

crimination, persecution and violence, whatever their sexual orientation.

### Federal Budget Slights HIV/AIDS Funding

Washington DC – According to President Bush's fiscal year 2005 budget proposal, HIV/AIDS funding may be \$4 million less than it was two years ago, decreasing from \$700 million to \$696 million. The Human Rights Campaign and the Democratic National Committee expressed extreme concern last month when early details of the budget were released. The budget provides flat funding for nearly every care and treatment program within the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act.

Funding for the Ryan White CARE Act was increased from \$2.02 billion this year to \$2.05 billion next year. While most programs will see no increase, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program and research at the National Institutes of Health will receive additional funding. The president's proposal doubles the money available for abstinence-only-until-marriage education programs.

"A CDC report released last summer showed that the rate of HIV diagnoses for gay and bisexual men is rising steeply," said HRC President Cheryl Jacques. "This is no time to cut short our commitment to serious, science-based prevention programs while at the same time funding abstinence-only programs."

According to Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe, "Bush's refusal to fund science-based programs and community-oriented prevention efforts, while pouring millions into abstinence-only programs, shows just how far he is willing to go in order to appease his right-wing base."

### Catholic Charities Lose

Portland, Maine – A city ordinance requiring organizations that receive federal grants through the city to offer employees with same-sex partners identical benefits to those offered married workers has been ruled legal. Responding to the challenge by Catholic Charities of Maine, the U.S. District Court last month ruled that the local law is constitutional and does not amount to discrimination against religious groups.

The ruling upholds the city's right to make domestic partner benefits a condition of receiving housing and community development

grants. However, since the Catholic Charities' health plan is covered by a federal law that regulates employee health insurance and pension plans, the court ruled that these benefits cannot be modified by state or local government.

Catholic Charities will have to supply some domestic partner benefits to its employees to be eligible for city grants.

### You Animal!

Central Park Zoo, Manhattan – Roy and Silo are completely devoted to each other. Inseparable for six years, they exhibit "ecstatic behavior." That is, they entwine their necks, they vocalize to each other, they have sex. They turn away female companionship. These male chinstrap penguins are, to anthropomorphize a bit, gay. Or at least so said a *New York Times* article circulated on the Internet last month.

Roy and Silo were so desperate to incubate an egg that they put a rock in their nest and sat on it. When given a fertile egg to hatch, the two sat on the egg until a chick was born. For ten weeks, they raised Tango, keeping her warm and feeding her until she could go out into the world.

Two other penguin pairs at different zoos, one female, one male, have also exhibited pair bonding and parenting behavior, according to the report.

Gay groups insist that homosexual behavior is part of the natural order, and therefore the rights of homosexuals should be protected. Conservative religious groups condemn the same behavior, calling it "animalistic."

The *Times* quoted Paul L. Vasey, a Canadian professor of psychology and neuroscience who studies homosexual behavior in Japanese macaques. Although scientists have observed this behavior since the 1700s, Prof. Vasey believes there are few books on the topic because "people don't want to do the research because they don't want to have suspicions raised about their sexuality."

### Sash & MCC Clash

Chicago – In dueling press releases, the Rainbow Sash Movement, a group of LGBT Catholics, and the Metropolitan Community Church clashed over tactics for promoting marriage equality for same-sex couples. The Rainbow Sash accused MCC of anti-Catholic bigotry for supporting a demonstration at the

home of Chicago's Cardinal Francis George during last month's Freedom to Marry Week activities.

"We are deeply concerned, that to best of our knowledge, the local MCC coalition has not outreached to any Gay and Lesbian National/Local parish-based Catholic Organization prior to making a decision that affects the Catholic Gay and Lesbian Community of Chicago," wrote Rainbow Sash spokesman Joe Murray. "According to the MCC Chicago-based coalition George has positioned himself as Illinois' foremost opponent of LGBT rights."

Murray added, "By attempting to demonize Cardinal George the organizers could be perceived as playing the anti-Catholic card."

