

National Roundup

2 Aug 2006

By Andrew Davis

Maryland's highest court will review a lower court's ruling that a 1973 state statute that bans same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, according to The Washington Blade. The court's seven judges will hear oral arguments in December after Baltimore Circuit Court Judge Brooke Murdock ruled in January that the state's ban violated Maryland's constitution.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and Freedom to Marry have taken out full-page advertisements in 50 newspapers nationwide to underscore the fight for same-sex marriage rights, according to the Associated Press. Organizers stated the development represents the most money gay-rights supporters have ever spent on print advertising space (\$250,000) .

According to a 25-page statement backed by a group of 260 gay leaders and straight allies, the LGBT-rights movement has become too narrowly focused on marriage. The statement, "Beyond Same-Sex Marriage: A New Strategic Vision for All Our Families & Relationships," has been signed by current and former leaders of national gay-rights organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force as well as individuals including scholar Cornel West, feminist Gloria Steinem and novelist Armistead Maupin.

Many large firms—which are regarded as being conservative—have started outreach and benefits programs to gay attorneys, according to an item on Advocate.com. A 2005 survey by the National Law Journal found that among the country's 20 largest law firms, only five reported having any gay lawyers at all—and among those five firms, only 1.8 percent of attorneys were openly gay.

Human Rights Campaign's Coming Out Project has announced the release of its brand new Resource Guide to Coming Out, a guide based on research conducted by the organization. Companion pieces will include Coming Out at Work, Coming Out Politically and Coming Out to your Healthcare Provider. See www.hrc.org to order a free guide.

On July 22, the religious LGBT organization known as Soulforce concluded its "The 1000 Watt March, Vigil, and Concert: Shedding the Powerful Light of Truth on the Anti-Gay Dishonesty of Focus on the Family" event with a two-mile walk led by actor-activist Chad Allen and Judy Shepard, executive director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation, according to a press release. Earlier in the week, families took part in a 65-mile relay-style march from the Colorado State Capitol Building in Denver to the entrance of the conservative group Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs.

In a statement, Human Rights Campaign lauded the work of The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights in getting the Voting Rights Act renewed. LCCR, along with coalition members that included HRC, signed more than 100,000 reauthorization petitions and made 15,000 calls to Congressional offices to urge renewal of the act.

The merger of PlanetOut Inc. and its two recent acquisitions, RSVP Vacations and LPI Media, will result in five percent of the associated workforce being let go, according to Press Pass Q. "Specifically, we are consolidating media and advertising services, e-commerce services and back-office operations on a global basis," Karen Magee, CEO of PlanetOut Inc., said in a recent statement.

Democrat Al McAffrey is about to be the first openly gay member of the Oklahoma legislature, AP reported. McAffrey, a Navy veteran and grandfather of four who works as a funeral director, won his primary race for a state house seat in Oklahoma City and will not have to square off against a Republican.

Bleu Copas, a decorated sergeant and Arabic language specialist, was dismissed from the U.S. Army under “don’t ask, don’t tell” because of a string of anonymous e-mails that outed him to his superiors, CNN reported. Copas maintained that he never told his Fort Bragg, N.C.-based superiors he was gay—and his accuser was never identified.

In Maine, more than 200 people, including the governor, gathered to support Linda Boutaugh and Keri Fuchs, a lesbian couple whose home was vandalized by two boys (aged 12 and 14) in what prosecutors are calling a hate crime, PlanetOut.com reported. The boys broke into the couple’s mobile home on June 30, destroying furniture and appliances; stealing valuables; scattering human waste; and scrawling anti-gay slurs.

In somewhat of an unusual development, the American Civil Liberties Union has filed a federal lawsuit in Jefferson City, Mo., on behalf of the anti-gay Rev. Fred Phelps and his Topeka, Kan., Westboro Baptist Church, The Washington Post reported. Phelps and the church are fighting a Missouri law banning protesters at military funerals, saying that the law violates their freedom of speech and religious liberty. Phelps and his followers say God is allowing soldiers to be killed because the United States tolerates homosexuals.

In other ACLU-related news, the organization and Lambda Legal asked a federal appeals court to rethink its July 14 ruling upholding a Nebraska law that bans all protections for same-sex couples, a press release stated. The motion comes after a three-member panel of the Federal Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit reversed a district court ruling that struck down Nebraska’s anti-gay measure.

The city of Philadelphia plans to evict The Boy Scouts’ Cradle of Liberty Council—the nation’s third-largest—from its publicly-owned headquarters or make the group pay fair rent unless it alters its discriminatory policy concerning gays, the Associated Press wrote. The council has been fighting with the city for more than three years over the policy, which prohibits gays from being leaders.

The LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index (tm), a comprehensive national benchmarking tool for colleges and universities that helps campuses become more LGBT-friendly, will launch Aug. 21. The tool takes into consideration factors such as LGBT policy inclusion, student life and campus safety. For info, e-mail info@campuspride.net.

In an interview with a newspaper, Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell—who is the Republican candidate for governor—compared the state’s gay and lesbian citizens to arsonists and thieves, according to a statement from People For the American Way. The group’s leader, in that same statement, opined that “[e]quating gay people with violent criminals is a surprising level of ugliness even for someone with Ken Blackwell’s record of promoting second-class citizenship for gay and lesbian Ohioans.”

At the annual meeting of Equality Virginia, the state’s largest gay-rights organization, Candace Gingrich—the younger sister of former Republican U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga.—stated that ignorance is the biggest enemy for foes of a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Virginians will decide on the measure Nov. 7.

Hanns Ebensten, who created and built his namesake, Key West, Fla.-based gay travel industry over more than three decades, died at 82 after a bout of pneumonia, Gay.com reported. Ebensten was the author of eight books; the last, *Egypt in My Blood*, was published just weeks before his death.

In New York, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice has named Wendy Ann Sealey as its director of development, according to a press release. Before joining Astraea, Sealey was the director of professional

advancement opportunities at Prep for Prep, a leadership development organization.

In California, the Los Altos City Council has reversed a ban on city proclamations related to sexual orientation, The San Jose Mercury News reported. The council unanimously decided to rewrite the policy so that all proclamation requests will now be considered by the mayor.

Lis Baccigaluppi and Mary Delamater have started LezCruise.com, a Web site for lesbians. The site has two main features: a listing of cruises on which lesbians are either booked or interested in booking as well as discussion boards specific to each posted sailing so that women can get acquainted before the cruise.