

the rest of our world

Phelps 6, Equality Virginia 400

Fredericksburg, VA – According to a report on 365Gay.com, it was no contest: six members of Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church protested a production of *The Laramie Project*, while more than 400 students at Mary Washington College demonstrated their support for equality and their rejection of hate and bigotry.

Among the signs held by the Phelps contingent were "Death Penalty for Fags" and "God Hates America." One protester stood on an American flag spread on the sidewalk.

Meanwhile, hundreds of students held candles lighting the way from the main campus gates to the theater.

Students from three other Virginia schools traveled to Fredericksburg for the counter-protest. A group from Longwood College wore white angel's wings.

A member of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays collected donations for Equality Virginia outside the theater. Some people pledged a dime to the organization for every minute the Westboro Baptist Church group protested.

Housing Denied in FL

Boca Raton, FL – Two men in Boca Raton seeking an apartment rental were denied the possibility of renting because they are gay, reports Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund. It's a common form of discrimination in Florida and around the country, Lambda Legal says, and the group has filed a lawsuit in Palm Beach County Court on behalf of the two.

An hour after Fred Sternbach was shown several apartments and liked one, the manager called him back to explain whether the "partner" he had indicated on an information card meant a wife or fiancée. When Sternbach said "neither," he was denied an apartment because the company rents only to couples who are married. Although Sternbach and his partner, Stephen Miller, have been together 16 years, there is no state where they can obtain a marriage license.

A Palm Beach County law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and marital status. Nationwide, 145 cities or counties have such laws.

"Even though it's illegal in many places, this is an indignity many lesbian and gay people face but don't report," said Greg Nevins, Lambda Legal's staff attorney. According to a nationwide survey commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2001, 34 percent of lesbian, gay or bisexual people have been turned away from renting or buying a home because of their sexual orientation or know someone who was denied housing based on their sexual orientation.

Judicial Nominees Opposed

Washington, DC – On March 6, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved the nomination of Timothy Tymkovich to the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, by a 10-6 vote, with three senators voting "present." The Human Rights Campaign reports that Tymkovich's record "raises concerns about his views on gay, lesbian,

bisexual and transgender people and the civil rights laws that protect them." Specifically, a law review article that he co-authored demonstrates that he believes and perpetuates some of the worst anti-gay rhetoric. The nomination is awaiting action by the full Senate.

HRC also has expressed opposition to two other nominees – Jeffrey Sutton and Jay Bybee. The committee approved Sutton, who was nominated to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, on Feb. 13, and Bybee, who was nominated to the 9th Circuit Court, on Feb. 27. Both nominees await action by the full Senate.

Taxing Equality

Washington DC – As of March 2003, 185 of the Fortune 500 and 166 state and local governments provide health insurance benefits to the domestic partners of their employees, reports the Human Rights Campaign's Political Equality Update. But under federal law, the employers who offer this benefit and the employees who take advantage of it are taxed inequitably.

Currently, employers' contributions toward health insurance for an employee's spouse are not taxed. However, the same contribution for the domestic partner's coverage is included in the employee's taxable income.

When domestic partner benefits are included in employees' incomes, employers pay higher payroll taxes.

In February, Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., introduced the Tax Equity for Health Plan Beneficiaries Act (H.R. 935) to fix this problem. This legislation, which as of March 1 had 15 co-sponsors, would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to include domestic partners on the same basis as married spouses.

Dutch Get Medical Marijuana

Washington, DC – The Marijuana Policy Project reported that under a groundbreaking new law effective in March, physicians in the Netherlands will be able to prescribe medical marijuana and pharmacies will dispense it to patients as they do other prescription medications, the first country to do so.

The Dutch government will require medical marijuana growers to meet specific product quality standards and security rules. Once this system is in place, pharmacies will dispense medical marijuana only from government-licensed providers. Until then, they will be permitted to obtain the medicine from producers of their own choosing.

The Canadian government established a medical marijuana program in July 2001, but only a limited number of patients have made it through the complex permission process. In addition, Canada has yet to provide these patients with a legal means of obtaining their medicine.

Robert Kampia, executive director of the Marijuana Policy Project in Washington, DC, declared, "While the Netherlands is guaranteeing patients safe access to quality-controlled medical marijuana, we're still fighting just to keep people with cancer and AIDS out of jail. The rest of the world increasingly regards the

U.S. policy of criminalizing medical marijuana patients and providers as cruel and pointless."

US Census Blamed & Praised

Amherst, MA – The U.S. Census 2000 count of same-sex couples missed at least a hundred thousand more, according to a study released by the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS).

Two surveys of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people show an undercount of 16 to 19 percent of same-sex couples, as documented in the think tank's report, *Left Out of the Count: Missing Same-sex Couples in Census 2000*.

The difference comes in whether couples used the "unmarried partners" option or listed themselves as "housemates/roommates" because of confidentiality concerns and a lack of fit of census options for their own family configurations.

"The people we surveyed were politically aware and were more likely to know about and use the 'unmarried partner' option," according to Marc Rogers, Ph.D., one of the authors of the report. "They're a best-case scenario, meaning the actual undercount is likely to be far higher."

At the same time, the Human Rights Campaign was applauding the US Census bureau for releasing its report on same-sex partners while acknowledging that the numbers are "artificially low."

"This is a landmark as it is the first time any government institution has worked to gather and publish information on this country's gay families," said HRC Communications Director and Senior Strategist David M. Smith.

