

the rest of our world.....

■ Court-Gay rights

WASHINGTON - The US Supreme Court appears to be contradicting itself on gay rights.

The court refused to hear a case on a Cincinnati city charter amendment that denies discrimination protection to gays and lesbians. That means the amendment can stand.

Two years ago, the court came down strongly in favor of gay rights by striking down as unconstitutional a notorious constitutional proposal in Colorado that would have prohibited local communities from enacting gay rights ordinances. The court turned aside a gay-rights group's argument that the voter-approved 1993 amendment violated gays' and lesbians' equal-protection rights just as the Colorado amendment did.

But three justices took the unusual step of writing that the refusal to hear the case was more a reflection of an unresolved debate about the true effect of the amendment is and not a signal of the court's view of the issue.

There has been great debate about whether the Cincinnati amendment can be practically applied. If it can, some lawyers say, then there might be a case for the Supreme Court.

Justice John Paul Stevens wrote a brief opinion playing down the court's denial of review. His opinion was joined by Justices David H. Souter and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

■ Gay Christ

NEW YORK - If Terrence McNally wanted a little attention, he sure got it.

McNally's new play, "Corpus Christi," opened off-Broadway to a protest led by members of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

Protesters believe the play depicts a gay Christlike figure who has sex with his apostles.

A brochure released earlier this year described the play this way: "From modern day Corpus Christi, Texas, to ancient

Jerusalem, we follow a young gay man named Joshua on his spiritual journey, and get to know the 12 disciples who choose to follow him."

In May, the Manhattan Theater Club canceled plans to produce the off-Broadway play after receiving anonymous death threats against its actors, audience and McNally, a multiple Tony Award-winner.

Days later, theater executives reversed their decision, saying police promised to ensure safety if the play was staged.

■ Lesbian custody

NEWARK, N.J. - A lesbian in New Jersey has been denied joint custody and visitation rights to the 4-year-old twins of her ex-partner. Superior Court Judge Philip B. Cummis likened legal status of the woman to that of a step-parent. He said state law does not give third parties an automatic right to visitation or custody of a partner's biological children. A ruling for the woman, identified in court papers only as V.C., would have been one of the first in the country to give custodial rights to the former partners of lesbian mothers.

"This is an enormous disappointment, to say the least," said Gina Reiss, executive director of the New Jersey Lesbian and Gay Coalition. Courts in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Utah have held that nonbiological partners have the right to sue for custody or visitation after a relationship ends. Earlier this year, a trial judge in New Mexico awarded a nonbiological partner full custody of the children of her ex.

■ Don't ask

NEW YORK - There's been another appeals court ruling in favor of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

And this time, the ruling came in the court that has jurisdiction over Vermont cases.

The 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a judge who ruled in 1997 that the policy

discriminates against gays. The Vermont Supreme Court later refused to take up the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in a separate case.

The 2nd Circuit ruling comes on a 1994 lawsuit filed by six gay members of the military. All six now risk dismissal because they "came forward and said, 'I'm gay and I don't think the policy treats us fairly,'" said one of their lawyers, Beatrice Dohrn.

■ French couples

PARIS - An effort to give homosexual and unmarried straight couples new legal status in France got tripped up by conservative lawmakers.

But the ruling party of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin says the issue will resurface.

Jospin's party pledged to make some changes and return the measure to parliament in two weeks. The unexpectedly quick end to the bill was an embarrassment for Jospin, who expressed confidence earlier that it would pass. But in parliament, the opposition voted to dismiss the measure and there were too few leftist deputies to counter the move.

Act Up-Paris, a pro-gay group, scorned the governing left, saying deputies were "deliberately absent" to avoid voting. The measure would allow any two unrelated people to conclude a union that would, among other things, allow them to file joint tax returns, gain inheritance benefits, and take part in the other's social security coverage.

