

the rest of our world

Free Speech Threatened

BOSTON – A woman who wrote an article in *Sojourner* last spring about her radical politics and activities 35 years ago was investigated by the Massachusetts State Police. Ann Withorn reported in the September issue of the same newsjournal that a state police officer told her a “complaint” had been filed regarding her story under a post-September 11 law establishing “a hotline” for any resident to call in “anonymous complaints” about “suspicious activity.”

The trooper was making “a threshold inquiry” to evaluate how serious the complaint was. The troopers denied that what she wrote had triggered the inquiry, but said they were “checking up on the caller’s fear that I might ‘currently be involved in potentially dangerous activity.’”

Withorn had written about a group of four friends who called themselves the Red Coven. It had never been “active” in any sense of protest. The troopers wanted to know whether the group still existed.

A record is being kept, somewhere in some database connected to the hotline, of the complaint and the result of the visit. But because the complaint will be characterized as unsubstantiated, of course such things aren’t threats to free speech. And Brutus is an honorable man.

Dade Defeats Anti-Gay Measure

MIAMI – The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and local gay rights organization No to Discrimination/Save Dade celebrated last month as voters defeated an anti-gay measure that would have removed 4-year-old civil rights protections in housing, employment, credit and accommodations for gays and lesbians in Dade County.

NGLTF contributed \$100,000 and voter identification and mobilization expertise to the campaign, which ended “what Anita Bryant began 25 years ago,” crowed Lorri L. Jean, NGLTF’s executive director. “The people of Miami-Dade County have sent the Christian Coalition and its small band of gay-obsessed zealots packing!” The margin of victory was 53 percent to 47 percent.

Other organizations that worked on or invested heavily in the No to Discrimination/Save Dade campaign included LLEGÓ – the National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization – the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way.

LGBT Veterans Asked to Share Their Stories

NEW YORK – The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) recently unveiled a new area on their website dedicated to LGBT veterans. In collaboration with the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) and the American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), HRC is collecting stories of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender

veterans, some of which will be posted on their web site at www.hrc.org in honor of Veterans Day, November 11, 2002.

“It is time to recognize the contributions of LGBT men and women who have given their time, talent and, in some cases, their lives in service to their country,” said HRC Senior Policy Advocate John Vezina, who specializes in military issues. “The ‘Documenting Courage’ project is a way for us to preserve the stories of LGBT American vets for future generations and to demonstrate the undeniable contribution the LGBT community has made in service to the country.” Stories can be submitted via the form located at www.hrc.org/documentingcourage/sharestory.asp.

First NY Times Same-Sex Union Announcement Features VT CU

NEW YORK – Two weeks to the day after announcing it would offer gay and lesbian couples equal access to its Weddings/Announcements pages, *The New York Times* announced the September 1 civil union of Daniel Gross and Steven Goldstein – the paper’s first-ever same-sex union notice.

Gross, 32, and Goldstein, 40, celebrated their civil union ceremony in North Hero. “Obviously, Daniel and I are thrilled to be the first gay couple featured on the *Times* Weddings and Announcements pages,” Goldstein said. “We hope this prompts more couples in New York and across the country to submit their wedding announcements and put a face on our lives and our relationships.”

As of mid-September, 125 US newspapers had newly agreed to print same-sex union announcements, according to GLAAD, and *The New York Times* had printed its first lesbian union announcement on September 8: Dr. Leslie Jennifer Miller (38) and Dr. Alicia Jana Salzer (36) affirmed their partnership in a commitment ceremony on Fire Island led by a nondenominational spiritual counselor.

Dr. Miller, who is a staff forensic examiner at the Crime Victims Treatment Center at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt, met Dr. Salzer in the hospital’s emergency room in October 1999.

Nevada School Harassment Case Settled

SAN FRANCISCO – Derek Henkle signed an unprecedented settlement with the Washoe County, Nevada public school district in which he will receive \$451,000 in compensation for years of harassment over being gay. Henkle was called names, spat upon, beaten by classmates wearing rubber gloves (as protection against any possibility of getting AIDS), thrown into lockers, and even threatened with being roped with a lasso and dragged behind a truck.

According to a report in the *Boston Globe*, Henkle charged that school administrators told him to “stop acting like a fag” and to keep his sexual identity quiet. Rather than

punish the harassers, administrators transferred Henkle to a succession of schools where the harassment continued, ultimately placing the then-16-year-old in an adult education program at a community college.

Henkle’s sexual orientation became public when he was 14 and appeared on a public access television program to discuss being gay.

“I was forced from school to school, and treated like I was the problem. My teachers chose not to protect me, my administrators chose not to protect me, and my school let me down,” Henkel said.

School officials noted that the settlement contained no admission of wrongdoing and said that their position was “pretty clear: Any kid that walks onto one of our campuses – gay, straight, black, white, Muslim, Jewish, rich, poor, whatever – deserves to be treated with respect, free of harassment, threats, and intimidation.”

