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## national news

### More states consider marriage bans

A proposal to ban same-sex marriages entered the Nebraska Legislature with 28 cosponsors, three more than the number of votes it will need to pass, according to an *Omaha World-Herald* story. The bill, sponsored primarily by Omaha Sen. Jim Jensen, adds a ban on marriage between persons of the same sex to existing bans on multiple marriages and marriages between close relatives, and stipulates that Nebraska will not recognize such marriages from other states.

Meanwhile, leaders of both parties in the Minnesota House of Representatives favor enacting a law to prohibit same-sex unions, reports the *Saint Paul Pioneer-Press*. House Speaker Phil Carruthers and House Majority Leader Ted Winter have offered their support for a bill authored by House Minority Leader Steve Sviggum that would bolster the language of the state's current definition of marriage as "a civil contract between a man and a woman."

And state senators voted unanimously and without debate to enact a law prohibiting homosexual marriages in Mississippi and denying recognition to same-gender marriages performed legally in other states. According to the *Biloxi Sun Herald*, members of the House are expected to affirm the decision and pass into law the executive order signed last year by Gov. Kirk Fordice to deny recognition of same-sex marriages.

### Wisconsin campus groups face funding threat

In a suit filed by three University of Wisconsin-Madison law students, U.S. District Court Judge John Shabaz ruled in January that students at the school should not have to pay for student groups they do not approve of, reports the *Milwaukee newspaper In Step*. Under the current fee structure each student contributes \$37 as part of their tuition that is allocated to groups by the student government.

Judge Shabaz ruled that this fee policy violates the students' First Amendment rights to free speech and association, despite the school's argument that the fees do not compel speech on behalf of the plaintiffs but simply support the expression of different views and the free exchange of ideas without direct endorsement of an ideology or political beliefs.

The plaintiffs, all devout Christians, named 18 groups in their trial brief whose ideological or political stance they found objectionable. Two sexual minority groups—the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community Center and the Madison AIDS Support Network—as well as Amnesty International, Community Action on Latin America, and Students of National Organization for Women, were among the groups listed.

If the decision stands, students will be able to opt out of subsidizing campus groups that they do not support. The change in funding structure could effectively shut down targeted groups. After receiving a deluge of letters from across the state, UW-Madison has decided to appeal the ruling.

### Florida youth project gives dropouts another chance

The Dade County coalition of gay youth groups, Project YES, has instituted a GED program specifically for sexual minority youth who have dropped out, according to a *Miami Herald* report. Organizers of the equivalency course are attempting to enroll the required number of students without encouraging currently enrolled students to drop out. They are hoping to provide an education alternative for gay and lesbian young people who dropped out of high school to find relief from verbal and physical abuse.

Although the GED course will be offered at a community college, where participants may have less reason to fear harassment by other students, Project YES is also considering the feasibility of an alternative high school program like the Harvey Milk School, which was established in New York City in 1985.



National studies have determined that the dropout rate among gay and lesbian youth is 28 percent; in Dade County schools the overall dropout rate in 1995 was 8.8 percent, which is broken down by gender and race but not by sexual orientation. Stories of gay students being harassed and beaten have recently gained attention from the national media, but experts and activists fear that many incidents go unreported.

### Alternative Barbie hits it big

What began as a clever birthday gift may soon become the latest Tickle Me Elmo craze: San Francisco resident Paul Hansen's anti-Barbies are set to make their art-gallery debut. Although the dolls will no longer be advertised or sold as Barbies, due to the legal objections of Mattel, interested consumers may be able to mail-order their very own Trailer Trash "1 1/4-inch Generic Doll," complete with cigarette, baby on hip, platinum blonde hair with black roots, who comes complete a word balloon reading, "My Daddy swears I'm the best kisser in the county." Hansen's other creations have included Drag Queen Barbie (who is really a Ken doll), Big Dyke Barbie, Voodoo Barbie and Barbie in a Rat Trap.



In-jean-ious, the store that carried the dolls during San Francisco's lesbian and gay pride festivities, quickly sold out after the story was picked up by the media and spread worldwide. The store has had to set up a special phone system to handle the flood of orders and plans a mailing in a few weeks to provide details on prices and ordering.

### Human rights victory in Atlanta

Mayor Bill Campbell signed an administrative order Dec. 20 requiring that all city contracts exceeding \$1,000 include a provision prohibiting anti-gay discrimination among the contractors and their employees. Georgia does not currently have a statewide law banning discrimination based on sexual orientation, although the City of Atlanta's discrimination policies and Fulton County's employment policies protect sexual minorities from discrimination.

Nick Gold, a spokesman for the mayor, told the *Washington Blade* the mayor's action was inspired by recent legislation in San Francisco that compels city contractors to provide domestic partner benefits to their employees. San Francisco has required its contractors to prohibit anti-gay discrimination among employees since 1972.

Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone