchers and NGLTF.

According to the survey of over 2600 respondents, black GLBT Americans identify HIV/AIDS, hate-related violence, and marriage / domestic partnership as the most important policy issues impacting their lives. In addition, 40 percent of black GLBT women, 18 percent of men, and 15 percent of transgender people are parents.

Half of those surveyed say racism is a problem in the white GLBT community. Two-thirds report that homophobia is a problem within the black community. In terms of sexual identity, three-quarters identify as gay or lesbian, 11 percent as bisexual, and one percent as transgender. More than half of respondents say their church/religion views homosexuality as "wrong and sinful."

Condoms 'Grow' In Trees Down Under

DARWIN, Australia - According to a report from the Associated Press, health officials have come up with a novel idea to encourage safe sex within isolated Aboriginal communities: hanging condoms in trees.

An official at the cultural health service at Fitzroy Crossing said the town once had the highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases in the remote Kimberley mountains region in the north of Western Australia state. But, partly thanks to the condom-tree program, infection rates are now falling.

Aborigines often congregate under trees outside the town's bar or at a popular area a few miles away to drink and catch up with friends. The condoms dangle in canisters made from plastic piping slung from wire hooks in the trees.

When the program began three years ago, virtually no Aborigines were getting condoms from the only two outlets in town: the supermarket and district hospital. Now the valley's 3,500 people are using up to 3,000 condoms a month, he said.

Anti-Gay Juror Found in Contempt

NORTHAMPTON, MA - The Union News of Hampshire and Franklin counties reported that a juror who reportedly wrote a threatening, homophobic statement on his jury questionnaire was found in contempt of court.

Judge W. Michael Ryan found Benjamin Love of Belchertown in contempt after learning that Love had written, "Northampton is a town of faggots and dykes. Kill them all," on his jury form.

There was some speculation that the man was mentally ill and/or had written the statement in an attempt to be dismissed from the pool. "There was no hate behind that thought process," Love's lawyer explained, adding, "There was no thought behind that thought process."

Judge Ryan didn't buy the excuse and sentenced Benjamin B. Love to a day in jail.

"New" Military Challenges

SANTA BARBARA, CA - Scholars and military analysts raised concerns last week that the Pentagon, White House and federal courts are undermining efforts to ensure equal opportunity for minorities in the military. Experts described a strategy of neglect, attrition and non-enforcement with the cumulative effect of making military service less open to minorities. Particularly worrisome, they said, is the Pentagon's increasing reliance on a small group of civilian advisors intent on preserving the military as a bulwark of traditional values.

"What we're seeing is a jolt to the right by a Pentagon and an administration under the sway of extreme traditionalists," said Nathaniel Frank, Director of Communications at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military at the University of California, Santa Barbara (CSSMM). "They are using the language of national security and unit cohesion to justify politically-motivated attacks on equal opportunity."

There has been heavy pressure from conservative groups that oppose women in combat to put an end to Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services and what they see as its "feminist ideology." In response, the Pentagon dismissed 22 of the 34 members, restricted the committee's duties to an agenda dictated by top Pentagon officials, and cut the group's budget by 20 percent. The lobby groups include the Center for Military Readiness (CMR), Concerned Women for America (CWA), the Independent Women's Forum (IWF) and the Eagle Forum.

In addition to declining support for women in the military, the armed forces have seen a surge in expulsions and harassment of gay soldiers. Last month, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a legal aid and watchdog group that monitors the policy on gay troops, released its eighth annual report on "don't ask, don't tell." According to SLDN, the Pentagon fired more than 1250 soldiers in 2001 for being lesbian, gay or bisexual. The report also documents 1075 cases of anti-gay harassment last year, up from 871 in 2000. Reflecting a "worsening epidemic of anti-gay hostility," this figure includes a record 513 instances in the Army alone, up 145 percent from the previous year.

Three priests oppose ban on gay marriage

BOSTON - According to a report in the *Boston Globe* three Roman Catholic priests broke with the church hierarchy's support of a gay

marriage ban. The three took a stand yesterday against the gay marriage ban, citing Catholic teaching on social justice and calling the amendment discriminatory to children born to gay parents.

"Especially in light of the present crisis of abuse, we want to make sure that all children are protected and receive equal rights," the Rev. Walter F. Cuenin, pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Newton, said in a statement. "This amendment would certainly deprive some children of their rights simply because their parents were not legally married."

"This does nothing, nothing to protect family life," said the Rev. Richard Lewandowski, pastor of St. Camillus parish in Fitchburg. "It only weakens it." The Rev. Thomas J. Carroll, director of the Jesuit Urban Center in the South End, also spoke against the ban.

If the legislature decides to support a constitutional amendment, it must schedule a constitutional convention by May 8. Fifty state legislatures must approve the question in conventions this year and in 2003 before the measure faces voters. The language of the proposed amendment declares that only heterosexual marriages will be recognized and that no other relationship will receive "the benefits or incidents exclusive to marriage" from the state.

Westchester Board Considers Gay Couples' Registry

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. - The mother of twin 16-year-old-sons - one straight, the other gay - pleaded last night for the Westchester County legislature to create a registry that will allow gay couples to document their partnerships so that her gay son can enjoy "the same kind of protections that his brother will have" when he marries. The report was quoted from the *Journal News* by the Human Rights Campaign.

