

NATIONAL news



Matt Foreman is taking the reins at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

NEW YORK

Matt Foreman, Empire State Pride Agenda executive director, was named April 4 as executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The longtime activist will take the helm from Lorri L. Jean after her contract expires in May and after they have worked together for two weeks to facilitate a smooth transition.

"We interviewed a diverse pool of very strong candidates and felt Matt was exactly what the task force needed. We're thrilled he'll be joining us," said Margaret Burd, NGLTF board co-chairwoman. "He is a dynamic activist, a proven manager and an effective fund-raiser who is supremely dedicated to our cause and has enjoyed extraordinary success working on behalf of GLBT people."

Foreman lives with his partner of 13 years, Francisco De Leon, in Manhattan.

COLORADO

The House passed an amendment April 1 to repeal discrimination protections in Medicaid and emergency medical care from state law.

Senate Bill 88 came up for consideration as part of an annual review of state regulations. If passed, it would repeal a rule prohibiting discrimination based on age, sex, religion, race, sexual orientation, political belief, physical diagnosis, handicap or disability in Medicaid and emergency medical services. The amendment now goes to the state Senate for debate.

The bill would be particularly dangerous for members of the sexual minorities community, who often have to face barriers of discrimina-



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tion in dealing with health care providers. Fewer than half of queer adults disclose their sexual orientation to their health provider, according to a December 2002 survey. The poll also indicated gay, lesbian, bi and trans people are less likely to have health insurance than their straight counterparts.

"People who work in public health departments are very dedicated to improving the health of all persons, and they know it makes sense for people to be treated equally," said Ken Haller, Gay and Lesbian Medical Association president. "For certain legislators to pull back these protections is at very least questionable and, at most, blatantly discriminatory, not to mention just bad medicine."

NATIONAL

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network has demanded clarification of comments published April 7 from the U.S. education secretary suggesting that public schools should incorporate Christian values. The statements appeared in an article titled "Rod Paige: America's Education Evangelist" in *The Baptist Press*, the news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.

According to GLSEN executive director Kevin Jennings, Paige's comments appear not only in direct conflict with core U.S. principles separating church and state but are offensive to the administrators, educators and students of diverse religious faiths who fill U.S. public schools.

"The language of religious values—particularly 'Christian values'—has often been misused to isolate or denigrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people," he said. "For Secretary Paige to suggest that the tenets of any particular religion have a place in public education is an exceedingly dangerous breach of the constitutional separation of church and state and of tremendous concern for safe schools advocates who seek to protect LGBT students and staff from harassment, violence and discrimination in schools."

In the article, Paige asserted that Christian schools and universities are growing as a result of a "strong value system" that is lacking in public schools where "there are so many kids with different kinds of values." He offered his prayers to those who disagree with his position that religion has a place in U.S. public schools.

Bob Chase, National Education Association past president and GLSEN board member, expressed deep concern, noting: "As the highest education official in this nation, he must learn to see diversity as an incredibly rich resource for thought and ideas. The values of hard work, respect and responsibility—values taught every day in America's public schools—transcend any singular set of religious beliefs."

VIRGINIA

Virginia Tech's board of visitors reversed itself at a meeting April 6 and restored sexual orientation to the university's nondiscrimination policy.

The board voted March 10 to remove sexual orientation because, it said, federal and state laws offer no protections based on sexual orientation. The move generated tremendous outcry from students and civil rights groups.

The board dropped sexual orientation from the school's nondiscrimination policy in an attempt to ward off potential lawsuits, according to *The Collegiate Times*, the school's newspaper. However, a university spokesman suggested the changes were based more on personal political agendas of board members than legal fact.

At least 383 colleges and universities across the nation have written nondiscrimination policies covering sexual orientation, including 11 in Virginia.



Sharon Smith



Diane Whipple

CALIFORNIA

Here is an update on the state's pro-gay legislation:

- Assembly Bill 205 successfully passed its first committee hearing April 1. It would provide registered domestic partners and their families nearly all the rights and responsibilities available to married couples under state law, including child custody and child support obligations, community property, mutual responsibility for debt and the ability to make funeral arrangements.

Witnesses speaking on behalf of the bill included Lydia Ramos, who movingly shared the horrifying circumstances she faced after the death of her partner last year, including a court battle for custody of her daughter. Also present were Sharon Smith, who fought for the right to sue for wrongful death after her partner, Diane Whipple, was killed in an infamous San Francisco dog-mauling case, as well as Keith Bradkowski, who experienced numerous legal problems after his partner was killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The bill passed on a party-line vote. Every Democrat on the committee voted in favor of it, with the exception of Hannah-Beth Jackson of Santa Barbara, who abstained.

- The Judiciary Committee approved Assembly Bill 17 by a 10-2 vote April 1. It would prohibit state agencies from contracting with businesses that discriminate in providing benefits to their employees with spouses or domestic partners. The bill will be heard in the Appropriations Committee next month.

To address the concerns of religious-based organizations, the measure includes a provision allowing employers to provide equal benefits without asking employees' marital or domestic partnership status. For employers who have religious objections to domestic partnership, benefits can be provided to "a legally domiciled member of the employee's household."

- The Human Services Committee passed Assembly Bill 458 on a party-line vote of 4-2 April 8. It would protect foster youth, foster parents, other foster household members and foster agency staff from discriminatory treatment and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity and HIV/AIDS status. In addition, it requires foster parents and other caregivers to receive training on the nondiscrimination requirements. It now will go to the Appropriations Committee.

- The Appropriations Committee passed a historic civil rights measure April 2 that would prohibit housing and workplace discrimination based on gender stereotyping. Assembly Bill 196 now goes to the floor for a vote.

The legislation needed 13 votes to pass the committee. All eight Republicans voted against it, and 17 Democrats voted for it, with one Democrat, Lou Correa of Santa Ana, voting no. **J**

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

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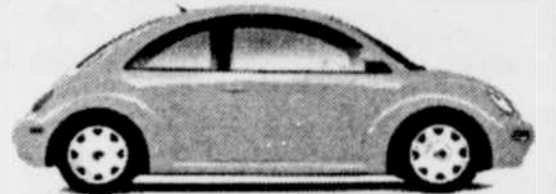
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