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national news

Local action critical to securing rights

Gay and lesbian rights legislation at the city and county level has advanced at a dramatic pace in the 1990s—that according to independent researchers at the University of Florida in a new report summarizing their book-length study of sexual minority rights laws in the United States.

The report, titled "All Politics Is Local: An Analysis of Local Gay Rights Legislation," was released in late June by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Policy Institute, a national think tank and policy center on gay rights issues.

Researchers studied 126 U.S. communities that passed gay rights laws or policies as of 1993, and compared them to 125 randomly selected U.S. jurisdictions without such legislation.

In addition, the authors did intensive field research in five representative communities—Cincinnati, Iowa City, Philadelphia, Raleigh, and Santa Cruz—to further examine the factors which led to the passage of the laws and to study their impact.

Researchers concluded that mobilization of the gay community in a locality is the single most important political determinant of the passage of a gay rights law.

It also found that 79 of the 157 cities and counties that had gay rights ordinances by 1997 passed them in the 1990s. Those ordinances almost always covered public employment, but varied widely in their coverage of private-sector employment, housing, public accommodations, hotel and retail centers, and private business contracts with the city or counties.

Copies of the study may be obtained by calling NGLTF publications at (202) 332-6483 or by downloading the report from the NGLTF Web site (www.nglftf.org).

Gay group asks S.F. board not to join boycott

In a surprise move, the founder of United Airlines' gay and lesbian employee group has asked San Francisco politicians to not join a boycott over United's refusal to offer domestic-partner benefits.

"United Airlines by no means has a stellar past when it comes to human rights issues.... Yet in spite of all this, we are concerned about the far-reaching effects a boycott might have on all employees at United Airlines, especially gay and lesbian employees," David Tomb, who heads the group United at United, told The Associated Press.

On July 7, Tomb asked the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to kill legislation that would prohibit city employees from flying United on official business, unless no other viable alternative was available.

The airline is part of an industry lawsuit to overturn the city ordinance which requires that companies doing business with San Francisco offer benefits to the registered domestic partners of its employees.

IRS accused of anti-gay bias

In a July 2 letter to the Internal Revenue Service, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund demanded the agency rescind its response to a request for nonprofit status made by the Gay and

Lesbian Adolescent Support System and immediately grant federal tax exemption to the group.

Formed in 1994 to serve the needs of young people facing anti-gay bigotry and abuse, GLASS is staffed entirely by volunteers.

When the Greensboro, N.C., grass-roots support group filed for tax-exempt status under the



Internal Revenue Code's section 501(c)(3), the IRS without explanation transferred the application from a local office to its national headquarters, then responded that approval would be contingent

upon a detailed description of the group's "procedures and safeguards in place to assure that counselors and participants do not encourage or facilitate homosexual practices or encourage the development of homosexual attitudes and propensities by minor individuals."

HRC counters Disney boycott

Beginning with a donation of \$5,000 worth of Disney stuffed animals to children in Washington, D.C.-area hospitals, the Human Rights Campaign on June 26 kicked off a nationwide drive to counter the Southern Baptist Convention's boycott of Walt Disney Co.

HRC is calling on its 200,000 members to buy gift certificates for Disney retail stores, theme parks and movies and donate them to children in hospitals across the country.

In response to Disney's policy of extending equal benefits to domestic partners of its lesbian and gay employees, its decision to allow ABC's *Ellen* star Ellen DeGeneres to out herself and her character, and its welcoming attitude toward queer visitors at its theme parks, delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention on June 18 voted to boycott Disney and all its subsidiaries.

Clinton may appoint gay ambassador

In its June 26 issue, the *Washington Blade* reported President Clinton "has chosen an openly gay person to be the United States ambassador to a European nation and has picked at least two other open gays for high-level domestic positions that require confirmation by the Senate, a White House official said this week."

The gay and lesbian weekly says White House officials will unveil the names within the next two months.

Word of the appointees come on the heels of criticisms of the Clinton administration by gay and lesbian activists who are disappointed by what they view as the president's failure to appoint open gay men and lesbians during his second term.

Hawaii enacts partnership plan, but the fight's still on

While gay rights organizations are preparing to fight a November 1998 anti-gay marriage ballot initiative, Hawaiian gay and lesbian couples are lining up to apply for the state's new domestic partnership plan.

On July 1, the state's Department of Health began distributing applications for couples wishing to register as "reciprocal beneficiaries."

Under the law, which took effect eight days later, reciprocal beneficiaries can be any two people—including blood relatives and same-gender couples—who are at least 18 years of age and who cannot legally marry. They need not live together.

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