

the rest of our world

Boycott Ires RuPaul

Los Angeles – According to his ‘blog’ (for the uninitiated, ‘weblog,’ a kind of online diary or commentary), RuPaul, the actor and diva of drag, has no use for the NGLTF’s call to boycott a white comedian’s black face act.

Comedian Chuck Knipp, a white gay man, portrays the character of “Shirley Q. Liquor,” a black woman on welfare. The NGLTF and the National Association of Black and White Men Together have called for a boycott of the comedian’s act, encouraging gay clubs not to book the comedian and gay and lesbian audiences to shun his performances.

RuPaul wrote that in an earlier entry he had “lambasted the protesters of a ‘SHIRLEY Q.’ night-club appearance for being unsophisticated barbarians and transparent opportunists with misguided rage.” Further, he asked whether there weren’t more important issues for the NGLTF to spend time and energy on.

ACLU Hires Anti-Gay Former Pals

Washington – The American Civil Liberties Union, known for defending gay and lesbian rights and whose executive director is gay, has hired two virulently anti-gay former politicians as consultants. Former House Majority Leader Dick Arme (R-Texas) and former Rep. Bob Barr (R-Georgia) will join the ACLU to consult on “privacy rights,” according to a brief report in the *Washington Blade*.

Arme is notorious for his disrespect toward Rep. Barney Frank (D-Massachusetts), calling him “Barney Fag.” He retired this month from the House. Barr was a sponsor of the Defense of Marriage Act, prohibiting recognition of any same-gender unions. He was defeated in Georgia’s Republican primary last summer.

Cutest Couple in Chicago are Dykes

Chicago – One Chicago high school senior class made a different choice as it voted for those titles so dear to yearbook editors: it chose two lesbians as its “cutest couple.” Sixty seniors at Crete-Monee high school staged a walkout to protest the double-standard the school is using to delay publication of the yearbook, requiring parental permission for the designation. Critics pointed out that when het couples are chosen for this yearbook honor, no such permission is sought.

‘Het Panic’ Turns Deadly

Chicago – A gay man has been charged with the murder of a woman who tried to get him to change his sexual orientation, according to the *Washington Blade*. Nicholas Gutierrez, 19, has confessed to killing 51-year-old Mary Stachowicz, whose body was found in the crawl space of his apartment.

In some cases where gay men have been murdered by straight men, defense attorneys have used a so-called “gay-panic” defense, suggesting that their clients became enraged and panicked when the vic-

tim allegedly made a sexual approach. There is no word on whether Gutierrez’s defense counsel will attempt the opposite defense as a mitigating factor. Gutierrez could face the death penalty.

Russian Club Trashed After Seige

Moscow – Sharing a building with the Dubrovka Theatre turned out to be hazardous for the health of Central Station, a gay club. The club was seized when Moscow police stormed the theatre to release hostages held by Chechen rebels. According to wire reports, the authorities used the club to gain entrance into the theatre, and afterward, “large quantities of alcohol and the sound system” were stolen and homophobic graffiti were scrawled on the walls.

Gay Men’s Chorus at Kennedy Center Honors

Washington – The Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington, DC performed two songs as part of the 25th annual Kennedy Center Honors. It was the first time that a gay chorus had been invited to participate in this highly celebrated cultural event.

In a salute to the British-born Elizabeth Taylor, one of the five honorees, the Chorus sang a custom rendition of “There Is Nothing Like a Dame.” The chorus later joined Burt Bacharach and Dionne Warwick for an arrangement of “That’s What Friends are For,” in recognition of Taylor’s commitment to AIDS research.

The 160 members of GMCW, along with the other performers for the evening, also participated in a rousing finale of “America the Beautiful.”

“This was a shining moment both for the Chorus and for the gay and lesbian movement” said Jeff Buhrman, Artistic Director of GMCW. “The Chorus was proud to represent our fellow gay men and lesbians at such a prestigious event, in front of the President of the United States, and through the broadcast, in millions of homes across America.” The show was broadcast on December 27.

Cracker Barrel Board Passes Pro-Gay Policy

Washington – The Board of Directors of Cracker Barrel restaurants announced last month that it is adding sexual orientation to the list of characteristics covered by the company’s nondiscrimination policy. The announcement ends a more-than-decade-long campaign on the part of gay rights advocates who have been pressuring the restaurant chain because of its policy of firing employees who fail to “demonstrate normal heterosexual values.”

“This small step has enormous significance for every gay or lesbian employee who has ever experienced job discrimination,” said Kim I. Mills, education director for the Human Rights Campaign.

The board of CBRL Group Inc., parent company of Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores and Logan’s Roadhouse restaurants, voted unanimously to change the pol-

icy following its annual shareholder meeting in November. A shareholder proposal to add sexual orientation to the company’s nondiscrimination policy would have received a majority of the votes cast, a company official told HRC, but because no sponsor was present at the meeting to introduce the proposal, no formal vote was held. CBRL Group Inc. is based in Old Lebanon, Tenn.

Cracker Barrel drew national attention in 1991 when it instituted a company policy that called for terminating employees “whose sexual preferences fail to demonstrate normal heterosexual values which have been the foundation of families in our society.” At least 11 workers were fired as a result. The company’s blatant discrimination – which was legal in the states where it occurred and remains legal under federal law – touched off a wave of protests and boycotts at Cracker Barrel restaurants.

Liz Taylor Photo Book to Raise Funds for AmFAR

Madison, WI – According to a press release, a new collection of photos of Liz Taylor by Gianni Bozzacchi is being released by the University of Wisconsin Press and a percentage of the “net royalties” are being donated to AmFAR in recognition of its crucial work and Elizabeth Taylor’s dedicated service to AIDS research and prevention.

