

the rest of our world

Who Reigns in Spain?

Madrid – Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero last month defended a new law allowing gay couples to marry, in a veiled counter-attack on the Roman Catholic Church, which has thrown its weight against it, according to Reuters.

“I will never understand those who proclaim love as the foundation of life, while denying so radically protection, understanding and affection to our neighbors, our friends, our relatives, our colleagues,” Zapatero told parliament in his state of the nation address.

The law, passed in April, allows same-sex couples to wed in civil ceremonies and gives them the same inheritance and adoption rights as heterosexuals.

The Church, traditionally powerful in Spain, says gay marriage harms society by threatening the very notion of family. Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, head of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family, also said adoption of children by same sex couples was “moral violence” against children.

Smelly Science

Stockholm – A potential pheromone found in male perspiration activates the brains of homosexual men and heterosexual women in a similar manner, according to the Associated Press and medicalnewstoday.com. In the study, published last month in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, researchers found that brain activity induced by a testosterone derivative and an estrogen derivative corresponded with sexual orientation, rather than with biological gender.

The researchers observed that the testosterone derivative activated the hypothalamus in homosexual men and heterosexual women, but not heterosexual men.

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese responded “How we treat people should be based on principles of basic fairness, not scientific evidence. This study adds to a growing body of evidence showing a biological connection around sexual orientation. Science is closing the door on right-wing distortions.”

Cornhusker Hope

Lincoln, Neb. – A federal judge struck down Nebraska’s ban on same-sex marriage last month, saying the measure interfered not only with the rights of gay couples but also with those of foster parents, adopted children and people in a variety of other living arrangements,

according to the Associated Press.

The amendment to the state’s constitution had been passed overwhelmingly by the voters in November 2000.

The Nebraska ruling is the first in which a federal court has struck down a state ban on same-sex marriage, and conservatives in the United States Senate pointed to it as evidence of the need for a federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex

Joseph F. Bataillon of Federal District Court, said the ban “imposes significant burdens on both the expressive and intimate associational rights” of gay men and lesbians “and creates a significant barrier to the plaintiffs’ right to petition or to participate in the political process.”

In an unrelated Cornhusker success, candidate Barbara Baier was elected last month to the Lincoln Board of Education with 56 percent of the vote, as reported in the *Lincoln Journal Star*. According to the Victory Fund, Baier was the first openly gay person to win an elected office in Nebraska.

Homophobic Note Makes PFLAG \$\$

Cyberspace – A rain-smudged piece of hate propaganda was to be sold on Ebay.com last month to raise money for PFLAG. The description of the item to be sold stated “On Friday, April 22nd some idiot Republican FRreeper stood out in the rain and responded one-by-one to each bumpersticker on my car. The soggy remnants of his semi-literate rantings have been salvaged and saved to document the bigotry and hatefulness of the Christo-Fascist-Zombie-Brigade.”

At press time, the item had 21 bids with the winning bid at \$76.

Microsoft Flips, Again

Seattle – For the second time in the past eight months, Microsoft has switched its stance on the gay rights issue. In an email to employees last month, CEO Steve Ballmer said the company would publicly support initiatives to protect the rights of homosexuals in the workplace, according to a *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* report.

“After looking at the question from all sides, I’ve concluded that diversity in the workplace is such an important issue for our business that it should be included in our legislative agenda,” Ballmer wrote. The reversal comes 15 days too late to affect the outcome of a vote on an

anti-discrimination bill: it was defeated in the state Senate by one vote. Microsoft, which had previously written a letter of support for similar legislation, earlier this year took a position of neutrality on House Bill 1515.

Gay groups, *The Stranger* weekly and Microsoft employees claimed that the company bowed to pressure from the Rev. Ken Hutcherson, a Redmond pastor who threatened a national boycott of the software company if it supported the anti-discrimination measure.

Health Care Taxing

Washington, DC – According to a *Washington Post* report last month, employees who take advantage of health care coverage for their partners whether in same-sex or heterosexual unmarried unions are stuck with tax bills for the benefits.

Under federal law, any portion of an employer-paid insurance premium that goes for coverage for a domestic partner is treated as taxable income to the employee. The employee also may not make any payments for partner coverage with pretax dollars.

