

NATIONAL news

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Editors at several newspapers requested alternate versions of the Sept. 6-8 installments of the nationally syndicated comic strip "For Better or for Worse," which reintroduced a gay character who first appeared in 1993.

In the current story, a groom asks Lawrence—his childhood best friend—to be the best man at his wedding. The mother of the bride objects to his presence and says to her daughter, "But Deanna, this is a church!!"

The *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times* reported Sept. 4 that as of Aug. 29, editors at two dozen papers had requested alternate strips from syndicator United Media. These versions do not allude to Lawrence's sexual orientation.

Amy Lago of United Media said that such requests don't necessarily mean that the papers will run the alternate strips but that they are considering it. She would not disclose which publications had asked for the revisions.

"At a time when gay and lesbian issues and lives are part of the national dialogue, it defies reason that a newspaper would consider censoring a comic strip simply because it contains an openly gay character," the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation said in a statement. "Editors who want to close their eyes and pretend that gays and lesbians don't exist do a tremendous disservice both to their readership and to the integrity of their newspapers. Newspaper readers of all ages should be able to enjoy characters that reflect the diversity of their community."

AIDS Action announced Sept. 17 that Harriet C. Babbitt is taking the helm as the advocacy organization's next executive director, effective immediately.

Until recently, she served for three years as deputy administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development, which has a multi-billion-dollar annual budget. Prior to that, she served four years as U.S. ambassador to the Organization of American States.

"The face of HIV/AIDS in America has changed over its 20-year history," Babbitt said. "Youth and communities of color have become the most at-risk groups, showing increased numbers of new HIV infections."

U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., commented on Babbitt's appointment: "The domestic and global battle against AIDS is far from over. Hattie's experience, ability and commitment will be invaluable for AIDS Action in its ongoing leadership in this vitally important cause."

MASSACHUSETTS

Openly gay state Sen. Cheryl Jacques lost her bid to represent Massachusetts in the U.S. Congress, coming in a strong second in the special Democratic primary election Sept. 11 to fill the seat of the late Rep. Joe Moakley for the state's 9th Congressional District. Her main oppo-



Cheryl Jacques

nent, state Sen. Stephen Lynch, won with 40 percent of the vote.

CALIFORNIA

The California Senate endorsed a bill Sept. 10 to expand domestic partnership law. Assembly Bill 25 would extend to registered domestic partners basic legal protections that only married opposite-sex couples have under state law.

"The Senate's approval of this comprehensive measure is a real victory for couples and families throughout the state," said Jean Har-



ris, California Alliance for Pride and Equality executive director and former Basic Rights Oregon executive director. "AB 25 is a measure that endeavors to consider loving and committed relationships regardless of sex or age. They are as valuable and worth protecting equally under the law. This is a positive step in the right direction that truly strengthens our state and provides vision for the rest of the country."

The bill now goes back to the state Assembly for its concurrence to the Senate amendments, then to Gov. Gray Davis, who has acknowledged he supports AB 25. He has until Oct. 14 to sign the bill into law.

ARIZONA

Openly gay Tempe Mayor Neil Giuliano handily defeated his recall opponent with 68 percent of the vote in a record turnout of 31.5 percent for a special election Sept. 11.

"I'm glad that it's over," he said. "The recall was very wrong. Obviously, that's what the voters thought, too."

The recall began when the City Council and mayor's office tried to bar city employees from designating United Way contributions to the Boy Scouts of America, which bans gay men as leaders. Giuliano repeatedly said hate and bigotry fueled the effort.

"At its core, this drive to recall an excellent mayor was about prejudice, not principle," said Brian K. Bond, Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund executive director. "It was a not-so-thinly veiled attempt to remove an outstanding public servant from office because he is openly gay. I'm glad the voters of Tempe stood up to discrimination and retained this extremely competent mayor who is serving their city with distinction. This sends a strong message to all mayors that you can do the right thing and win." J

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



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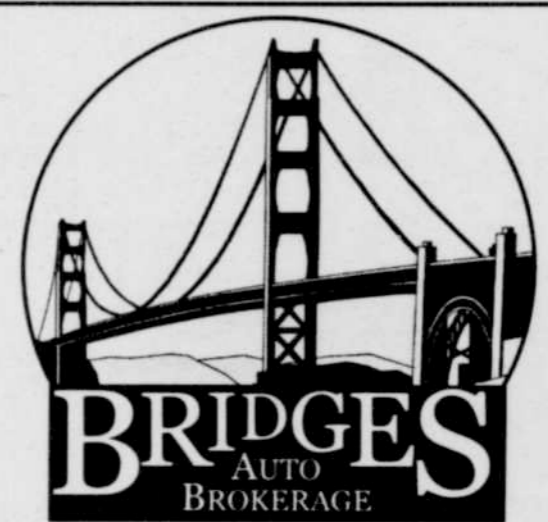
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