

the rest of our world

"Sodomy" Erased From NY Law

Albany, NY – As the legislative session drew to a close, the Empire State Pride Agenda and victims' rights groups prevailed upon legislators to drop the terms "sodomy" and "deviate sexual intercourse" from state law, reports *Gay City News*.

A Pride Agenda release said, "For decades, New York has categorized sexual assaults into rape and sodomy. By definition, the crime of rape arises out of 'sexual intercourse' and the crime of sodomy arises out of 'deviate sexual intercourse,' defined by statute to include both oral and anal sex."

Matt Foreman, director of NGLTF and a former head of the Pride Agenda, said, "No longer will any New Yorker read in the papers that a victim has been 'sodomized' with all the misunderstanding and anti-gay baggage that term comes with."

Buenos Aires Okays Civil Unions

Buenos Aires – In July, a law passed by a 29-10 vote in Argentina's capital city to recognize civil unions for same-sex couples. Buenos Aires is the first city in Latin America to officially recognize such partnerships, reported the *Christian Science Monitor*.

Predictably, the legislation was strongly opposed by the Catholic Church.

The civil-unions law applies to "couples formed by two people regardless of their sex or sexual choice."

According to the report, "all couples must meet certain requirements that include living together for at least two years within the city limits. The law extends health and insurance benefits as well as hospital visitation rights to the couples, but does not allow them to adopt children or establish rights of inheritance."

The Joy of Sax

Washington, DC – Congressman Barney Frank (D-Massachusetts) in mid-July addressed a question to seven of his colleagues who circulated a Dear Colleague letter calling on those opposed to gay marriage to sign on as cosponsors of a Constitutional amendment to ban it, according to a press release from his office. The letter raised the specter of the pending (and likely gay-marriage favorable) Massachusetts Supreme

Judicial Court ruling being used to impose the ruling on other states using the full faith and credit clause of the U.S. Constitution by "supporters of same-sex unions."

"I was disappointed to see how vehemently my colleagues oppose same-sex unions," the openly gay Frank quipped. "I assume they will be patrolling nightclubs in their districts to prevent any such duet from undermining public morality. My question is whether they are willing to allow clarinet-saxophone liaisons. We, of course, already know that Senator Frist would be vehemently opposed to any union consisting of two trumpets and a trombone."

The email alert from Rep. Frank's office was accompanied by a scanned image of the letter.

'Lift the Ban' Campaign Features Transactivist

Washington, DC – Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) unveiled a national ad campaign as part of its ongoing effort to repeal the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The campaign, which features transgender activist Calpernia Addams, asks constituents to visit www.lifttheban.org and urge Congress to repeal the law which prohibits gay Americans from serving openly in the armed forces.

"In 1999, PFC Barry Winchell was brutally murdered by fellow soldiers who perceived him to be gay," the ad says, "because of his relationship with Calpernia Addams, a transgender woman he met while serving in the Army. The time has come to end discrimination in our armed forces."

To date, more than 5,000 individuals have signed the online petition.

Smear Campaign Against Gay Reporter

Washington, DC – Several news sources have reported that someone in the White House Press Office attempted to discredit ABC News reporter Jeffrey Kofman after he filed a report on the decline of troop morale in Iraq. The reporter, it was implied, should not be considered credible because he's Canadian, and not only that, he's gay.

The report first appeared on Matt Drudge's online media scandal site, according to syndicated gay columnist Mubarak Dahir. The White House has denied that it was the source for the information.

The National Gay and

Lesbian Journalists Association, of which Kofman is a member, characterized the smear campaign as "a form of dangerous intimidation and a potential professional libel."

Dahir, in a recent column, wrote that the smear campaign was "aimed at intimidating journalists of all kinds. The message is clear: File a story we don't like – a story that is 'unpatriotic' – and we'll go after you any way we can." In his column, titled "Shoot the Messenger," he also charged that calling attention to irrelevant facts about the reporter (such as his nationality and sexual orientation) was an attempt to distract Americans from serious questions about the Bush Administration's policies in Iraq.

NH Court to Decide on Gay Adultery

Concord, NH – The New Hampshire Supreme Court will decide whether a lesbian relationship constitutes adultery under a 1791 law, reports the *Valley News*. The justices heard arguments in a disputed divorce case, in which a Family Court judge declared that a gay relationship was adultery, and thus grounds for divorce.

