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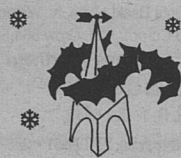
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Sex harassment

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Supreme Court has been asked to decide whether a law against sex harassment applies even when both the harasser and victim are the same sex.

The court has heard arguments in the case in which a Louisiana oil rig worker claims he was sexually pursued and harassed by his male supervisor.

A lower court ruled that a federal law banning on-the-job discrimination never applies to same-sex harassment, but Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist said at one point, "I don't see how we could possibly sustain the ruling."

Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, David H. Souter, John Paul Stevens, Antonin Scalia and Stephen G. Breyer also voiced grave doubts about upholding the court, which said the federal known as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 cannot apply in same-sex complaints.

"A Jew could discriminate against a Jew," Breyer said. "An African-American against an African-American, an Italian against an Italian. Why isn't it possible that a homosexual ... could discriminate?" he asked.

The highest court's decision could have enormous importance for American business. Gay rights groups are watching closely, too, though there is nothing in the court papers to indicate that the worker, his supervisor or two other alleged assailants is homosexual.

If the court should rule that same-sex harassment never violates Title VII, victims of homosexual harassment would be left without a federal remedy.

Gay councilman

WASHINGTON - An openly gay man has been elected to the District of Columbia city council.

Republican David Catania, 29, defeated a well-known Democratic incumbent for an at-large seat in a special election.

Catania, an attorney with a local law firm, is the first openly gay and the second Republican member of the council. He joins Carol Schwartz, a popular liberal GOP member.

Catania said his election was a message to politicians who have "squandered home rule."

"I think voters are attracted to ideas and determination and integrity," he said. "It doesn't matter what the label is. Local issues are not partisan issues. My age never became an issue. My sexual orientation never became an issue."

Catania will serve out the final year of the term and must run for a full four-year term next year.

Gay recruiters

NEW YORK - A New York City councilman is joining a crusade to clean up Times Square.

Some merchants in the newly spiffed up heart of Gotham want a chrome-and-glass kiosk military recruiting office on a traffic island to be moved to improve the look of the neighborhood.

Councilman Tom Duane has decided to side with the business group because of the military's stance on gays and lesbians, who can be booted for their sexuality.

Duane says New York in effect sanctions that policy by allowing the military recruitment center to remain on city land. And, as head of a subcommittee on land use, he has some authority over the issue.

"This is another step in finding out how the military is allowed to be there for free while it continues its policies of discrimination," Duane said.

Gay Newfoundlanders

ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland - Another Canadian province has embraced gays and lesbians.

The legislature in Newfoundland voted to include sexual orientation in its human rights code. That means that provincial law prohibits discrimination against gays in employment, housing, lodging and access to services.

Some pension plans are excluded from the amendment in accordance with the federal Income Tax Act, which defines a spouse as someone of the opposite sex.

The Newfoundland decision leaves Alberta and Prince Edward Island as the only Canadian provinces that do not protect gays and lesbians against discrimination.

Teaching tolerance

CHESTERTON, Indiana - A Midwestern school board gave its community a lesson in tolerance.

The Duneland School Corp. school board voted 4-1 to uphold a committee recommendation that a poster promoting tolerance for gays and lesbians remain in an English teacher's classroom at Chesterton High School. The board decided the poster met curriculum standards.

"If this poster gets one kid to think, if it gets one child to not categorize or stereotype people, if it gets one kid to not use that derogatory word that we all know, then I think its educational value is inarguable," said Michael Griffin, a school board member.

The black and white poster has photographs of 10 famous historical figures, including Cole Porter, Walt Whitman, Michaelangelo and Eleanor Roosevelt, with a caption that reads: "Sexual orientation has nothing to do with the ability to make a mark, let alone make history."

Ellen, again

BEVERLY HILLS, CA - Ellen DeGeneres continues to be a poster girl for the lesbian and gay community.

The latest honor comes from the American Civil Liberties Union of

Southern California, which gave her its Bill of Rights Award for advancing "the cause of gay rights 100-fold" when she came out of the closet on the "Ellen" television show and in real life.

"From the beginning, I said that I didn't want to become a spokesman for gay rights. But here I am," she said.

"There's still a lot more to do," she said. "There's a warning label on my show sending a message that there is something wrong with me."

Concert bagged

MYRTLE BEACH, SC - A concert by The Village People won't be happening on the beach this spring because of homophobia.

The owners of a restaurant and entertainment complex near Myrtle Beach pulled out of negotiations for a May concert by the venerable disco group because, they said, they did not want to be linked to a gay rights festival promoting the concert. Festival organizers have threatened to organize a boycott of Burroughs & Chapin, owners of the complex.

Gay rights organizations denounced the developer's actions. "They're not just homophobic, they're aggressively homophobic," said Cathy Renna of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation in Washington.

Greek affair

ATHENS, Greece - Those Greeks have always been enlightened.

The latest proof is the public rallying to the defense of a deputy district attorney who was fired by Greece's highest court for having an extramarital affair with a transsexual who also is a former transvestite prostitute.

The court questioned Giorgios Sakellaropoulos' "social character," but many Greeks have rallied to his defense.

Supporters claim he was sacrificed for crossing an ill-defined moral line. They wonder, for example, if there would have been any problems if his mistress was born a woman, or if he was gay and sleeping with another man.

"We are a sexist and racist society," raged columnist and television producer Nikos Mastorakis in an open letter to Sakellaropoulos, published in the Athens daily Vradini on Monday. "The system destroyed you because you fell in love with a woman who wasn't always a woman."

Sakellaropoulos, 44, whose wife is currently expecting their second child, has threatened to take the issue to the European Court of Human Rights. "I'm guilty, but I disagree with my punishment," he said. "My personal life concerns only me and nobody else."