"The hopes that I have for my sons are identical," Carol Fessler told the packed chambers of the legislature. "I want them to grow into adulthood, and I also want them to enjoy a mutually supportive, loving relationship."

"Gregory can enter into that relationship and enjoy all the protections and the social and legal recognitions that a marriage conveys. Nicholas isn't going to be that lucky."

Thirty speakers - including a Methodist cleric and an Episcopal pastor, a high school teacher, four gay couples, a transsexual and the leaders of a half-dozen local gay organizations - supported the proposal, although many said it should go a step further by also conveying next-of-kin rights for couples who register.

As now proposed, the registry would not give unmarried couples any of the rights associated with marriage. It simply provides unmarried couples with a place to declare their partnership, which would allow them to claim domestic partner benefits from employers who offer them, including IBM Corp., the towns of Eastchester and Greenburgh, and the county itself. The measure currently would require gay or lesbian couples

to cohabit for a year before being eligible to register their partnerships.

Five speakers opposed the proposal at the public hearing.

ExxonMobil Must Vote on Sexual Orientation Policy

WASHINGTON - *Bloomberg News* reports that the Securities and Exchange Commission said ExxonMobil Corp. must allow a shareholder vote on a resolution calling on the world's largest publicly traded oil company to bar discrimination based on sexual orientation.

SEC lawyer Keir Gumbs denied Exxon Mobil's request that it be allowed to exclude the proposal from its annual meeting next month.

The proposal is sponsored by several groups, including the New York City Employees' Retirement System, which says it holds about \$480 million in company shares. At last year's annual meeting, 13 percent of shareholders voted in favor of the proposal. Exxon Mobil - based in Irving, Texas - argued in a letter to the SEC that it be allowed to bar a vote this year because the company has already "substantially implemented" anti-discrimination measures. The company said it has a comprehensive policy prohibiting discrimination and that naming specific groups automatically excludes those who aren't named.

"It has always been Exxon Mobil's policy not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or any other non-work-related characteristic," the company wrote to the SEC in January.

"We are unable to concur in your view that Exxon Mobil may exclude the New York City Employees' Retirement System proposal," the SEC wrote back, without elaborating.

"I am gratified that the SEC has reversed a blatant attempt by Exxon Mobil to stifle debate on this important human rights issue," New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr. said in a prepared statement.

Allentown Protects Rights of GLTs

ALLENTOWN, Pa. - The Allentown City Council voted to amend the city's human relations ordinance Wednesday, adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the law's list of protected classes.

The *Morning Call* reports that in doing so, Allentown became the 230th municipality in the country to extend employment, housing and other protections to people based on their sexual orientation.

It became the first city in Pennsylvania to add gender identity as a protected status in its human relations law. Gender identity can refer to transsexuals or cross-dressers, but also men and women who simply appear opposite their sex.

Des Moines YMCA Charges Gay Couples More

DES MOINES, Iowa - Officials are threatening to withhold city money from the YMCA of Greater Des Moines because it charges homosex-

ual couples more to join than heterosexual married couples, reports the Associated Press.

Des Moines added a sexual-orientation clause to its anti-discrimination ordinance last year. The ordinance outlaws discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment or use of public accommodations within the city limits.

"Anybody that does business with the city must comply with that policy," said City Councilwoman Christine Hensley. "If there's a loophole, I'll be sure to close it."

The president of the local YMCA said it is not discriminating because its policy is based on Iowa's definition of marriage, which does not recognize gay and lesbian unions. Sexual orientation has nothing to do with membership, he said.

Legally married couples who live together may join the YMCA for \$57.50 a month. Gay couples living together are not eligible for the family package and must join at single adult rates which are \$38.50 - \$13 more for each couple.

Carrier Corp. Ends Support of Scouts Over Policy

SYRACUSE, N.Y. - Carrier Corp. is ending its support of a major regional Boy Scouts dinner because of the organization's ban on gay leaders, according to a story filed by the Associated Press.

Carrier declined to buy or sell tickets this year for the annual Boypower Dinner of the Hiawatha Seaway Council of the Boy Scouts of America, said a company spokesman. Last year, the company was responsible for combined donations and corporate dinner ticket sales of \$42,025. Former CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite was this year's featured guest. The dinner is a major fundraiser, attended by more than 2,000 people and generating hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Scouts.

Until last year, the event had been held in the Carrier Dome at Syracuse University every year but one since it was started in 1984.

Last year, however, the university told the Scouts that it could no longer use the stadium because the organization's ban on gay leaders was in conflict with the school's policy on diversity.

HIV and Hep-C

BOSTON - *The Washington Blade* reported last month that a Boston AIDS activist who is herself HIV-positive has had to pay for her own liver transplant. Belynda Dunn's liver had been damaged by Hepatitis-C, but her health maintenance organization refused to cover the cost of the transplant on the grounds that the procedure was "experimental" for anyone with HIV.

AIDS Action of Massachusetts was successful in another case when it convinced a state board to order that the cost be covered by Medicaid. Dunn raised funds privately to cover the operation - which usually costs \$208,000, though she said she had negotiated a lower price. ▼