

NATIONAL news

"The application's questions regarding sexual orientation are a blatant violation of federal law," said Sharra E. Greer, SLDN legal director. "Apparently, Air Force Reserve officials are either unaware of, or simply do not care about, the 'don't ask' provision of the current policy. Either way, the questions should be removed immediately."

U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., introduced June 27 a resolution to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation in Senate offices. It has 41 co-sponsors—36 Democrats, one Independent and four Republicans—including Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith.

The measure, if passed, would add sexual orientation to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or state of physical handicap to the anti-discrimination section of the Senate's Standing Rules in Employment Practices. The amendment would allow employees who believe they were discriminated against based on their sexual orientation to seek recourse with the Senate Ethics Committee, which then could investigate a claim and recommend discipline for any Senate member, officer or employer found in violation.

A total of 13 Cabinet-level agencies, the General Accounting Office, the Office of Personnel Management and the White House have issued policy statements forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation. In addition, 68 senators—44 Democrats, 23 Republicans and one Independent—have written policies for their congressional offices indicating sexual orientation is not a factor in their employment decisions.

President Bush signed June 24 the Mychal Judge Act, providing a federal payment to the beneficiaries of public safety officers killed in the line of duty, including those killed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks without a surviving legally recognized spouse, son, daughter or parent.

Under current law, only spouses, children or parents of public safety officers who die in the line of duty are entitled to receive \$250,000 in death benefits. Beneficiaries named by fallen public safety officers—including siblings and same- or opposite-sex domestic partners—will be eligible to collect federal money.

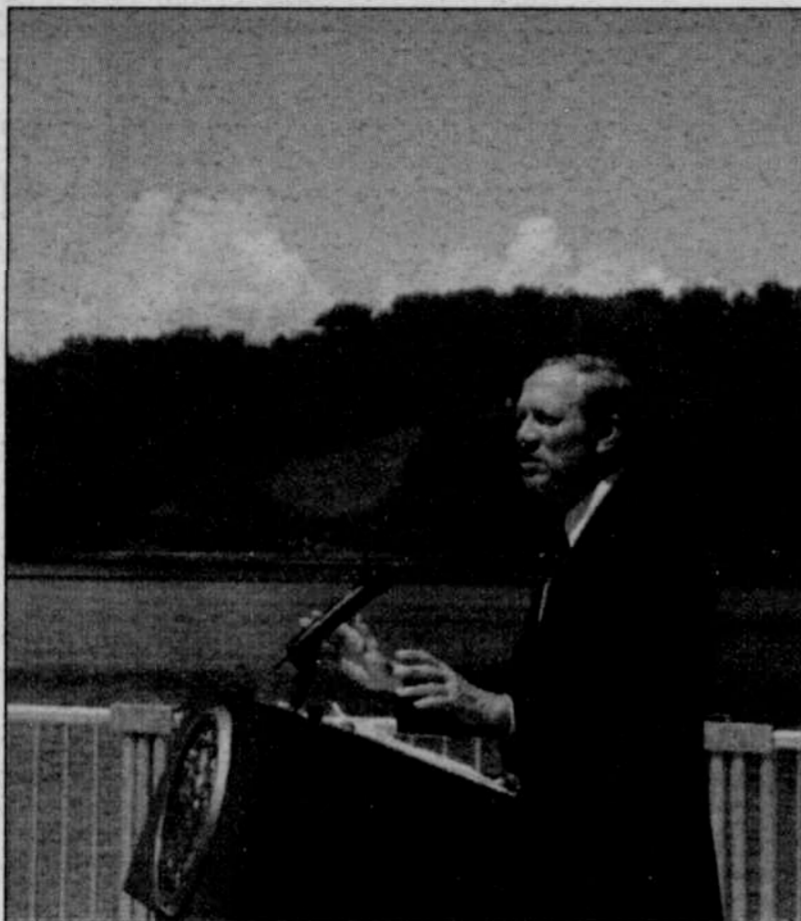
The act was named after the New York firefighter chaplain who was gay. It was sponsored by Reps. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., and Donald Manzullo, R-Ill., and Sens. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., and Joseph Biden, D-Del.

