

the rest of our world

Money For Adoptions

Seattle — President Bush signed expanded adoption legislation early last month and was hailed by Families Like Ours, a nonprofit group focusing on gay and lesbian adoption and foster care issues. Executive Director David Wing-Kovarik commended Bush: "Overall, this reauthorization will help place more children in families, regardless of their structure, including those headed by gay or lesbian parents."

Currently, the federal government pays states \$4,000 per child that is adopted. Under the new legislation, states may receive an additional \$4,000 for each adoption. This will encourage more placements and may result in good news for gay and lesbian adoptive families.

Only three states — New York, New Jersey and California — have made it illegal for public agencies to reject adoptive parents based on sexual orientation. Currently there are more than 500,000 children in the foster care system nationally.

Judge Grants Gay Divorce

Sioux City, IA — In an Iowa District Court last month, Judge Jeffrey Neary granted a divorce to two women who had had a civil union in Vermont, becoming one of the first judges outside Vermont to dissolve a civil union. The Iowa women had agreed to the settlement and did not have children, according to a report in *The Boston Globe*.

Neary said he wasn't trying to expand rights for same-sex couples. "I'm not changing state law here," he said. "I'm not recognizing marriages. I'm recognizing that Vermont has recognized this [union]."

Other non-Vermont dissolutions have been less than successful. A Texas judge's grant of a civil union divorce was reversed. A case filed by a Connecticut man became moot when the man died.

Iowa is one of 36 states that have adopted the Defense of Marriage Act, which restricts marriage to the union of one man and one woman.

NTAC Sponsors Assessment Survey

Washington, DC — A perennial problem for the nation's transgender and gender-queer community has been the dearth of reliable statistical data about trans and gender-variant identified persons. In an effort to help change that, a study has been created

to address the community and the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition is seeking participants.

This study, conducted by a graduate student at Claremont Graduate University, is open to anyone residing in the United States, with a particular focus on collecting demographic and experiential information about gender-variant identified persons. The study is seeking 1500 responses from the transgender community. Participants must be at least 18 years old and self-identify as a part of the gender-variant community. The confidential survey can be accessed online at <http://www.transacademics.org/> (click on "research projects").

MSU Bans Gender Identity Harassment

East Lansing — Michigan State University became one of the first public institutions in Michigan to prohibit harassment of people based on the way they express their gender. Last month, the Board of Trustees unanimously approved a policy banning harassment based on gender identity, a classification that includes people who are transgender, transsexual or in the process of changing their gender.

The policy, however, does not prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. MSU prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability status and sexual orientation, among other reasons.

"We don't have any laws that protect us, and we need to have it in the words," said Melissa Sue Robinson, founder and president of the National Association for the Advancement of Transgender People. "It's not enough to just not harass us," she said.

Naval Academy Alumni Denies Gays

Santa Barbara, CA — The Board of Trustees of the US Naval Academy Alumni Association unanimously rejected a proposal last month to create a chapter for its LGBT graduates. As reported by the University of California's Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, USNA Out had filed a petition for official recognition on Veteran's Day.

According to the Naval Academy Alumni Association's statement, the board denied the request because "the Alumni Association has never before chartered a special-interest chapter and does not want to begin that practice." Rather, the state-

ment says, the Association will sanction chapters on the basis of geography.

Jeff Petrie, president of USNA Out, noted, however, that the Association has extended official recognition to at least one alumni chapter that is based on common interests, not geography: an official "Recreational Vehicle" chapter is not based on members' geographic location. According to Petrie, "It is difficult for many of us gay graduates to participate in the regular chapter meetings, because we are not welcome. We still take great pride in having graduated from the Naval Academy."

Black Coalition Supports Gay Marriage

Washington DC — An ad hoc group of African-American gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender leaders has come together as the National Black Justice Coalition. Early last month, the group launched a national campaign opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment, a proposal that would permanently deny same-sex couples the rights, benefits, responsibilities and protections of civil marriage.

NBJC leaders announced a major fundraising drive to generate black support for marriage equality. The goal of the \$100,000 campaign is to advertise in the black media, and to develop a website to counter right-wing misinformation about blacks and same-sex marriage. "The right-wing fired the first shots in this battle, but today we fire back," said Coalition member Donna Payne. She added, "Permanently denying the rights, protections and responsibilities of marriage to same-sex couples in this country does nothing to strengthen our families."

The coalition announced the support of Coretta Scott King, Congressman John Lewis, Ambassador Carol Moseley Braun, Rev. Al Sharpton, Whoopi Goldberg, and several other key African Americans who are in favor of same-sex marriage.

Homecoming Queens?

Big Piney, WY — When Amanda Blair and her female date arrived at their rural high school homecoming dance last September, they were met by police officers and escorted off the premises without explanation.

Blair is heterosexual but chose to attend the dance with a female friend as her date in order to support lesbian and gay students.

In response to the ACLU, the School District made assurances that students can bring same-sex dates. The ACLU cited a 1980 federal case which established that students who want to bring same-sex dates to school dances are not only protected under the free expression provisions of the First Amendment, but that schools must take steps to ensure their safety. In the 23 years since the case was decided, students throughout the U.S. have brought same-sex dates to school dances without incident.

Gay Is Not a Dirty Word

Lafayette, LA — Seven-year-old Marcus McLaurin was disciplined at school for telling a classmate that he had two mothers and explaining that gay meant "when a girl likes a girl." The ACLU has intervened.

As reported in *The New York Times* early last month, McLaurin was lined up for recess when a second-grade classmate asked him about his parents. Marcus responded that he had two mothers, not a mother and father. When the other child asked why, Marcus responded it was because his mother was gay. When the other child asked what that meant, Marcus explained, "Gay is when a girl likes another girl." Marcus's teacher scolded him, told him that "gay" is a bad word, and sent him to the principal's office. He was referred to the school's behavior clinic where he was ordered to write the sentence "I will never say the word 'gay' in school again" over and over.

The ACLU contacted the Ernest Gallet Elementary School in Youngsville, La., demanding that it remove all mention of the incident from Marcus's record, refrain from restricting his speech in the future, and apologize to the child and his mother. The School Board has voted to refuse any apology.

A book drive protest has been organized by the Family Pride Coalition. Family Pride is asking community members to purchase children's books that include and celebrate LGBT-headed families, and donate them to their children's school, or to the district in which they live, in support of the Marcus McLaurin family. Details of the drive are at www.familypride.org.

No Name-Calling Week

New York — The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network in conjunction with Simon & Schuster and

almost forty other partners, late this fall announced a new initiative called "No Name-Calling Week." During the week of March 1-5, 2004, schools serving grades five through eight across the nation will be asked to take part in educational activities aimed at stopping name-calling and verbal bullying of all kinds. Former NFL player and activist Esera Tuaolo is the official spokesperson.

The project was inspired by James Howe's novel *The Misfits*, in which four outcast students run for student council and come together to end name-calling in their school. Partners in this project include Amnesty International, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, and Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

Polygamist Claims Lawrence Rights

Salt Lake City — A Utah man with five wives argued early last month that his bigamy convictions should be thrown out following last summer's Supreme Court decision decriminalizing gay sex. The decision struck down the Texas sodomy law, ruling that what gay men and women do in the privacy of their homes is no business of government. It's no different for polygamists, argued Tom Green's attorney to the Utah Supreme Court and reported in the *Associated Press*.

"It doesn't bother anyone, (and with) no compelling state interest in what you do in your own home with consenting adults, you should be allowed to do so," Green's attorney said.

The state said the court should reject the appeal because Green failed to raise the issue during his trial two years ago or at any time since then. ▼