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NORTHWEST news

**WASHINGTON LEGISLATORS
FIGHT FOR EQUALITY**

Several bills recently were introduced in the Washington Legislature that would affect gay residents.

Sen. Pat Thibodeau and Rep. Ed Murray, both liberal Democrats, offered a proposal Feb. 2 that would authorize Vermont-style civil unions guaranteeing the same benefits and protections as marriage. The Associated Press reports the bill doesn't stand a chance in the House, where Republicans hold a co-majority.

"This bill is about treating all of our citizens with dignity," Thibodeau said. "The bill does nothing to diminish marriage but grants same-sex couples equal protection under the law."

Murray added in a statement: "Same-sex couples have the same responsibilities as all other couples. It is time that same-sex couples be accorded the same rights and the same level of respect."

Murray also is involved in the Safe Schools/Bullying Bill, which would define harassment and intimidation in an inclusive way to cover sexual orientation. Democratic Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe and Republican Rep. Ida Ballasiotes are the other sponsors.

The Senate also is considering legislation that would reverse last year's decision to extend health care benefits to the domestic partners of state employees, including same-sex partners. Sponsors of the bill cite cost concerns, while opponents contend it's important for Washington to take a stand against discrimination.



Rep. Ida Ballasiotes



Rep. Ed Murray



Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe



Sen. Pat Thibodeau

in Salem before moving to Minnesota, was found dead Sept. 28. He just had been elected as secretary of the Lambda Society, a gay and lesbian campus group.

Gallaudet student Joseph Mafnas Mesa Jr. of Barrigada, Guam, was arraigned Feb. 14. Executive Assistant Police Chief Terrance W. Gainer said the 20-year-old told investigators he killed the two fellow freshmen during separate robbery attempts.

The news of Mesa's arrest surprised Kathleen Cornils, Plunkett's mother. "I have no comment at this time; I'm going to get more information."

Thomas Minch, 18, of Greenland, N.H., was charged Oct. 3 with second-degree murder but released Oct. 4 because of insufficient evidence. University Provost Jane Fernandes said he was kicked off the campus after the arrest but is free to return now that he has been cleared.

**GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY
STUDENT ARRESTED**

Just four months after the murder of a former Portland, another Gallaudet University student was found dead in the same dormitory Feb. 3. An arrest was made in the case Feb. 13, *The Washington Post* reports.

The death of Benjamin Varner, a 19-year-old from San Antonio, shocked the campus, which barely was beginning to recover from the first slaying. Gallaudet, located in Washington, D.C., is the nation's only university for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Eric Franklin Plunkett, who grew up in Portland and attended Oregon School for the Deaf

**FOOT PATROL
HOLDS NEW TRAINING**

The Rainbow Community Foot Patrol will train volunteers 2 p.m. Feb. 17 at Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, 2400 N.E. Broadway. The new patrol is seeking a minimum of 12 volunteers to help keep the community safe by their presence on Portland's streets.

Although the ultimate goal of the foot patrol is to cover all of downtown Portland, it will begin this spring around the bar district, on Stark Street at 12th Avenue, and Old Town/Chinatown. Patrolers, who will be easily identified by their bright jackets, will carry radios so they can alert police if they come across problems.

Co-chair Dana Rosenlund said she is working on an application for nonprofit status, designing a Web page and setting up an e-mail account to improve communication. Volunteers must be 18 years old and agree to a criminal background check.

For more information call
503-774-9085.



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Co-chair Dana Rosenlund says the Rainbow Community Foot Patrol will hit the streets this spring