"As we have advised both the media and LGBT organizations, the press release by the Rainbow Sash Movement concerning MCC's participation in Chicago marriage events is erroneous, untrue, and misleading," according to the MCC's statement, "and is a significant disservice to the press and media, to LGBT causes and to ecumenical work in faith communities." The MCC denied involvement in the Chicago coalition sponsoring the demonstration. Rainbow Sash challenged that statement.

### Rights Disappeared

Washington, DC – The federal office with responsibility for protecting government workers from discrimination and retaliation appears to be backing away from its duty to enforce complaints of sexual orientation discrimination, and the leader of the nation's largest independent union of federal workers wants to know why.

In a letter to Scott Bloch, of the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, the president of the National Treasury Employees Union demanded to know if OSC is abdicating its statutory obligation to enforce the law and inform federal workers of their rights.

Her concerns arose, union president Colleen M. Kelley said, because "in recent days, all references on OSC's web site to its jurisdiction to accept complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation appear to have been removed." It appears that Bloch no longer intends to make federal employees and federal job applicants aware that discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited in the federal government.

Kelley described OSC's

recent actions as "in direct contradiction" to decades of established interpretation of the law, and she demanded that Bloch provide "a statement of your legal basis for taking this position."

As the largest independent union of federal employees, NTEU represents some 150,000 workers in 29 agencies and departments.

### Shame on Florida

Washington, DC & New York – In nearly simultaneous press releases, HRC, the ACLU, and the Family Pride Coalition condemned last month's ruling by the 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in *Lofton v. Kearney*. The court affirmed Florida's anti-gay adoption law, which absolutely prohibits gay and lesbian individuals from adopting.

The ACLU brought the lawsuit on behalf of four gay men who would like to adopt in Florida but are prevented from doing so by the law passed in 1977 in response to Anita Bryant's infamous anti-gay campaign.

"If single people can adopt in Florida, if gay people can be foster parents and legal guardians, and if there are thousands of children languishing in foster care, there can be no justification for Florida's ban on gay adoptions other than impermissible prejudice and hostility toward gay people," said Howard Simon, Executive Director of the ACLU of Florida.

"We are living in dangerous times," said Rosie O'Donnell, who is a member and supporter of the Family Pride Coalition. O'Donnell has been a spokesperson against the Florida ban, coming out in a 2002 *Primetime Live* interview to focus attention on the case.

Every mainstream child advocacy and mental health organization, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychiatric Association, is opposed to excluding gay people from adoption.

There are more than 3,400 children currently waiting for homes in Florida. Two other states, Mississippi and Utah, also have anti-gay adoption laws.

### Alternative Funding

Charlottesville, VA – Last month, DontGiveToUVA.com organizers Andrew Borchini and Andrew Bond contacted University of Virginia President John Casteen, setting a February 14 deadline for Casteen to

establish a plan for offering domestic partner benefits to UVA employees. When President Casteen failed to comply, the two men announced their website would begin accepting donations.

Borchini and Bond, 2003 graduates of UVA, created DontGiveToUVA.com to persuade the college to offer same-sex benefits by encouraging website visitors to donate to the DontGiveToUVA.com fund rather than to the University of Virginia. The money received by DontGiveToUVA.com will go to the University of Virginia employees who must pay for their partners' benefits themselves.

The webmasters "remain willing to shut the website down immediately if President Casteen takes tangible steps towards ending the second-class status of the University's gay employees."

### Gay Marriage Poll Annulled

Tupelo, MS – The American Family Association posted an online poll, late last year, asking its constituents their position on gay marriage. This conservative group, in its efforts to support a constitutional amendment defining marriage as strictly between a man and a woman, planned to forward the results to Congress. Given their constituency, it was expected the results would indicate that Americans oppose gay marriage.

Before the poll's url was leaked in December, the anti-gay-marriage position was leading, with 51 percent of respondents opposing gay marriage or civil unions. By mid-January, 60 percent of respondents, more than 508,000 voters, said, "I favor legalization of homosexual marriage." The AFA's chosen position was being defeated by a 2-1 ratio.

"We're very concerned that the traditional state of marriage is under threat in our country by homosexual activists," said AFA representative Buddy Smith. He says his organization has abandoned its goal of taking the poll to Capitol Hill. ▼

Compiled by Assistant Editor Susan McMillan.