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**NATIONAL news**

**GEORGIA**

A Walton County judge is holding a woman in "willful contempt" simply because she shares a residence with her same-sex partner.

Jean Ann Vawter was divorced from Douglas Alan Vawter in 1994. At that time, she was given sole custody of the couple's children.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, Douglas Vawter knew his ex-wife was in a committed relationship with another woman. In 1996, the two women participated in a religious commitment ceremony.

Last year Douglas Vawter requested that a local court issue an order that his wife be incarcerated in the Walton County jail because, he claimed, she violated their divorce agreement by exposing the children to a "meretricious relationship."

The judge found Jean Vawter's relationship was "unwholesome." She and her children were ordered to leave the home they had shared with her partner for more than four years.

In April, the ACLU filed an appeal in the Supreme Court of Georgia on behalf of Jean Vawter. The appeal asserts that the relationship between Jean Vawter and her partner is not "meretricious," and that the contempt order requiring her and her children to leave their home is a violation of her constitutional rights.



**IOWA**

The April 27 *Des Moines Register* reports that Seattle-based sex columnist Dan Savage, who allegedly cast a vote earlier this year in the Iowa presidential caucuses, has been charged with felony voter fraud.

According to attorney Mark Weinhardt, who represents Savage, his client is to appear May 9 in Polk County District Court.

Savage is looking at both a felony charge and a serious misdemeanor charge. If convicted, Weinhardt says, Savage could spend up to six years in prison.

In January, Savage ventured to Iowa to write a story for the online magazine *Salon*. The article, titled "Stalking Gary Bauer," details Savage's efforts to infiltrate the conservative Republican candidate's Iowa campaign. Savage also wrote of his attempt to infect Bauer with the flu by, among other things, licking doorknobs at Bauer's campaign headquarters.

According to Savage, he used his temporary address at the Kirkwood Hotel in Des Moines to vote in the caucuses.

**MISSISSIPPI**

In April, Mississippi became the second state in 2000 to pass legislation banning gay and lesbian couples from adopting.

Utah passed a similar law earlier this year. Previously, Florida had been the only state to forbid adoptions by gay and lesbian couples.

The Associated Press reports that the state Senate passed the ban in April with no debate and no opposition. Gov. Ronnie Musgrove has said he will sign the bill.

Religious leaders were divided over the ban. The state Episcopal bishop urged lawmakers to prayerfully examine all evidence before passing such a bill; Baptists and Methodists, meanwhile, lobbied for the measure's passage.

"There was pressure from the religious right, and they caved in to that pressure even though they were aware that it would be litigated. This is just an invitation to litigate," says David Inge-

bretsen, head of the Mississippi chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The law takes effect July 1.

**NATIONAL**

President Bill Clinton is gearing up to revive stalled hate crimes legislation with the hope of forcing a congressional vote before the November elections, reports an April 25 Associated Press story.

Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno met with state law enforcement officials in April at the White House to formulate a strategy for mobilizing public support for the hate crimes bill and to force the Republican congressional leadership to take up the issue.

The bill would add crimes motivated by a victim's sexual orientation, sex or disability to the list of hate crimes already covered by federal law. Those include crimes motivated by race, religion, color or national origin. The bill would also give federal prosecutors the option of pursuing a hate crime case if local authorities declined to press charges.

White House officials admitted using the hate crimes issue as a wedge to force the Republican Party to back up its "compassionate conservative" rhetoric with action.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior White House official told the AP that Gov. George W. Bush's "trouble with Bob Jones and extremist elements in the Republican Party" were factors in deciding to push for a hate crimes bill. The official was referring to Bush's failure to denounce Bob Jones University's interracial dating ban during a speech he gave at the South Carolina school.



Clinton has criticized Bush for opposing hate crimes legislation introduced in Texas after James Byrd, an African American, was tied to a pickup truck and dragged to death by a group of white men.

"All he had to do was lift his hand and they would have had a hate crimes bill," Clinton said at the time. "And it did not pass because they [Republicans] did not want it to pass."

Stating that "all crime is hate crime," Bush refused to get involved in the Texas debate concerning hate crimes legislation.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments April 26 in a case that will determine whether the Boy Scouts of America can bar gay men from serving as troop leaders.

New Jersey's highest court previously ruled that the Boy Scouts' firing of a gay troop leader violated a state law prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations. But lawyers for the Scouts say the law violates the organization's rights of free speech and free association under the Constitution's First Amendment.

"Boy Scouting is so closely identified with traditional moral values that the phrase 'He's a real Boy Scout' has entered the language," said lawyer George A. Davidson, arguing that the Scouts had a constitutional right to oust New Jersey troop leader James Dale after learning he is gay.

"Mr. Dale had created a reputation for himself" by becoming publicly known to be gay, and that would harm his ability to be a role model to Scouts, Davidson told the justices.

But, according to The Associated Press, Dale's lawyer, Evan Wolfson of Lambda Legal