Employer-paid health insurance is tax-free only for employees, spouses and dependents. And the Defense of Marriage Act, passed by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996, defines marriage for the purposes of federal law as “a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife.”

No Borders for Kiwi Lovers

Sunnyvale, CA – Love Sees No Borders, a group organized to lobby for immigration rights for same-sex partners, hailed New Zealand for normalizing immigration procedures for same-sex couples early last month. The new law removes the two-year waiting period for same-sex couples, making rules for all couples equal. “New Zealand is leading the way in treating all couples with the dignity they deserve and not subjecting some to an unequal system,” said Marta Donayre, Love Sees No Borders co-founder.

Currently 16 countries allow citizens to sponsor a same-sex foreign partner for immigration: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

In addition, the U.S. bans immigration of HIV-positive individuals, creating an additional hur-

dle to some couples. Under New Zealand’s new law, HIV status is not included as a determining factor in the immigration process.

WorldPride Rescheduled, Not Postponed

Jerusalem – WorldPride, originally to be held in late August 2005, has been rescheduled to August 6-12, due to the Israeli government’s decision to evacuate all Israeli settlers, security forces, and other offices from the Gaza Strip sometime this summer. Conflicting reports about postponement continue to arrive.

According to the website of Jerusalem Open House for Pride and Tolerance, having WorldPride coincide with the pullout “would be highly inappropriate and would do a disservice to the values WorldPride is about: tolerance, pluralism, and equality.”

The *Bay Area Reporter* reported last month that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution endorsing WorldPride, despite pressure from some groups to decline because of injustices to Palestinians.

VA HIV Patients Get Transplants

Washington, DC – Lambda Legal in late April reported a new policy in the Department of Veterans Affairs that directs VA hospitals nationwide not to categorically refuse organ transplants to HIV positive patients.

According to the new policy, veterans who have HIV and need an organ transplant will be “evaluated locally by a medical professional experienced in HIV care; and Veterans who are HIV-infected undergo the same pre-transplant examinations for solid organ and bone marrow transplantation as non-HIV infected transplant candidates.”

A 2002 New England Journal of Medicine article that found “no evidence of poorer survival among otherwise healthy HIV-positive patients who are receiving anti-retroviral therapy.”

Repeal Military Sodomy Ban

Washington, DC – The Human Rights Campaign last month lauded the Pentagon for its proposal to decriminalize consensual sodomy in the military, as reported by the *The New York Times*. Both opposite-sex and same-sex couples are prohibited from engaging in “unnatural carnal copulation with another person” under Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

“Repeal of Article 125 would remove a significant obstacle in the fight to end the military’s gay

ban,” said Servicemembers Legal Defense Network Director of Law & Policy Sharra E. Greer.

Transfolk Attacked in Nepal

Geneva – Police in Kathmandu attacked a group of transgender people, underscoring the vulnerability of all Nepalese to police abuse since King Gyanendra seized power in February and suspended most civil liberties, Human Rights Watch reported.

On April 13, the Nepalese New Year’s Eve, police attacked 18 metis (a traditional term for biological males who dress and identify as women) who were walking toward a festival in Kathmandu. Nine were severely beaten with batons, gun butts, and sticks.

“This attack is only the latest of a string of police assaults in Nepal against transgender people,” said Scott Long, director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Program at Human Rights Watch. “In a country where political and civil rights have been suspended, the violence sends a message that no one who looks or acts differently can feel safe.”

Focus on Focus

Colorado Springs – The *Rocky Mountain News* reported early last month on the protest held at the Focus on the Family headquarters where the focus was on families of a different kind. The protesters, numbering close to 1,000, included same-sex couples, parents, and heterosexuals supportive of their gay children or siblings.

The crowd gathered on the sidewalk in front of the evangelical ministry’s headquarters, holding hands and praying.

At a press conference, Focus on the Family representatives emphasized that they do not promote hatred or intolerance toward gays and lesbians but they cannot support a “lifestyle that isn’t affirmed in the Scriptures.”

Jeanine Hill, of Denver, attended the protest on behalf of her gay son, Troy. “For three years, my son was like a dirty little secret I didn’t want anyone to know about,” Hill said. “And then I realized what a horrible thing that was. As a mother, I would give up God before I gave my child up. I would reconcile with God later.” ▼

Compiled by Susan McMillan.