

were identified by a witness, attacked Wagner while shouting anti-gay epithets and expletives. Police are reportedly not considering the case a hate crime.

Wagner's parents and many fellow students believe the attack was motivated by homophobia. Since coming out at age 14, Wagner has been subjected to daily verbal and physical abuse at school. His mother told the *Times* that most school officials have refused to take action on complaints about the abuse. She also charged that several teachers ignored harassment which occurred in the classroom.

Shortly after news of the attack appeared in local papers, another woman came forward to report her frustration at the lack of response from school officials to the physical and verbal assaults suffered by her 12-year-old daughter over a two-year period. The woman, who requested anonymity to protect her daughter, said her daughter is teased in school for having a lesbian mother and has been slapped, kicked and spat upon. She also claimed that teachers and the vice principal did not pay attention to her daughter's complaints.

Nondiscrimination policy adopted by postal service

The U.S. Postal Service's law enforcement branch, which employs 4,600 inspectors, police officers and support personnel, has issued a new code of conduct forbidding employees to discriminate against sexual minorities even during off-duty hours. Each employee of the agency is required to sign the new code, but some are protesting out of belief that the rules will intrude upon their private lives.



The discrimination clause states that "Employees acting in an official capacity will not directly or indirectly authorize, permit or participate in discrimination based on age, gender, ethnic origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation against anyone, whether or not they are employees. Because we are a law enforcement agency, off-duty conduct that demonstrates an inability to be fair, objective and unbiased in dealings with others will not be tolerated."

The statement does not include religion, which is generally protected under federal nondiscrimination policies.

A U.S. Postal Inspection Service spokesman said "the policy will only affect any action that is a violation of the law," as opposed to situations, such as speaking out against same-sex marriage, which would be a matter of free speech.

Dornan-Sanchez race still not over

Nineteen people interviewed by *The Los Angeles Times* admitted that they inadvertently cast illegal votes in the hotly contested Nov. 5 election in which political novice Loretta Sanchez unseated longtime Rep. Bob Dornan.

The report links many of those noncitizen voters to Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, an organization which offers citizenship classes and registered at least 916 people in Dornan's district last year. Representatives of the group conceded that some of its students voted before they were sworn in as citizens, but blames misunderstandings and over-eagerness.

Interviewees told the *Times* they were encouraged to register and vote by people they believed were affiliated with Hermandad, and that they were given voter registration materials and absentee ballot applications immediately after passing tests or interviews with immigration officials,

but before attending the swearing-in ceremony which completes the naturalization process. They were apparently unaware they had broken the law by registering and voting early.

Hermandad executive director Nativio Lopez insisted that organization staff made the guidelines clear to students, and said he did not know the source of the widespread misunderstanding. He pointed out that many people walk away from their INS interviews in an excited state, often believing that they have completed the process.

It is a felony under state law for someone who is not a citizen to vote or register to vote; noncitizens who commit felonies are subject to deportation.

The Orange County Registrar of Voters Office has completed a review of the election results which found no irregularities, the district attorney's office in Orange County is conducting a criminal investigation into the matter, and the U.S. House of Representatives is considering its own investigation in response to charges levied by Dornan that 100 people voted twice, 195 people improperly returned absentee ballots, and as many as 1,000 noncitizens and convicted felons voted.

Dornan was accused of racism after he blamed his defeat by 984 votes on noncitizen voting.

Trials begin on anti-HIV gene testing

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, biotechnology researchers have won government approval to begin the first human gene therapy trials in the fight against HIV. The tests, based on a discovery made by Stanford scientists nearly a decade ago, seek to provide patients with newly formed and fully functioning cells created from their own immune systems which are genetically capable of preventing HIV from reproducing.

Doctors plan to remove bone marrow from 60 volunteers and collect the highly specialized stem cells, which are the progenitors of red blood cells, platelets and all the differentiated white blood cells that comprise the body's immune system—including the T cells that are attacked by HIV and macrophages that attack invading viruses. Using a harmless virus as a carrier, scientists will insert into the purified stem cells a mutated form of the "rev gene," which normally makes a protein that is essential to the early reproductive cycle of HIV. Each succeeding generation of stem cells, T cells and macrophages produced, scientists hope, will then be genetically resistant to HIV.

Trials were set to begin in early January at AIDS clinics in Redwood City, Calif., and Alabama using participants whose infection ranges from recently diagnosed to late-stage AIDS.



Charlotte Bunch honored

Lesbian activist, writer and international advocate for the human rights of women Charlotte Bunch, 52, was inducted Oct. 5 into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, N.Y., site of the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848. Bunch, who works for the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, is a leader in the international movement for women's rights, including reproductive rights, education, freedom from violence, and adequate nutrition and sanitation standards.

Bunch cofounded the journal *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* in 1974 and served on the board of what was then called the National Gay Task Force.

Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone

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