Bozzacchi became Taylor’s “personal photographer” in 1965, following his work on the set of *The Comedians*, which starred Taylor and Richard Burton. The 129 black and white photos in *Elizabeth Taylor: The Queen and I* are reportedly mostly previously unpublished. Barnes and Noble is also kicking in a donation to AmFAR when purchasers follow the link to its website from AmFAR’s website (<http://www.amfar.org>).

Gay Bank Robber & Murderer Executed in Oklahoma

McAlester, OK – Jay Wesley Neill, a 37-year-old gay man, died by lethal injection in Oklahoma on Thursday, December 12, despite a last-minute appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court to stay the execution.

Neill was one of two men who robbed a bank in Geronimo, Okla., in 1984. During the robbery, Neill and his partner Robert Johnson stabbed three bank employees to death, and also shot four customers, one of whom also died. Neill was 19 at the time, while Johnson was 21.

Amnesty International and other advocates pled for clemency on Neill’s behalf because of anti-gay bias during his trial and sentencing. Addressing the jury during the sentencing phase of Neill’s trial in 1992, the prosecutor said:

“I’d like to go through some things that to me depict the true person, what kind of person he is. He is a homosexual. The person you’re sitting in judgment on – disregard Jay Neill. You’re deciding life or death on a person that’s a vowed [sic] homosexual ... But these are areas you consider whenever you determine the type of person you’re sitting in judgment on. ... The individual’s homosexual.”

In a separate trial, the other man involved in the crime, Robert Johnson, was sentenced to life in prison.

Fed. Court Dismisses Religious Challenge to Gay Rights

Louisville, KY – A federal appeals court dismissed a lawsuit by a Kentucky doctor that sought to strike down a local ordinance making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The court found that the ordinance did not affect the religious practices of Dr. J. Barrett Hyman, a Baptist and local gynecologist, and therefore his lawsuit was baseless.

“This case was never about Dr. Hyman’s religious liberties. It was an attempt to tear down important civil rights protections,” said Leslie Cooper, the American Civil Liberties Union Lesbian and Gay Rights Project staff attorney who defended the ordinance on behalf of the Fairness Campaign, which had lobbied for the passage of the ordinance.

Hyman brought suit claiming that his religious rights were violated by the anti-discrimination ordinance because it made it illegal for him to bar gay and transgender people from working in his medical office. The Appeals Court found that he didn’t have the right to bring the lawsuit because the ordinance didn’t affect his religious practices.

“The kind of arguments that Hyman is advancing are as old as the civil rights movement itself,” said Diane Moten of Fairness Campaign.

“It’s shameful how our religious freedoms are being contorted to stand for bigotry and discrimination,” said Jeff Vessels of the Kentucky ACLU. “This result is a clear victory for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights.”

Transgender Appointed to DignityUSA Board

Washington – Michelle (“Chellie”) Griffin, an “out transsexual lesbian cradle Catholic” has been appointed to the DignityUSA Board of Directors. Board President Pat McCarron reported that Griffin “received a unanimous vote of confidence from the current members of the board.”

Griffin has two grown children, three grandchildren and is employed as a Management Information Systems Consultant. She has been active in her church and in DignityUSA for several years, joining Dignity in Dallas in 1998, and becoming a member of Regional and National Houses of Delegates from 1999 through 2001. Griffin has served as Chapter Liturgy Committee Chair person since 1999, Chapter Board member since 2001 and as Chapter vice president in 2002.

Dignity is a grassroots organization for gay, lesbian, and transgender Catholics.

Supreme Court to Rule on Texas Sodomy Case

Washington – The Human Rights Campaign praised a decision by the Supreme Court to hear a case that

could lead to sodomy laws being ruled discriminatory and unconstitutional.

“Sodomy laws are unfair, un-American and used to discriminate against gay and lesbian Americans in a number of ways,” said HRC General Counsel and Legal Director Kevin Layton.

The case the Supreme Court agreed to hear is *Lawrence v. Texas*. In 1998, Houston police broke into John Lawrence’s apartment shortly before midnight seeking an armed intruder. Instead, they saw Lawrence having sex with Tyron Garner and jailed both men on charges of violating a state law that bans sex between consenting adults of the same sex – but not of the opposite sex.

Lawrence and Garner pleaded no contest to the misdemeanor charge and were each fined \$200. The state courts upheld the conviction. Lambda Legal asked the Supreme Court in July to hear the case and declare a violation of privacy and equal protection.

“As a result of the convictions, neither man can hold jobs in dozens of professions in Texas and may have to register as sex offenders if they move to some other states,” said Liz Seaton, HRC’s senior counsel. “These laws are used to deny gay workers jobs, refuse lesbian mothers custody, oppose non-discrimination laws and block hate-crime legislation. Until these laws are overturned, a basic step on the path to freedom remains blocked.”

In 1986, the Supreme Court upheld sodomy laws 5-4 in *Bowers v. Hardwick*. Only three justices who participated in that ruling remain on the bench. In 1996, the current Supreme Court struck down an anti-gay amendment to Colorado’s Constitution on equal protection principles. Additionally, since *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the number of state sodomy laws has declined from 28 to 13, in large part because of the persistent court efforts of Lambda Legal and the American Civil Liberties Union, as well as state organizations fighting to overturn these laws.

No Philippine Visas for Same-Sex Spouses

The Philippines has ruled that it will not grant visas to same-sex spouses. According to a report on Gay.com, the country’s justice department has declared that a family visa cannot be granted to the same-sex spouse of a foreigner working in the country.

Justice secretary Hernando Perez said that the Philippine constitution and the family code do not recognize gay partnerships.

A ruling was requested by the department of foreign affairs on dealing with same-sex marriages of foreign diplomats and staff of international organizations running out of the Philippines. ▼