

NATIONAL news

measures—including six constitutional amendments—died in the Legislature earlier last month. However, this amendment was added to another bill, dodging the regular legislative process.

The amendment was offered by state Sen. James Williamson, R-Tulsa. The Senate passed it April 15 by a 38-7 vote. It passed in the House by a 94-4 vote.

"It is a sad day for Oklahoma when our Legislature votes to mandate discrimination in our state constitution," said Kevin Smith, lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma.

KENTUCKY

The Legislature passed a discriminatory anti-marriage constitutional amendment April 12. It will appear on the November ballot.

After passing the Senate, the amendment failed to get enough votes in the House. However, amendment backers were able to revive the measure and, on its second vote, it passed.

"This amendment will hurt real people who are a part of every community in this state," said Andrea Hildebran, Kentucky Fairness Alliance executive director. "When voters understand how much harm this will do to their own family members, their neighbors, friends and co-workers, they will vote against this in November."

MISSISSIPPI

The Senate passed a discriminatory anti-marriage constitutional amendment April 7 after passing the House in March.

Equality Mississippi will continue to work on educating voters about why they should vote against the measure in November. "We hope that the people of Mississippi will send a strong message to the state Legislature and Gov. Haley Barbour that Mississippi will not return to a past of scorn and discrimination," executive director Jody Renaldo said.

NEW YORK

Anti-gay groups are asking a Manhattan court to let them intervene in a lawsuit filed in March by five same-sex couples seeking the right to marry in New York, Lambda Legal said April 20.

In legal papers asking to become a party in the case, the anti-gay groups claim they would be harmed if same-sex couples are allowed to marry in New York—claims Lambda said have been rejected by courts in other states, including New Jersey, California and Florida. The groups include the Liberty Counsel of Longwood, Fla.; American Family Association Center for Law & Policy of Tupelo, Miss.; Thomas More Law Center of Ann Arbor, Mich.; New York Family Policy Council; and Michael Long, Conservative Party of New York chairman.

"These anti-gay groups cannot show that they will be harmed in any way if same-sex couples are allowed to marry. Allowing our clients and other New York couples to marry and protect their families does nothing to hurt the marriages of their heterosexual neighbors," attorney Susan Sommer said. "The real harm here is to loving same-sex couples who are being denied marriage, and that's what our lawsuit seeks to fix."

PENNSYLVANIA

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation blasted the White House's double standard on constitutional freedoms after Vice President Dick Cheney delivered the keynote address at the National Rifle Association's annual meeting April 17 in Pittsburgh.



Vice President Dick Cheney accepts a rifle from National Rifle Association president Kayne Robinson (right) and vice president Wayne R. LaPierre after concluding his keynote address April 17 in Pittsburgh

"As the administration appears to support the Second Amendment on the one hand, it is attempting to deface the Constitution by promoting an anti-gay Federal Marriage Amendment on the other hand, forever enshrining second-class citizen status for LGBT people," said John Sonego, GLAAD's director of programs and communications. "Gun owners should not take comfort in this administration's casual treatment of the U.S. Constitution."

According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 11,348 U.S. citizens were killed and 45,316 were injured by firearms in 2001 alone. Acting executive director Clarence Patton called guns "America's true weapons of mass destruction," noting that they are increasingly used in anti-gay hate crimes.

"The NRA lives in political and social vacuum," said Andres Duque, director of Mano a Mano, a network of Latino queer organizations and activists based in New York. "They refuse to recognize that advocating the removal of a ban on assault weapons in this country does enormous damage to vulnerable populations, particularly in urban environments where many Latinos live and work. [Cheney's speech] sends a very clear message to those that would suffer under the policies that the NRA advocates that this administration does not care about us or the issues that daily affect our lives."

NATIONAL

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force joined more than 1 million people from around the world at the March for Women's Lives on April 25 in Washington, D.C.

Deputy executive director Rea Carey fired up the crowd during a pre-march morning rally: "We will march today because the enemies of reproductive freedom are the same enemies of

equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The forces of intolerance have passed into law the so-called 'partial birth abortion' ban. Now, for the first time in history, these same elected officials are using an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to exclude gay and lesbian Americans from the promise of equality—from the ability to get married."

NGLTF staff, board members and volunteers walked side by side with other pro-choice supporters through the streets of D.C., past the front of the White House and back down to the National Mall.

"For nearly 30 years, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has considered reproductive freedom a 'gay' issue," executive director Matt Foreman said. "Today, that reality is more evident than ever before, as is the necessity that we join together."

MICHIGAN

The Republican-controlled House passed a measure April 22 that would allow doctors to refuse to treat gay, lesbian, bi and trans patients. The Conscientious Objector Policy Act provides that health care workers can refuse service to anyone for moral, ethical or religious reasons, although it would prohibit the refusal of emergency care.

The bill was strongly supported by the Michigan Catholic Conference, a conservative religious organization. It now goes to the Republican-controlled Senate, according to 365Gay.com.

In addition, three other bills that may affect health care for queer patients were approved April 22 by the House. One would exempt a health insurer or health facility from providing or covering a health care procedure that violated ethical, moral or religious principles reflected in their bylaws or mission statement.

Vocal opponents of the measure included state Rep. Chris Kolb, the first openly gay legislator in Michigan. "Are you telling me that a health care provider can deny me medical treatment because of my sexual orientation? I hope not."

The Mautner Project, the nation's leading lesbian health organization, called the act discriminatory, dangerous and morally repugnant.

"A core belief held by doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists and other health care professionals is to 'first do no harm,'" executive director Kathleen DeBold said. "And nothing could be more harmful to someone who is ill than denying them care.... By codifying discrimination in health care, this measure not only tramples the Hippocratic Oath that each physician is sworn to uphold, it puts this medically underserved population at even greater risk of serious illness—and worse." [M]

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



NGLTF deputy executive director Rea Carey fires up the crowd during the March for Women's Lives on April 25 in Washington, D.C.

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