

## the rest of



## our world

= news =

**Rights and votes**

WASHINGTON — All across America this year, voters are being asked to decide the rights of gays and lesbians.

Referendums are proposed on same-sex marriage, on teaching public school students about homosexuality, and on whether gays should receive the same civil rights protections as racial and religious minorities. Many votes were requested by groups who oppose what they call “special rights” for gays and lesbians.

“To our knowledge, there have never been this many (gay-rights issues) on the ballot,” says David Elliott, spokesman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. “It’s a backlash against the progress we’ve made toward equality.”

In Traverse City, Mich., for example, city commissioners adopted a bitterly contested resolution opposing discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Opponents began circulating petitions to force a vote in November on a proposed city charter amendment that would nullify the toothless resolution and prohibit commissions from approving gay-rights measures of any kind.

The Christian Coalition is seeking a referendum on repealing a gay-rights ordinance in Dade County, Fla. Oregon activists are collecting signatures in support of banning homosexual instruction in public schools. And critics of an anti-discrimination measure adopted this year in Davenport, Iowa, have begun a drive to overturn it.

**Presbyterian unions**

NEW YORK — Local Presbyterian churches have the authority to conduct religious ceremonies celebrating gay unions that stop short of marriage.

The decision by a 16-member court is binding unless the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) overrides it.

The case, one of three on gay issues argued before the tribunal in June stemmed from a ceremony performed in Dobbs Ferry, NY. The Northeast regional church court ruled that ceremonies of “holy union” for same-sex couples may be conducted if it is made clear they are not marriages.

The high court agreed,

though it instructed regional church bodies to make a clearer distinction between marriages and “blessing services.”

A second case before the high court involved a homosexual candidate for ministry who said he did not intend to remain celibate, even though church rules require clergy to observe either “fidelity in marriage” or “chastity in singleness.”

In that case, the Northeast regional court decided he could continue as a candidate, and that his “manner of life” could be evaluated prior to ordination.

Again, the high church concurred. It said the denomination’s standards of fidelity and chastity are to be applied at the point a person is considered for ordination, not during candidacy.

**Singapore speech ban**

SINGAPORE — Gays and lesbians have been forbidden even from talking about their sexuality in Singapore.

Authorities canceled a planned forum on the topic, saying it would legitimize practices considered unlawful in this conservative city-state.

In a statement, police said they “cannot allow the holding of this public forum, which will advance and legitimize the cause of homosexuals in Singapore.”

Businessman Alex Au, who had requested government permission to hold Singapore’s first forum on gays and lesbians on Sunday, said he was saddened by the ban.

“It seems that civil society can only operate within the narrow confines of what the authorities deem to be the public interest,” Au said.

**Gay wealth — not**

WASHINGTON — A new scientific study is exploding yet another myth about the gay community: the one about the high disposable income gays have.

The study finds that just isn’t the case.

Men who consider themselves “unmarried partners” of another man are better educated on average, but make less money than heterosexual men of the same age.

Women who have female “unmarried partners” also tend to be more educated, but earn salaries comparable to those of heterosexual women in the same age bracket.

Those are among the conclusions of a study in the June issue of *Demography*, the journal of the Population Association of America.

Advocates applauded what they said was the first comprehensive study of homosexuals but cautioned against drawing any firm conclusions until more research is done.

The study also found that 22 percent of lesbian couples living together have children, compared to 5 percent of gay couples living together. Sanders said that may show that gay couples have less pressure to get higher-paying jobs.

**Catholic silence**

BALTIMORE — The Vatican has moved to silence a nun and a priest ordered to stop ministering to gays and lesbians.

Sister Jeannine Gramick said she and the Rev. Robert Nugent were summoned to Rome and instructed by their religious orders not to talk about the Vatican’s decision. While they ended their ministry, both have spoken about the church’s decision.

Gramick, of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, said she would not obey the Vatican.

