

NATIONAL news

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NATIONAL

The U.N. Commission on Human Rights has postponed a vote on a "Human Rights and Sexual Orientation" resolution that expressed deep concern at the widespread abuses around the globe and called upon all nations to protect the human rights of everyone.

"We are very disappointed that the Commission on Human Rights has chosen to postpone action that affirms the basic human rights of the world's gay, lesbian and bisexual population, who along with the transgender community are routinely subjected to discrimination and inhumane treatment," said Elizabeth Birch, Human Rights Campaign executive director. "Lasting global peace begins with basic human rights for all the world's citizens."

A consortium of nations led by Pakistan attempted April 24 to block consideration of the resolution. In a 24-22 vote, the United States supported its consideration. Although the commission adjourned before the resolution could be voted on, reports indicated that the Bush administration would have abstained from voting, indicating that other language, not necessarily linked to sexual orientation, was problematic.

HRC sent letters to Secretary of State Colin Powell and Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and current head of the U.S. delegation to the commission, urging them to support the resolution. "We are troubled by reports that the U.S. would choose to abstain from voting on a resolution that would protect the civil and human rights of the world's gay community," Birch said.

Several recent media reports suggest the military's shortage of linguists, especially those trained in Arabic, is having a significant effect on operations in Iraq. Despite such accounts, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network reports that military leaders are continuing to discharge trained Arabic speakers who are gay, lesbian and bi.

The watchdog group has provided assistance to 24 linguists targeted under "don't ask, don't tell." Nine of those people have been trained in Arabic. Eight were Korean language specialists, and three were trained to speak Farsi. SLDN also has provided assistance to two Chinese and two Russian linguists.

"Soldiers and Marines throughout Iraq are supposed to befriend civilians even as they battle the remnants of Saddam Hussein's army," *The New York Times* reported April 13. "One problem is that few Iraqis speak English and even fewer Americans speak Arabic."

The effect of the linguist shortage is further highlighted in the April 21 issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, which includes the story of a Marine sniper working at a checkpoint in Iraq who "wishes there were a translator team on the ground or some way to warn civilians approaching the Marines' positions."

Several newspaper editorial boards recently have called for an end to "don't ask, don't tell" discharges, including *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* and *The New York Daily News*. "The military cannot afford to brand as unfit for service," *The Washington Post* wrote April 16, "qualified men and women who wish to put their talents—



Jeane Kirkpatrick has been urged to support a U.N. resolution affirming the human rights of queers worldwide

whether those lie in combat roles or languages—in the service of their country."

The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association decried April 21 trends in government research funding agencies to censor language that refers to queer health or sexual practices.

"According to our sources, e-mails to the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are being screened for sensitive keywords such as 'commercial sex workers,' 'needle exchange,' 'men having sex with men,' 'prostitutes,' 'transgender' and 'harm reduction,' and some program staff have been reprimanded for 'inappropriate language,'" President Kenneth Haller said. "In addition, titles and abstracts of NIH grants are being screened for similar keywords."

According to Haller, the driving force behind these inquiries lies outside these agencies. "There have apparently been cases of NIH and CDC officials being approached by congressional staffers who asked why certain grants were funded as well as cases in which specific NIH grants that involved commercial sex workers or transgendered persons were targeted with the apparent intent of proving that these studies are promoting 'unfavorable' or 'unsafe' lifestyles with federal taxpayers' dollars."

The Centers for Disease Control unveiled an initiative April 17 designed to increase HIV/AIDS testing. Officials are recommending that routine testing be offered at more health care settings and through utilization of a recently approved rapid HIV/AIDS test.

The Human Rights Campaign lauded the strategy but asserted that increased testing needs to be accompanied by the appropriate counseling and should be a part of a larger, more comprehensive program. According to political director Winnie Stachelberg, any meaningful effort to combat

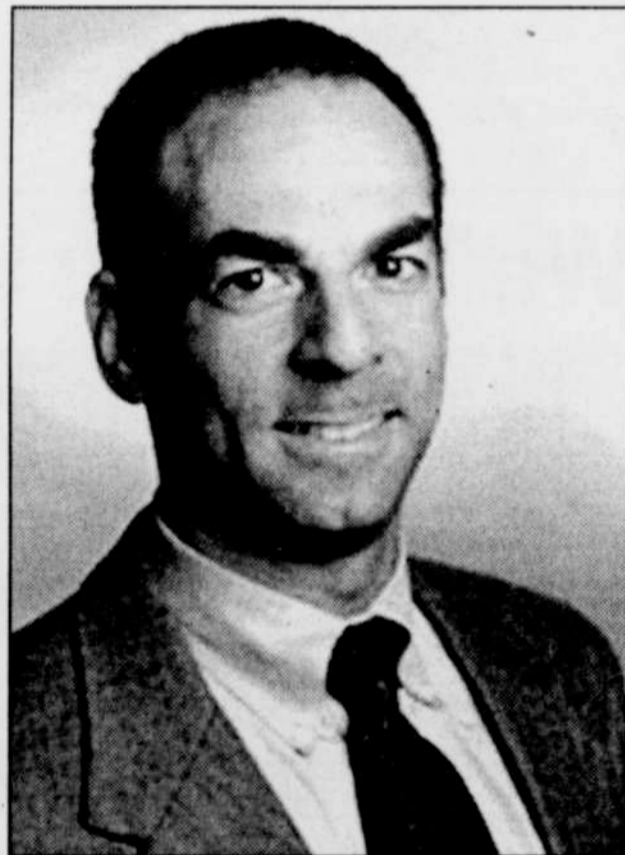
the epidemic must include a comprehensive prevention plan that includes safe-sex education along with testing and care for those infected.

"The CDC has taken an important step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS by working to make more Americans aware of their HIV status. Individuals who do not know that they are infected cannot seek proper treatment and are at risk for spreading the disease further," Stachelberg said. "We maintain that HIV/AIDS testing should be accompanied by the appropriate counseling, both before and after diagnosis, as stigma and fear surrounding the disease can be terrifying to patients."

Meanwhile, Gay Men's Health Crisis has grave concerns that the plan contains no provisions for increased funding of CDC activities. As a result, executive director Ana Oliveira believes, resources will be diverted from crucial community-based health education, risk reduction and behavioral interventions.

"This proposal relies on a health care system that historically has not reached those communities that are most at-risk and most underserved, particularly communities of color," she said. "This type of policy isolates those most at risk from the information they need to make an informed decision about testing and protecting themselves."

According to the CDC, the United States has roughly 40,000 new HIV infections each year, with about 900,000 people already living with the disease. Of those, an estimated 200,000 are unaware they are infected.



Attorney Adam Aronson called the Nassau County Supreme Court decision "a breakthrough ruling"

NEW YORK

A gay man in New York is a legal spouse and able to sue St. Vincent's Hospital for medical negligence leading to his longtime partner's death, a New York court ruled April 14. Lambda Legal said the decision is the first in the nation appropriately recognizing people who have a Vermont civil union as spouses outside Vermont.

In 2000, Vermont enacted its Civil Union Law to extend the state benefits and responsibilities of marriage to same-sex couples. No state in the nation allows gay and lesbian couples to marry.

Nassau County Supreme Court Justice John P. Dunne noted that "common law" spouses from other states are regularly recognized as spouses in New York and said, "It is impossible to justify, under equal protection principles, withholding the same recognition from a union which meets all the requirements of a marriage in New York but for the sexual



Ana Oliveira