Census data revealed that there are 594,391 reported same-sex households in the country – 301,026 are male partners, and 293,365 are female partners. Gay and lesbian families live in 99.3 percent of all counties in the United States.

The new report showed that a third of female partner households and a fifth of male partner households are raising children. Currently, eight states and the District of Columbia guarantee same-sex couples access to second-parent adoption.

Finally, the new report also gives insight into the number of interracial same-sex couples in the United States, with 11.5 percent of male same-sex households having multi-racial partners, and 10 percent of female same-sex households having multi-racial partners. Comparatively, 5.7 percent of married couples are multi-racial and 12.2 percent of opposite-sex partners are multi-racial.

Gay 'Brittanica'

Los Angeles – Scholars, academic researchers and experts in the arts and literature have created an encyclopedia of facts and information about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (glbtq) culture. The new glbtq encyclopedia went online last month at www.glbtq.com.

Written for anyone with an interest in glbtq culture and people, glbtq.com is a free encyclopedia containing more than one million words in 900-plus entries. The electronic compilation includes more than 200 historical photographs and illustrations.

"Much of the information that is available in the encyclopedia was almost impossible to find 25 years ago," said General Editor Claude J. Summers, Ph.D.

"The ethnic, racial, geographic, and cultural diversity of the entries is impressive," said Judith Scherer Herz, a professor at Concordia University in Montreal.

Tee A. Corinne, the famed lesbian photographer, is on the editorial board of the encyclopedia, along with a long list of academics.

'Savage Nation' Loses Sponsors

New York – All six national sponsors of MSNBC's "Savage Nation" debut have publicly withdrawn from the program, sending a clear message to NBC News that they refuse to support Michael Savage's attacks on women, people of color, immigrants and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, announced the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) announced that.

Since Savage's March 8 debut on MSNBC, GLAAD alerted each national advertiser that their ads appeared on Savage's show, and made them aware of Savage's homophobic, racist and sexist attacks. Procter & Gamble, Dell Computer Corporation, Casual Male, Idea Village, Cole Media Group and The Sharper Image all have instructed MSNBC that their ads are not to appear on future "Savage Nation" airings. Kraft Foods and General Mills also have stated that they will not support Savage's television show.

"These companies get it," said Joan M. Garry, GLAAD's executive director. "They get that Michael Savage's racism, sexism and homophobia do not reflect the attitudes and beliefs of fair-minded corporations and consumers."

Texas School Allows GSA

Houston – After months of delays and a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union, officials at Klein High School have agreed to allow students to form a Gay-Straight Alliance, according to a settlement agreement announced last month.

The ACLU lawsuit was filed on behalf of Klein student Marla Dukler. "It's too bad that we had to wait until the school year was two-thirds over before we finally get to have the club we asked for so long ago, but I'm really glad the school is finally doing the right thing," Dukler said.

"We hope to start working on changes to make our school safer immediately," Dukler said. "It needs it."

When students at Klein High School originally submitted their application to form a GSA last September, school officials changed the requirements for student clubs in an attempt to keep the club from forming. When the students resubmitted their application, months passed with no response.

In January, the ACLU filed a complaint on the students' behalf in the U.S. District Court charging violations of the First Amendment and the federal Equal Access Act, which requires schools to allow GSAs if the school permits other non-curricular clubs.

Ginni Clemmons Killed

Durham, NC – A notice from non-profit women's music distributor Ladyslipper Music reported the passing of musician Ginni Clemmons, who was killed in an automobile accident near her home in Maui on February 15, a few days before her 67th birthday.

Clemmons was one of the founding mothers of the Women's Music Movement. When Ladyslipper issued its first catalog after its founding in 1976, Clemmons' album *Long Time Friends* was one of its 13 titles.

Born Virginia Clemmons on February 28, 1936, in Evergreen Park, Illinois, Ginni first picked up the guitar when she was working with emotionally disturbed children. In addition to teaching voice, banjo and guitar at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, Ginni established her own recording label, Open Door Records. She produced seven albums and is perhaps best known for her cover of "Wild Women Don't Get the Blues." She was a proselytizer for participatory song and an advocate of emotional self-help through music. She is survived by a sister, Maxime. Friday, a brother, Tim Friday, and nieces and nephews, all of Illinois.

Clemmons circulated and believed in her Pledge of Allegiance for the 21st Century: "I pledge allegiance to the health of the United World of the Universe. And to the Earth on which we stand: One planet, Born of love, Indivisible, with Rights and Responsibilities for all."

AFL-CIO Calls for End to Transgender Bias

Washington, DC – The AFL-CIO Executive Council, representing over 13 million employees in the United States, spoke out last month against all forms of bigotry and hatred. This is the first time that the AFL-CIO leadership specifically included transgender people in a call for an end to bias.

"Employment, housing and other forms of discrimination, as well as acts of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity and gender expression, continue unabated," the statement reads.

Donna Cartwright, a member of the AFL-CIO Pride at Work National Executive Board said, "This is a wonderful day for transgender people, and a proud day for the labor movement. The AFL-CIO's action in recognizing that transgender and gender-different people need protection against discrimination and hate crimes is in the best traditions of labor solidarity and support for human rights."

Noting a post-9/11 increase in attacks on civil liberties, the AFL-CIO promised to challenge discrimination in housing, employment, education, healthcare access and other areas.

Vanessa Edwards Foster, Chairman of the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC), said, "The AFL-CIO has shown true vision in supporting all workers, not just certain segments of the workforce. We only hope government can follow their lead." ▼