“I choose to obey the voice of God within me, and in this instance, the voice of God is saying that I should not collaborate with my own oppression,” Gramick said.

A statement released by the order said that Gramick was obligated by her vows to follow the Vatican’s latest directive. She could be dismissed if she fails to comply.

Nugent chose to abide by the directive.

“I am now prohibited from speaking or writing in the public forum about the Notification itself, about the ecclesiastical process that led to it or about the issue of homosexuality,” Nugent said in a short press statement.

**Zimbabwe crime**

HARARE, Zimbabwe — The former president of Zimbabwe has been ordered to jail on sex and assault convictions in a ruling that said homosexual acts remain illegal.

Canaan Banana, 64, was convicted in 1999 of 11 counts of sodomy and abusing his power to sexually assault and carry out “unnatural acts” with men, most of whom were part

of his presidential staff. He had appealed the convictions, contending they violated privacy rights enshrined in Zimbabwe’s constitution.

Zimbabwe’s five Supreme Court judges were divided over whether consensual sodomy by homosexuals should remain illegal, Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay said. Three of the judges took into account conservative African attitudes toward homosexuality and ruled the law should remain in effect, he said.

**More polls**

NEW YORK — A new national poll confirms that at least half of Americans still don’t like the idea of gay marriage.

But just as many say gay partners should have some legal rights of a married couple, such as inheritance, Social Security benefits, and health insurance.

More women than men feel gay marriage is OK. So do more Democrats than Republicans, more young people than old, and more people who feel gays are born with that sexual orientation.

The poll, conducted for The Associated Press by ICR of Media, Pa., found that 51 percent were opposed to allowing gay couples to marry, while 34 percent approved.

Half the respondents were asked the question a bit differently — whether they approved of allowing gays to form a “domestic partnership” that would give them the rights and benefits of opposite-sex marriage.

In that question, which did not refer to “gay marriage,” the number that approved allowing such a relationship grew slightly to 41 percent while the opposition was almost half.

The AP poll found that at least half of Americans support the rights of gays to receive health insurance (53 percent), Social Security benefits (50 percent) and inheritance (56 percent) from their partners.

**Tuilian fight**

SAN FRANCISCO — Dr. John Hensala is suing the U.S. Air Force for trying to force him to repay the government the cost of his education.

The Air Force ordered him

to repay \$70,000 in tuition for medical training at Northwestern University and Yale.

That was after he disclosed to his superiors that he was gay. He then was discharged and billed the cost of his education.

The Air Force said Hensala deliberately timed his announcement to get out of his military obligation.

But Hensala, 35, said he did not know he was gay when he signed up.

“This is largely on principle,” Hensala said in an interview in his apartment in San Francisco’s largely gay Castro District. “I would be able to pay back the funds eventually. But an employer who fires someone just because they’re gay... I don’t think it’s the right of the employer to say, ‘You owe us this money.’”

**Italian Outing**

ROME — There has been controversy in Italy over World Gay Pride week festivities coinciding with Jubilee Year festivities of the Roman Catholic Church.

Even that was upstaged when a member of the Italian Cabinet revealed his bisexuality.

Agriculture Minister Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio revealed his sexual orientation in *Panorama* news magazine. “Courageous,” said the caption under his photo.

Very few public figures in Italy outside the fashion world are openly anything but heterosexual. Pecoraro Scanio’s announcement won quick praise in some circles.

“He broke a taboo,” the daily newspaper *La Repubblica* said.

But Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of dictator Benito Mussolini, was quick to criticize Pecoraro Scanio for going public. Mussolini is a member of parliament from the National Alliance, a party born out of the ashes of her grandfather’s political movement.

“Sexuality should remain a private matter,” she said.

**Gay Days Growing**

ORLANDO, Fla. — Gay Days at Walt Disney World has finally come out of the closet.

During one year of the celebration, Disney posted signs at the entrance warning guests