David Blanchflower accused his wife Sian of having an adulterous affair with Robin Mayer. According to the report, "Both women have objected to the adultery charge on the grounds that New Hampshire law recognizes adultery only as a heterosexual act." Mayer appealed the Family Court's conclusion that adultery could include same-gender sexual relations.

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders filed a brief in the suit urging the Court to treat all extramarital relationships equally. Mayer argued that because gays and lesbians are not treated fairly under other New Hampshire laws, asking to be treated equally under the "adultery" provision of divorce law is a "disservice."

A ruling is not expected for several months.

Who Wants A Million for Marriage

Washington, DC – Not a million dollars, silly, a million signatures of American voters in favor of federal recognition of same-sex marriage. And the answer is the Human Rights Campaign, which launched a website, www.millionformarriage.org, to achieve that goal.

Visitors to the site will be able to sign a petition supporting the right of every American to marry; to

send e-mails asking friends and family to get involved in the campaign; and to receive a commitment to marriage document that symbolically recognizes their relationship until gay and lesbian relationships are lawfully recognized.

Bi Conference in San Diego

Miami, FL – LLEGO, the National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Organization, passed along a press release about the 2003 North American Conference on Bisexuality (www.bisexual.org/nacb).

"This Conference will be the largest gathering of people interested in Bisexuality in the world this year," said NACB Co-chair Richard Woulfe. The Conference, to be held at the Radisson San Diego Hotel August 21-24, 2003, will kick-off with three Pre-conference Institutes on Bi Health, Bi People of Color, and Bi Youth.

Gay Arkansas Student Wins

Jacksonville, AR – Thomas McLaughlin's suit against his school for outing him, making him read the Bible, and silencing him has borne fruit: the school district has settled and agreed to all conditions demanded by the American Civil Liberties Union.

"I'm really glad that this is all over and that the ACLU is making the school treat gay students the way they should have been treated in the first place," said the 14-year-old McLaughlin, adding, "No more students should have to go through what I did."

The Pulaski County Special School District officials' actions, the ACLU lawsuit charged, violated McLaughlin's rights to free speech, equal protection, and privacy as well as his religious liberty.

The school has agreed to expunge McLaughlin's disciplinary record, as well as enforce fair policies throughout the district, including not disclosing any student's sexual orientation; not punishing students for talking about their sexual orientation; not discriminating against students because of their sexual orientation; and not preaching to students or forcing them to read the Bible.

The district also issued a formal apology to McLaughlin and his parents and agreed to pay \$25,000 in damages and attorneys' fees.

Wal-Mart Gets On Board

Seattle – According to a report from *The New York Times*, Wal-Mart

Stores, the nation's largest private employer, has expanded its antidiscrimination policy to protect gay and lesbian employees.

The decision was first disclosed by the Pride Foundation, a Seattle gay rights foundation that had invested in Wal-Mart and then lobbied the company for two years to change its policy. Wal-Mart officials confirmed the policy change.

The *Times* article quoted the giant retailer's spokeswoman as saying, "It's the right thing to do for our employees. And it's the right thing to do for our business."

As outlined in the letter to the Pride Foundation, Wal-Mart's new policy states, "We affirm our commitment and pledge our support to equal opportunity employment for all qualified persons, regardless of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or status as a veteran or sexual orientation."

The letter indicates that the policy extends to recruitment, hiring, training, and promotion and other personnel actions.

Tying the Knot

Toronto – In mid-July, the Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church, married his partner Phillip Ray De Blicke. The two were married by Rev. Brent Hawkes, the pastor of Toronto's MCC just east of the city's gay village.

According to the report by 365Gay.com, Perry broke down in tears as Hawkes asked the two men whether they took the other to be their "lawfully wedded spouse." The couple exchanged wedding bands, embraced and kissed as Hawkes pronounced them married under the Ontario Marriage Act.

Since the Ontario Court of Appeal struck down the federal government ban on same-sex marriage, hundreds of Americans have traveled to Canada to marry.

Perry is encouraging more Americans to look north to tie the knot to create pressure on the US jurisdictions that currently ban same-sex marriage. "I don't care what the U.S. government says," Perry said at a press conference. "My partner Phillip and I are legally married under Canadian law. We've put our nation on notice: We're coming home and we are legally married." ▼