

rically opposite to admonitions in the Bible," she wrote. "This mission is founded on biblical principles, and we cannot give a public forum to a public official who is blatantly flaunting those principles."

Kolbe, who came out in 1996, downplayed the snub. He indicated in a statement that he didn't want the controversy to undermine the essence of Thanksgiving.

"God made many diverse people in his image," Kolbe wrote. "Judeo-Christian tradition tells us that no people should be made to feel smaller than others."

**CONNECTICUT**

The Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities ruled last month that the state laws prohibiting sex discrimination include transgendered people within those protections. The ruling came in response to a request for a declaratory ruling filed by Stamford attorney Bruce Goldberg.

"This is a very important decision for transgendered people, who have historically been excluded from many civil rights protections," said Jennifer Levi, Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders staff attorney. "The commission's ruling takes note of the still-pervasive discrimination that many people face simply because they do not meet society's stereotype of what people think a 'real woman' or a 'real man' should look like. This decision affirms the recent trend correcting the historical error of excluding transgendered people from our laws."

The decision relies, in part, on a 1989 U.S. Supreme Court case in which Ann Hopkins, an associate at the accounting firm of Price Waterhouse, was denied partnership because she was considered too masculine, macho and aggressive. The commission's ruling recognizes that the form of discrimination many transgendered people face also is grounded in enforcing sex stereotypes, a practice harmful to all people.

The ruling clarifies that transgendered people may bring claims of sex discrimination and defines transsexual people to include a broad range of individuals who do not conform to gender stereotypes regardless of whether they have or intend to have surgery. The ruling also includes intersexed people—for example, people who are born with ambiguous genitalia or chromosomal ambiguity found in people with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, Klinefelter's Syndrome and Turner's Syndrome.

**PENNSYLVANIA**

Sovereign Bancorp, a \$35 billion financial institution headquartered in Wyomissing, Pa., has reconsidered a plan to roll back domestic partner benefits for its New England employees and announced it would extend them companywide. The decision came after Kim I. Mills, Human Rights Campaign education director, wrote to CEO Jay S. Sidhu, detailing why such benefits are a low-cost means of attracting and keeping the best employees.

"This is excellent news and another sign that domestic partner benefits are good business," she said. "Sovereign has shown great leadership

by being willing to re-examine its initial decision and then reversing it because it was the right thing to do."

HRC has found only two U.S. companies that ever have rescinded domestic partner benefits: Perot Systems Inc. in 1998 and ExxonMobil Corp. in 1999. Neither has reinstated the benefits, even though their major competitors offer them.

In October, HRC obtained a copy of a benefits brochure sent to Sovereign's New England employees stating: "Beginning in 2001, eligible dependents for Flex Benefits will be limited to a team member's spouse and dependent children. If you currently cover a domestic partner or other adult dependent, you may continue coverage for that individual. However, future dependents will be covered under the new guidelines."

The reason given for all benefit changes outlined was that the company needed to manage the costs of rising health care. "Eliminating an inexpensive perquisite to save money rings hollow, especially since Sovereign recently posted a 51 percent increase in third-quarter cash earnings, among other positive results during this market downturn," Mills wrote.

John Hamill, Sovereign Bank New England chairman, called Mills on Nov. 17 to say the company had decided to reverse its initial position.

**GEORGIA**

The Mary-Helen Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer kicked off its 10th year of fighting tobacco use by participating in the first National GLBT Forum on Tobacco Prevention and Control on Nov. 8 and 9 in Atlanta.

"Tobacco is a killer, and our community smokes at significantly higher rates than the general population," said Mautner Project executive director Kathleen DeBold, who attended the forum. "It is especially alarming that GLBT youth—the future of our movement—are lighting up in unprecedented numbers. The good news coming out of this forum is that there is a growing network of GLBT activists and health professionals dedicated to helping us stop."

The goal of the forum was to provide tangible recommendations for reducing tobacco use among youth, increasing quit rates among smokers and reducing exposure to second-hand smoke. It was organized by the American Legacy Foundation, an independent public health organization that has designated the queer community as one of five priority populations in the battle to decrease tobacco consumption.

"When you work at a project serving lesbians with cancer, the devastation caused by smoking is self-evident," DeBold said. "But for the GLBT population in general, smoking can seem like the least of our worries. Our challenge now is to change that perception." j

Compiled by Copy Editor JIM RADOSTA, who can be reached at jim@justout.com.



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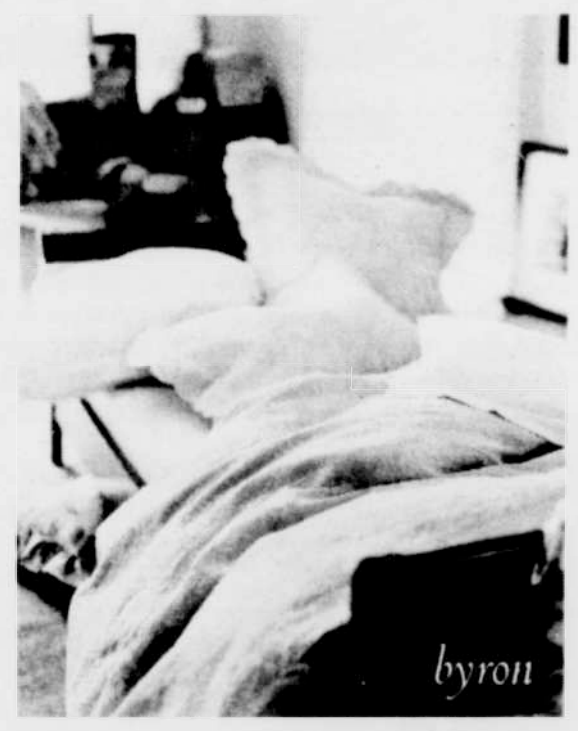
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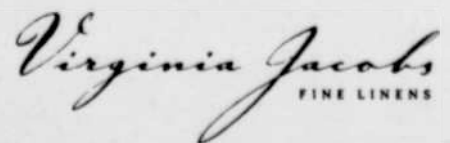
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