NEW YORK

The state Legislature granted June 25 domestic partners of Sept. 11 victims, including same-sex partners, the same death benefits that are provided to spouses under the state workers' compensation law. Gov. George E. Pataki is expected to sign the measure.

This step taken in the closing days of the 2002 legislative session represents a continuation of New York's efforts to provide equitable treatment. It also should provide an additional basis in state law for Special Master Kenneth Feinberg to rule favorably on applications from gay and lesbian survivors for federal fund compensation.

"We are glad the Legislature took this action on behalf of Sept. 11 domestic partner survivors," said Ross Levi, Empire State Pride Agenda legislative counsel. "We do feel, howev-



New York Gov. George E. Pataki is expected to sign a measure extending workers' comp death benefits to same-sex partners of Sept. 11 victims

er, that our elected representatives could have shown even greater leadership and made this permanent for all domestic partners."

The amount of payment from workers' compensation depends on the victim's salary. In New York the payment can be as high as \$20,800 a year to the surviving partner of the victim and is provided in perpetuity.

Last month the Legislature passed bills making victims' domestic partners and children eligible for the state's World Trade Center memorial scholarship program. Pataki also is expected to sign this measure.

FLORIDA

The National Center for Lesbian Rights filed suit June 19 on behalf of a Tampa student against the Hillsborough County School District for enforcing an illegal policy that prevented her senior portrait from appearing in the yearbook alongside those of her classmates. Attorneys allege violations of state and federal sex discrimination laws as well as constitutional rights to free expression and equal protection.

Robinson High still clings to a decades-old rule requiring all girls to wear a scoop neck drape for their senior portraits while letting boys wear a white shirt and tie of their choosing. The school refused to create an exception for Nikki Youngblood, who voiced her objection to being forced to wear frilly, stereotypically "feminine" attire.

"I don't understand why this is such a big deal to them," she said. "This is how I dressed in school every day. I even wore a tuxedo to a school dance. This is 2002, not 1802."

Youngblood hasn't worn a skirt or dress since elementary school and dresses in what typically would be considered unisex or male clothing. Still, Robinson vice principal David Fyfe informed her mother that her only other option was to buy an advertisement and pay for her own sitting, then her picture could appear—not with the other graduating seniors but in the back of the yearbook.

As a result of the school's discriminatory policy, the space that Youngblood's portrait would have occupied was blank. To add insult to injury, her name was not even listed in the index among the graduating seniors. [C]

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



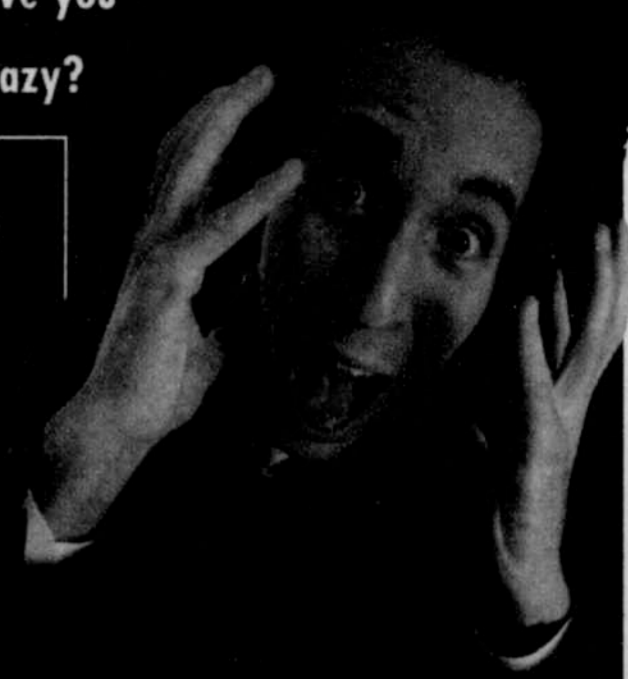
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