NGLTF Honors Rosie's Adoption Couple

LOS ANGELES – On September 17th, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) honored Steve Lofton and Roger Croteau, a couple for more than twenty years, who launched an historic lawsuit to challenge Florida’s ban on gay adoption in an effort to legally guarantee that their five foster children remain a part of their family.

Lofton and Croteau, who were profiled in a television special which also featured Rosie O’Donnell, accepted the 2002 NGLTF Leadership Award, established in 1989 to honor and recognize GLBT allies in the straight community and individuals in the GLBT community who have made “unparalleled contributions to advancement of freedom and equality for the nation’s GLBT community.”

Harvard Law School Gives Military Recruiters Access

WASHINGTON – Harvard Law School announced plans to allow military recruiters on-campus access to students. The new plan abandons previous Harvard Law School policies preventing such recruitment because of the armed forces’ ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual service members. Harvard officials had previously noted that the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy is in direct violation of the school’s non-discrimination policy, which includes sexual orientation.

Sharra E. Greer, legal director for Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), noted that turning away military recruiters in the name of non-discrimination is not, in fact, about access or recruiting. “Recruitment offices are in virtually every corner of our nation,” Greer said. “Americans who want to serve are finding their way to recruiters. In fact, the services are all projected to meet their recruiting goals for the year.”

Harvard Law School’s previous policy restricting on-campus recruiting was approved in 1998 on the grounds the military could recruit

through a student veterans organization. The Air Force, however, recently demanded that the school rescind its ban on recruiters or risk losing \$328 million in federal funds, which are, of course, tax dollars.

“Harvard Law School has a right to set standards for recruiters, and to make opportunities available to every student, regardless of sexual orientation,” Greer said. “It was simply asking all employers to play by the same rule: no discrimination. The federal government should not be exempt. In the end, patriotism is about honoring our nation’s core values of freedom and equality for all.”

BU “Academy” Drops Gay Group

BOSTON – According to a report in the *Boston Globe* and passed along by the Human Rights Campaign, Boston University’s Chancellor John Silber has ordered the headmaster of the prestigious BU Academy (grades 8-12) to disband its gay-straight alliance. James Tracy, the headmaster, complied, under threat of losing substantial funding from BU, according to two teachers at the school.

A BU spokesman said Silber, who founded the Academy in 1993, does not believe the school should host any organization that deals with student sexuality. Silber “is not hostile to any particular gender orientation, but he feels that it’s not appropriate for a school ... to be getting involved in the sexuality of its students,” according to the spokesman.

State Senator Cheryl Jacques, an openly gay member of the Senate, criticized the decision. “It’s misguided,” she said. “Gay-straight alliances are important organizations that help teach tolerance and prevent tragedies.”

The school’s gay-straight alliance was two years old and offered information and support to students who are questioning their sexuality.

Gay-straight alliances started in Massachusetts nine years ago as an antidote to the exceptionally high suicide rate among gay and bisexual high school students. According to a Massachusetts Department of Public Health report released in May 2001, about 40 percent of that student population have attempted suicide.

Since the 1993-94 school year, Massachusetts has helped pay for gay-straight alliances at schools that want them. It is the only state that does so. Last year, the Department of Education handed out a total of \$285,725 in grants of between \$500 and \$3,000 to 156 schools.

Quebec Court Agrees With Ontario on Gay Marriage

QUEBEC – A Quebec Superior Court justice ruled last month that denying gays and lesbians the right to marry is a violation of Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, reports *Planet Out*.

The landmark decision parallels a decision by the Ontario Superior Court earlier this year. And, like the Ontario ruling, the court gave

the federal government two years to amend the law or it would be declared invalid.

“We’re overjoyed,” declared Michael Hendricks, who with his partner René LeBoeuf took the government to court in 1998. Leboeuf and Hendricks have been together for more than 25 years.

While the case was under consideration, the Quebec government passed legislation creating a civil union registry, granting gay and lesbian couples many of the same privileges of marriage. But Friday’s court ruling said that the creation of civil unions in Quebec “does not replace the right of access to marriage.”

Under Canadian law marriage is defined as “a union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.”

A third challenge to the constitutionality of the definition will be heard in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Ultimately it is expected the issue will be decided by the Supreme Court of Canada, a process that could take up to five years.

Philly Fights to Save Same-Sex Couple Benefits

PHILADELPHIA – Philadelphia’s mayor will appeal a Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court decision that struck down a property transfer tax break and city health benefits for same-sex partners, according to a statement issued by the mayor’s spokesman. In addition, “we are also seeking a stay of the opinion so those employees currently receiving benefits will continue to receive benefits until this issue is resolved,” the spokesman said in a report in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The American Civil Liberties Union said an appeal would likely succeed there, noting that the Supreme Court recently allowed same-sex couples to adopt children.

The ruling to be appealed was issued when the Commonwealth Court threw out two of the city’s three laws granting benefits to same-sex partners, saying that the city was trying to redefine marriage and that only the state could do that.

One of the bills gave same-sex Philadelphia couples an exemption from the city’s three percent real estate transfer tax when transferring property from one partner to the other, an exemption already enjoyed by married couples. A second bill, designed to cover only city employees, gave city health benefits to the partners of about 120 city workers. ▼