

CALIFORNIA

Despite a shortage of qualified Arabic linguists in the intelligence and defense fields, the Army has fired a significant number of language specialists trained at the military's Defense Language Institute in Monterey because they are gay.

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network has assisted in the cases of seven Arabic speakers trained at the institute, including Pfc. Patricia Ramirez, who recently came out in a letter to her command. Officials originally informed her in writing that, despite her sexual orientation, she was being retained in the Army and should continue to report for duty.

Within weeks of that announcement, however, SLDN learned that the command apparently had reopened Ramirez's case and illegally was questioning servicemembers on base to obtain information about homosexual conduct. Additional servicemembers at the institute reportedly were threatened with disciplinary action if they did not cooperate with the renewed investigation.

Shortly thereafter, Ramirez was informed that, despite the institute's earlier promises to allow her career to continue, she was being fired under the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. She indicated to her command that, if the Army would allow openly gay, lesbian and bi personnel to serve without prejudice, she would be happy to continue serving.

"The command at DLI should have closed this case when it told Pfc. Ramirez to continue with her career," said C. Dixon Osburn, SLDN executive director. "Brave, patriotic Americans should not be fired in the name of federally sanctioned discrimination. That is blatantly un-American."

Officials within the intelligence communities have spoken publicly about the impact a shortage of Arabic linguists has had on the nation's fight against terrorism. A recent report from the House of Representatives noted "a significant shortfall in linguists. After the [Sept. 11, 2001] attacks, this shortfall actually increased slightly. A long-term linguist and analyst hiring strategy is required."

NEW YORK

Last month the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force joined a New York coalition of organizations in condemning the racist drag performances of Chuck Knipp, a gay white man who performs in blackface as the drag queen persona "Shirley Q. Liquor."

His act caricatures an impoverished black woman and draws from a number of stereotypes about African Americans. Shirley speaks pidgin English, spends her days waiting for government checks to arrive in the mail and has dozens of children (some named after venereal diseases), the fathers of whom are unknown to her.

In addition to Knipp's performances at entertainment venues across the United States, the Shirley Q. Liquor personality also is aired on radio stations, and merchandise is sold online at Cafe-Shops.com, where she greets visitors with: "Hello, baby! How you durrin?"



Chuck Knipp performs in blackface as the drag queen persona "Shirley Q. Liquor"

Welcome to my boutique of ignunce...please do not shoplift while you is up in here!"

About 50 activists protested Knipp's performance Sept. 13 at The View in New York. When police arrived, they shut down the gay bar and threatened demonstrators with arrest.

Black drag performer RuPaul Charles defended Knipp and criticized the protesters in a Nov. 3 letter posted on his Web site: "If I had sensed any malicious intent in his comedy routine, I would not be able to laugh at it.... Not unlike the school bully who picks on the smallest kid to create fear and gain control of the playground, these power mongers have pulled out the race card to instigate panic and incite fear to achieve their goal."



Atheist Christopher Arntzen "comes out" Nov. 2 during the Godless Americans March on Washington

NATIONAL

About 2,400 atheists and humanists from more than 200 organizations joined together Nov. 2 for the Godless Americans March on Washington, the first national civil rights march by and for freethinkers. The show of unity and diversity at the event was a historic step in building the movement for nonbelievers.

A speech by Christopher Arntzen, Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists chairman, received an enthusiastic response from the crowd. He noted that one in seven U.S. citizens are nonreligious.

"It is time to come out of the closet," Arntzen said. "What difference will it make if we are 14 percent of the population...if we are silent and invisible?"

ILLINOIS

The Chicago City Council voted Nov. 6 to add explicit coverage for trans people to local anti-discrimination laws. Mayor Richard Daley has expressed his support for the measure and is expected to sign it.

The effort to pass the bill was led by Illinois Gender Advocates. The council's Human Relations Commission OK'd the amendment unanimously Oct. 31.

The bill adds "a person's gender identity, appearance or behavior" to Chicago's Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances, which cover employment, housing and public accommodations. Sexual orientation was added to the law in 1988.

With Daley's signature, Chicago will become the 12th jurisdiction in 2002 to pass a law adding explicit gender identity and/or expression protections to a local anti-discrimination law. This will bring the U.S. total to 51 jurisdictions, including 42 cities, seven counties and the states of Rhode Island and Minnesota. **J**

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

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