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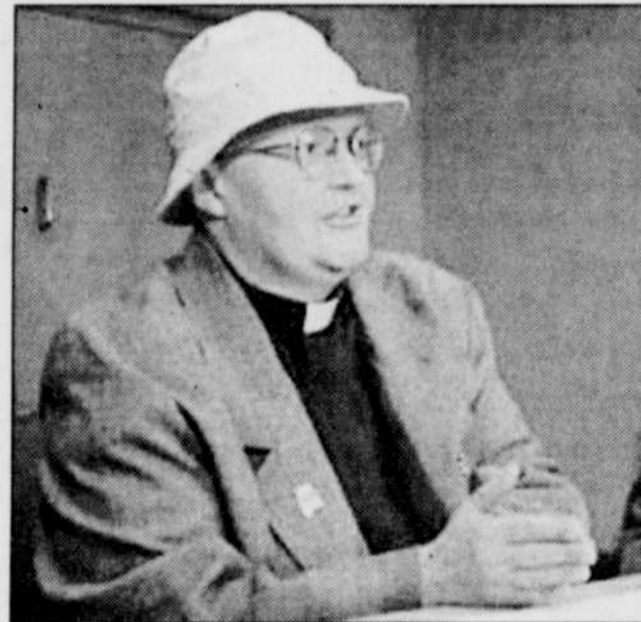
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NATIONAL news



The Rev. Felicia Fontaine addresses hate speech and crimes against gay men and lesbians during a news conference Feb. 19

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ALABAMA

The leader of Soulforce Alabama met unexpectedly with Chief Justice Roy Moore on Feb. 19 at the State Supreme Courthouse in Montgomery.

The Rev. Felicia Fontaine entered the building with three other people and asked to meet with Moore regarding his views and rhetoric about homosexuality after two previously mailed requests had gone unanswered. He arranged to speak with her immediately.

The four activists entered the courthouse on the first anniversary of Moore's special concurrence in a case involving custody of children by a lesbian mother. He laid out an extensive legal philosophy on homosexuality that used biblical citations to justify legal persecution of queers, stating, "The lifestyle should never be tolerated."

According to Fontaine, the meeting was cordial and most of the discussion was of a personal nature. Moore explained that he was required to uphold the Alabama Code and that if the law changed, then he would be bound to follow it.

"I don't believe his views changed in that one meeting, but it opened the door for further dialogue," Fontaine said. "People don't think Roy Moore can change, but no one ever thought George Wallace would change either, and he did!"

MASSACHUSETTS

The landmark case seeking the right of gay and lesbian couples to marry in Massachusetts was heard March 4 before the full bench of the state's Supreme Judicial Court. A decision is likely sometime this summer.

Filed in April 2001 by New England's Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders, Godridge et al. vs. Department of Public Health involves seven plaintiff couples who seek the right to civil marriage. GLAD is the same legal firm that helped win a victory in 1999's Baker vs. State of Vermont, a ruling that led the Legislature to create the nation's first-ever civil unions law.

The suit argues that the right to marry the person of one's choice is protected under the Massachusetts Constitution. GLAD's brief further argues that the state cannot justify excluding gay and lesbian couples and their families from the hundreds of protections marriage provides.

The seven couples have been in committed relationships between seven and 32 years. Four of the couples are raising children; others have faced health dilemmas.

All are concerned about providing security for one another and their families, but they lack the automatic extensive protections available through marriage. Each couple was denied a marriage license by local officials.

PENNSYLVANIA

The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania praised Temple and Drexel universities Feb. 14 for deciding to provide domestic partnership benefits to their gay and lesbian workers and urged other employers to follow their leadership.

"Thanks to Temple and Drexel universities, this will truly be a happy Valentine's Day for many same-sex couples," legislative director Larry Frankel said. "The ACLU expects that business and community leaders as well as fair-minded legislators and Gov. [Edward G.] Rendell will support these schools for doing the right thing."

In Pennsylvania, the ACLU has been extensively involved in efforts to obtain domestic partnership benefits for gay men and lesbians. It participated in the effort that led to the enactment of domestic partnership laws in Philadelphia, is helping defend those laws in a case before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and is battling University of Pittsburgh in an ongoing lawsuit aimed at securing domestic partnership benefits for its employees.



Tom Tunney is Chicago's first gay alderman

ILLINOIS

In a historic move, voters in Chicago's 44th Ward elected restaurateur Tom Tunney as the city's first gay alderman Feb. 25. In January he was appointed by Mayor Richard M. Daley to finish the term of Bernie Hansen, who resigned for health reasons.

"Times have changed in Chicago," said Bob Kearney, Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund political director. "Until yesterday, Chicago was the largest city in America to have never elected a gay person to its council."

The six-way race included another gay candidate, neighborhood activist and attorney Rick Ingram. Tunney received about 5,000 votes, and Ingram received about 2,000 votes.

"We are thrilled that the two gay men came in first and second out of the six candidates," said Rick Garcia, Equality Illinois political director. "That tells us that gay candidates are more than just viable on the lakefront. This bodes well for our political future in Chicago."

COLORADO

Paul Rosenthal is running for election to the 4th District seat on the Denver City Council. His election would be a historic victory for the city, making him its first gay council member. Jennifer Viega, minority leader of the Colorado House, is the state's only gay elected official.

Rosenthal is a visible force within Denver's gay community and the Colorado Democratic Party.

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