

Idaho Citizens Alliance looks to lawmakers

Kelly Walton, chairman of the Idaho Citizens Alliance, says he may look to the Republican-controlled state Legislature to promote his group's discriminatory agenda. That may not be so easy, however, since legislative leaders say they plan to focus this session on reducing big government.

House Speaker Michael Simpson and Senate President Pro Tem Jerry Twiggs, both Republicans from Blackfoot, predict most politicians will steer clear of controversial discriminatory lesbian and gay rights measures. Such a bill has yet to be introduced, and political observers predict bill opponents would try to keep such a measure bottled up in committee.

The ICA may be able to use a parliamentary maneuver early in the session to bypass the GOP leadership and get its proposal to the floor, where some say a discriminatory measure could gain approval.

The ICA unsuccessfully sponsored Proposition 1 last November, an initiative that would have restricted civil rights protections based on sexual orientation.

Colorado officials keep pushing Amendment 2

Colorado state officials have filed a brief with the nation's highest court seeking to overturn the Colorado Supreme Court's ruling last October that declared Amendment 2 unconstitutional.

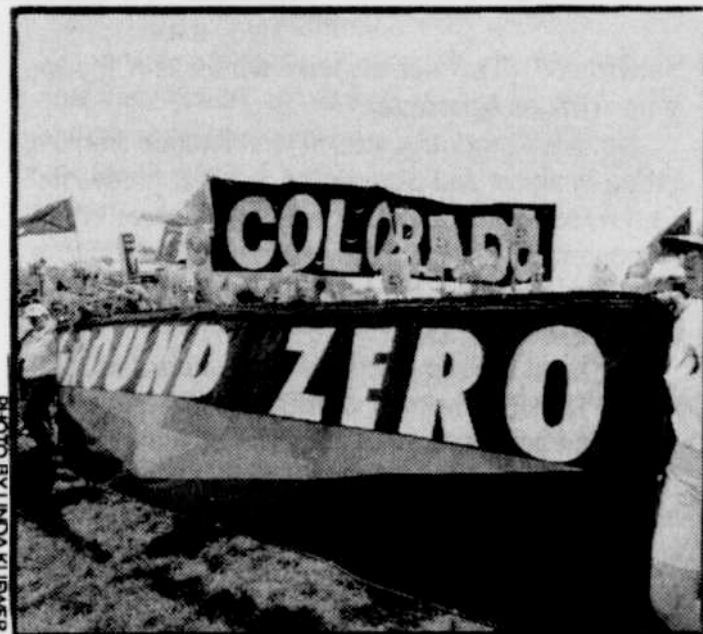


PHOTO BY LINCOLN KILMER

Colorado Attorney General Gale Norton filed the brief with the U.S. Supreme Court a few weeks ago. The state's top court had ruled Amendment 2, a discriminatory initiative approved by voters in 1992, was unconstitutional because it interfered with the rights of lesbians and gay men to participate in the political process.

Nebraska says no gay and lesbian foster parents

The Nebraska Department of Social Services recently implemented a new ban on foster parenting for gay men and lesbians. Mary Dean Harvey, director of the Nebraska Department of Social Services, stated that it was in the best interest of the state to place children "in the most family-like setting." Gay men and lesbians are now banned from operating foster care agencies, and unmarried heterosexual couples may not adopt children.

The action has been denounced by Citizens for Equal Protection, a statewide gay, lesbian, transgender group. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Fight the Right project is working with CFEP and local activists to challenge the policy. According to Robert Bray, NGLTF Fight the Right organizer, "The radical right is launching multiple attacks against the gay, lesbian and bisexual community simultaneously.... We need to respond aggressively...and be prepared for future attacks, whether they are in Nebraska or New York City."

Allstate reverses policy

Allstate Insurance Company, one of the nation's largest insurance companies, has agreed to write a joint liability policy for a gay male couple living in New York City.

"Insurance companies should not be in the business of picking and choosing which types of families are given coverage," says Suzanne Goldberg, staff attorney with the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York. "Refusing to issue joint personal liability insurance to lesbian and gay couples violates New York state laws which prohibit insurance discrimination based on marital status and sexual orientation."

Allstate had initially denied the joint policy to James Colgate and David Fields, a gay couple who had lived together for more than a decade and were registered with the city of New York as domestic partners.

The company maintained that a joint liability insurance policy was only available to individual subscribers and those "who have a legal relationship via marriage or some other legally recognized standing, such as blood relation or adoption."

The couple applied for the policy in 1993 while renewing an existing rental policy they shared on their Greenwich Village apartment.

Allstate reversed its position after several months of negotiation with Lambda attorneys, who argued the company's actions violated both state law prohibiting marital status discrimination and general provisions of state insurance law prohibiting unfair discrimination between people in the same class of risk. Lambda also argued the latter provision prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The company finally granted the joint policy in mid-December.

South Dakota jumps on queer marriage bandwagon

With the passage of a House Bill 1184, a piece of legislation that is a mere seven lines long, South Dakota stands to become one of the first states in the Union to take pre-emptive action against the recognition of same-sex marriages legalized in other states.

The bill whipped through the House of Representatives with a vote of 54-13 in favor of passage.

During floor debate, some legislators compared the marriage ban to "making homosexuality illegal in South Dakota." *The Rapid City Journal* quotes State Rep. Roger Hunt of Brandon as saying the bill was introduced because of the "great economic expense" same-sex marriage could bring to the state. Passage of the bill would "prevent one partner from homosexual marriages from being added to certain health and life insurance policies," he said.

Guns and queers

Two discriminatory organizations have announced a two-year plan of attack against gay men and lesbians in Washington state, according to *Seattle Gay News*. This plan includes initiatives to both Washington citizens and the Legislature.

The Equal Rights Not Special Rights Committee plans to file an initiative to the Legislature that would be identical to last year's failed Initiative 608. That measure would have prohibited civil rights protections for gay men and lesbians. It would also have prohibited public schools from "promoting homosexuality as a healthy or appropriate behavior."

Last month, the Citizens Alliance of Washington filed two initiatives to the people. If passed, one measure would prohibit gay men and lesbians from adopting children. The second would remove restrictions from buying and owning guns.

Compiled by Inga Sorensen and Kristine Chatwood

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▼ Let's all work together this year to fight bigotry on all fronts!



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