■ Methodists—Gay marriage

RALEIGH, N.C. - Vermonters are among United Methodist Church clergy and lay people who want their church's bishops to reverse a ban on same-sex marriages.

A letter signed by 363 people was sent to the bishops. "Our church is adrift, buffeted by forces that seek to steer our course away from the prophetic, just and compassionate

course of Christ," said the letter, signed by people in 37 states and Washington, D.C. In August, the 9.5 million-member United Methodist Church elevated a guideline against same-sex marriages into church canon and said ministers performing the ceremonies could be defrocked. The action came after a church jury acquitted a minister of violating church law by performing a same-sex union.

■ Gay ambassador

WASHINGTON - The US Senate has completed its business for the year without acting on President Clinton's nomination of James Hormel as ambassador to Luxembourg.

The San Francisco philanthropist's nomination became embroiled in the conservative politics of the Senate because he is openly gay.

Conservatives refused to allow his nomination to be taken up by the full Senate, even though he won the recommendation of the Foreign Relations Committee and supporters he had the votes to be confirmed if conservative senators' delaying tactics could be overcome.

The Clinton administration was weighing whether to renominate Hormel or seek another post in the administration for him.

■ New York Senate

ALBANY, N.Y. - The Human Rights Campaign has come under a lot of criticism for its endorsement in the New York Senate race.

The campaign endorsed incumbent Republican Sen. Alfonse D'Amato's re-election.

The group, the largest gay political organization in the country, chose D'Amato over Democratic Rep. Charles Schumer, who is running an aggressive campaign to unseat D'Amato.

Many activists lobbied the Human Rights Campaign not to endorse D'Amato, arguing that even if he had been helpful to

the gay community on some issues, his re-election would continue the domination of conservative Republicans in the Senate.

■ Cops-medicine

NEW YORK - Activists who were arrested during demonstrations were denied their AIDS medications by police.

AIDS activists and physicians were sharply critical of the police because the medications can lose their effectiveness if patients miss even a single dose.

"I am very angry that a peaceful candlelight vigil could end with my life being threatened," said John Irizarry, 27, who spent 19 hours in custody following the march Monday down Fifth Avenue. At least five of the roughly 100 people arrested were denied access to HIV or AIDS medication, according to the New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project.

According to New York Police Department policy, when someone is taken into custody and has prescription medicine on them, that medicine is vouchered, said Sergeant Nick Vreeland, a police spokesman. Over the counter medication is taken away. Police do not dispense any kind of medication. If someone needs to take a prescription, they are given the option of being taken to a hospital where they are evaluated, he said.

The arrests occurred during a rally in response to the slaying of Matthew Shepard, the gay University of Wyoming student who was beaten and lashed to a fence. Patients like Irizarry should never miss a dose of medication because that can allow the virus to weaken their immune systems, said Dr. Paul Curtis Bellman, an HIV specialist. "He has survived this long by being so diligent in taking all of his medications. The missed doses cannot be replaced," Bellman said.

Peaceful Vigil Turns Violent in New York

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marchers complained about baton use.

The march was diverted from Fifth Avenue onto side streets and Sixth Avenue several times. Marchers broke through barricades to return to Fifth Avenue and march past St. Patrick's Cathedral, in defiance of anti-gay Roman Catholic leader John Cardinal O'Connor. At 43rd Street, the parade was finally divided into two sections moving along

both Fifth and Sixth avenues.

In spite of the obstructions and diversions, the march eventually reached 23rd Street. There, at Madison Square Park, the demonstrators held a vigil in Shepard's honor. Though most of the organizers had been arrested, impromptu speakers paid tribute to the slain student. Protesters also spoke out against New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani and reiterated

the need to combat anti-gay attacks, which have more than doubled in New York since 1997 despite a drop in the overall crime rate.

Police arrested more than 120 people during the event, including activist and author Leslie Feinberg. Sylvia Rivera, a drag queen who fought police during the 1969 Stonewall Riots, was also among those detained overnight. ▼

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