



North American Notes

Bomb Targets Lesbian Bar in Atlanta

On the night of February 22, a pipe bomb exploded and sent nails and other metallic debris shooting through the crowd at the Otherside lounge, an Atlanta lesbian bar, injuring five people. No deaths were reported. A second bomb was discovered outside the establishment and detonated by police.

Specialists believe that the first bomb was intended to move people into the vicinity of the second bomb, which could have produced far deadlier results. The same strategy was used in the January bombing of the Northside Family Planning Services, an Atlanta abortion clinic.

Atlanta police said this bombing, the fourth to strike the city in seven months, has other similarities to the abortion clinic bombing, and that both may also be linked to the deadly explosion at the Olympic Games last summer.

Holocaust Survivors Sought

As Swiss banks prepare to disperse nearly \$70 million in funds confiscated by the Nazis during World War II, the International Gay and Lesbian Association (IGLA) has stepped forward to ensure that our own communities' Holocaust victims won't be forgotten.

Historians estimate that between 10,000 and one million homosexuals met their deaths in German concentration camps. Even after the camps were liberated, gays and lesbians were often left imprisoned, as Ally forces considered them to be actual criminals.

Survivors of the Holocaust and its victims are encouraged to contact IGLA via e-mail at mryser@ilga.org to find out more about the Swiss bank restitution process.

Ellen and "Ellen" Come Out

After months of hype and speculation, Ellen DeGeneres will finally tell it like it is on April 30 when both she and the lead character of her popular TV sitcom (also named Ellen) reveal their true sexual orientation.

The much anticipated episode completed taping in March and is set to feature Laura Dern as Ellen's romantic interest. Also appearing on the landmark program will be Oprah Winfrey as a therapist and singer k.d. lang as a waitress at a lesbian coffeehouse. Melissa Etheridge will also appear in the episode's opening credits.

DeGeneres will also appear as herself on an upcoming installment of "Prime Time Live" with Diane Sawyer. Though she has cleverly dodged saying the "I" word during previous interviews, inside media sources expect her appearance to be one of her most honest to date.

ACLU Supports STRAIGHT Students

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is no stranger to controversy as it fights to uphold basic civil rights for all Americans. While the group has often proved an influential ally to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, it sometimes finds itself on the other side of the argument.

Recently, the ACLU has taken a stand in support of Students Reinforcing Adherence In General Heterosexual Tradition (STRAIGHT) at Pennsylvania State University. The student government at Penn State recently voted against sanctioning the new group.

"You have to be able to tolerate speech of people you disagree with," said Larry Frankel, Executive Director of the regional ACLU. STRAIGHT's founder, 27-year-old Darin Locarini, plans to appeal the student government's decision.

Elsewhere, another ACLU official threatened to out members of his state's legislature if they voted in favor of a ban on same-sex marriage. In this case, however, the national ACLU instructed the Director, Keith Elston, to keep his free speech to himself and apologize to the lawmakers for his threat.

DOMA: From Defense to Denial

When DOMA was signed into law last year, many gay and lesbian people didn't realize how far-reaching the effects of such legislation could be. One gay man, openly gay Representative Steve Gunderson (R) had an idea, however, and he asked the Government Accounting Office (GAO) to investigate.

In its preliminary report, the GAO listed 1,049 federal statutes affected by marital status. Since DOMA effectively denies federal recognition to same-sex couples, these benefits and provisions remain out of reach. The extent of the GAO's findings was such a surprise that the office has decided against expending further time and resources on the project.

House Republican Co-Sponsors ENDA

Vermont's Republican Senator James Jeffords earned the respect of many gay and lesbian people in his home state when he agreed to be a principal sponsor of the Employee Non-Discrimination Act (or ENDA) with Massachusetts Democrat Ted Kennedy. Now another Republican has stepped to the forefront, this time in the House of Representatives. Connecticut legislator Christopher Shays has agreed to co-sponsor ENDA with openly gay Rep. Barney Frank, a Democrat from Massachusetts. Shays is the first Republican to assume such a leading role on ENDA in the House.

Despite his show of support, Shays remains pessimistic about the fate of the bill in the Republican-controlled House. Last September, ENDA came within one vote of being passed in the Senate. The bill will most likely be re-introduced sometime this month.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is gathering stories from those who have experienced workplace discrimination. These will be used in open hearings on ENDA. Anyone wishing to include their own experiences is encouraged to call HRC at (202) 628-4160, extension 4000.

Still Looking for a Few Good Men

As stories of homophobic witch hunts, sexual assaults, and harassment cases continue to dominate the press around the U.S. Armed Forces, recruiting offices are reportedly having trouble meeting their goals for new servicemembers. In response, the Army has lowered its educational requirements and nearly quadrupled its advertising budget for the coming year.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) reported that in 1996 alone, the Department of Defense discharged 850 people under the current policies — a five-year high. The group also documented 443 specific violations of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rules. Women were disproportionately targeted in the military's witch hunts.

In addition to criticism and lawsuits from the gay and lesbian communities, the Army has also come under the attack of women's groups and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Both constituencies have expressed concern about the Army's recent handling of rape and sexual assault cases on military bases, citing the disproportionate number of African-American servicemembers under investigation and the coercive treatment of women throughout the judiciary proceedings.

Those wishing to protest of the Army's treatment of its servicemembers are encouraged to write to The Honorable William Cohen, Secretary of Defense, 1000 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1000.

Changes at the Black Leadership Forum

The National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum has changed its name — to the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum. In so doing, the national advocacy group — the only one in the country working specifically on African-American g/l/b/t projects — marks a number of changes within the organization.

The group has launched an initiative to establish member organizations in each of the fifty states. Resources and financial support will be made available to local groups from the main office in Washington DC. In addition, the NBLGLF has lowered its individual membership fee from \$35 to \$10 a year.

For more information about the NBLGLF, call (202) 483-6786.

Presbyterian Prohibitions

Despite taking a supportive stance on the matter of same-sex marriages, the nation's Presbyterian churches recently passed an amendment that would keep non-celibate gays and lesbians from being ordained. The Church needed a simple majority of votes from its local presbyteries in order to pass the amendment.

In language reminiscent of the recently passed "Defense of Marriage Act," the new rule restricts church leadership positions to those who live "either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage of a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness." ▼

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