

national briefs

CALIFORNIA

Gay activists are angry about on-air comments made by an Orange County Christian radio talk show host who said homosexuality should be punishable by death.

According to the Sept. 5 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, Rich Agozino, host of *Crosstalk* on radio station KBRT-AM in Costa Mesa, urged callers to write to their state legislators asking them to enact laws that would punish homosexuality according to biblical law, meaning capital punishment, according to a transcript of the Aug. 29 show.

"Lesbian love [and] sodomy are viewed by God as being detestable and abominable.... Civil magistrates are to put people to death who practice these things," Agozino said, according to the transcript.



Gay rights activists said Agozino's statements could incite violence against gay men and lesbians.

But station manager Ed Personius said Agozino was simply encouraging listeners to follow the "word of God."

"Rich is simply querying Christians on what the word of God says," he told the *Times*.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Responding to concerns that gay men and others have been indiscriminately added to sexual offender lists around the country, New York Rep. Charles Schumer introduced a measure to discourage states from using the so-called Megan's Law to register people convicted solely of consensual sodomy and similar offenses.

Although the Schumer measure failed on a Sept. 9 party-line vote in the Judiciary Committee, the American Civil Liberties Union said it was optimistic that the measure would be considered on the House floor. Schumer also vowed to continue fighting for the measure.

The Schumer amendment would not have altered Megan's Law registration requirements for child molesters, violent sexual offenders or "sexual predators," but would have sharpened the focus of the measure by encouraging states to avoid registering persons charged with consensual sodomy, lewd conduct and other similar offenses, the ACLU argued.

HAWAII

A new agency aimed at assisting same-sex couples to obtain insurance benefits is up and

running. The Associated Press reported on Sept. 1.

With a colorful rainbow as its logo, Hawaii-based Pride Insurance & Financial Services Inc. opened for business this summer, just as the state's new reciprocal benefits law—the nation's first—came into effect, giving couples who can't legally marry a taste of the married life. A major provision of the law grants insurance benefits to same-gender couples.

"A lot of insurance companies won't even touch gays and lesbians. Let's just be honest about this.... They don't have to do anything they don't want to do," said Dr. Robert Jenkins, the agency's founder.

Pride Insurance, which is opening offices in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco, also helps same-sex couples in other states and countries apply to become reciprocal beneficiaries under the Hawaii law, which has no residency requirement.

ILLINOIS

Most of the 170 Lakeview residents who attended a community meeting Sept. 4 objected to a portion of the city's plan to beautify a stretch of North Halsted Street and honor the largely lesbian and gay population in the neighborhood, reports the *Chicago Tribune*.

The \$3.2 million proposal calls for the city to widen sidewalks and plant 180 trees along Halsted; nearly 200 steel towers would be ringed with rainbow-colored lights reflecting the hues of the gay and lesbian pride flag.

According to the newspaper, many people who attended the meeting praised the plan to fix crumbling sidewalks and freshen up the busy business and entertainment strip. But many speakers sharply criticized the proposal to string the street with rainbow-colored lights, for fear that would send the message the neighborhood is only for gay and lesbian residents. Other people worried that the effort, designed by the city to promote a gay and lesbian pride theme, might attract gay-bashers.

Construction for the project is set to begin in March 1998.

KENTUCKY

For the third time in five years, the "fairness amendment," a proposal designed to protect the citizens of Louisville against discrimination based on sexual orientation, has been defeated by the Board of Aldermen. The Sept. 9 vote was three in favor and seven against, with two abstentions.

Immediately following the vote, demonstrators stepped into a four-lane thoroughfare in front of City Hall to stage a brief sit-down protest. More

than 50 people were arrested on charges of obstructing a highway. A hearing is set for Oct. 1.

MICHIGAN

A mother from Portage is planning to hire an attorney after her 9-year-old daughter was denied enrollment in the local public school because she is HIV-positive, reports United Press International.

An attorney for the Portage Public Schools said on Aug. 28 that officials followed a district and state policy of establishing a panel to study the medical records of any student with a communicable disease to determine the risks to other students. It's unclear whether HIV is classified as communicable.

According to UPI, the mother of the unidentified girl has told reporters she refuses to turn over the girl's records to the west Michigan district because it is an invasion of privacy. She has found a private school that will accept the girl.

The mother claims the district knew about the girl's HIV infection at the end of last school year. The child was allowed to attend Woodland Elementary School when classes recently resumed, but was asked to leave three days later.

Scientists have long said that casual contact with a person living with HIV will not result in spread of the virus.

MINNESOTA

Two heterosexual men, Torence Harris and Greg Krebs, are suing the Gay Nineties Theatre Cafe and Bar, claiming a bouncer at the downtown Minneapolis establishment discriminated against them when she turned them away at the

door because they are not gay. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reports the plaintiffs are seeking damages in excess of \$50,000.

The suit alleges the bouncer's action violated a 1993 amendment to the Minnesota Human Rights Act guaranteeing access to accommodations and businesses regardless of sexual orientation.

The bar owners are denying the allegations. One of the men was admitted to the bar, they say, while the other chose to wait at the door for his girlfriend. When security personnel suggested he might want to leave rather than loiter at the door, the other man returned and started an argument, which prompted the bouncer to ask both men to leave, the owners contend.

NEW YORK

Sixteen Orthodox Jewish rabbis have filed a lawsuit to stop the Sept. 15 opening of a new Holocaust museum in Manhattan, reports The Associated Press.

The suit, filed in federal court Sept. 5, says the Museum of Jewish Heritage/A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, offends the beliefs of Orthodox



Jews because it includes an exhibit honoring gay men and lesbians who were persecuted by the Nazis.

The suit says the use of public money to build the museum near Battery Park is unconstitutional.

The rabbis are angry over "the elevation of homosexuals to the martyred status of the 6 million Jews," who died in the Holocaust, says Rabbi Yehuda Levin, the lead plaintiff.

Levin, who once ran for mayor, has been a vocal opponent of sexual minority rights.



Irving Cooperberg, one of the guiding forces behind the creation of two major institutions in New York's sexual minority community, died Aug. 20 at his home in Manhattan.

His partner of 25 years, Lou Rittmaster, who was with Cooperberg at the time of his death, announced the cause of death as complications due to AIDS.

Cooperberg helped establish the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, the largest organization of its kind in New York, and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, the world's largest lesbian and gay synagogue.

At the time of his appointment in 1994, Cooperberg was the first and only openly gay member of the Board of Governors of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, Pa.

PENNSYLVANIA

In a case brought by the Newspaper Guild, a labor arbitrator has ruled that Philadelphia Newspapers Inc., which owns both the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News*, must grant health benefits to same-sex domestic partners of its employees. Among other reasons, the ruling cited the "minuscule" costs of providing such benefits.

Sherry Boschert, a spokeswoman for the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, notes the ruling is part of a larger trend. "Twice as many media companies have domestic-partner benefits now as compared to three years ago," she says.

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