

NATIONAL news

cover employees' pets but not their partners.

"Home Depot is finally putting its people first," said HRC president Cheryl Jacques after learning that the company put out a memo at close of business Sept. 1 announcing the change.

Earlier that day, HRC's WorkNet project revealed that Home Depot, based in Atlanta, was one of four Fortune 500 companies that offered pet insurance but not domestic partner health insurance despite published policies prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation—and one covering gender identity. The others are Sprint, based in Overland, Kan.; Waste Management of Houston; and Ecolab of St. Paul, Minn.

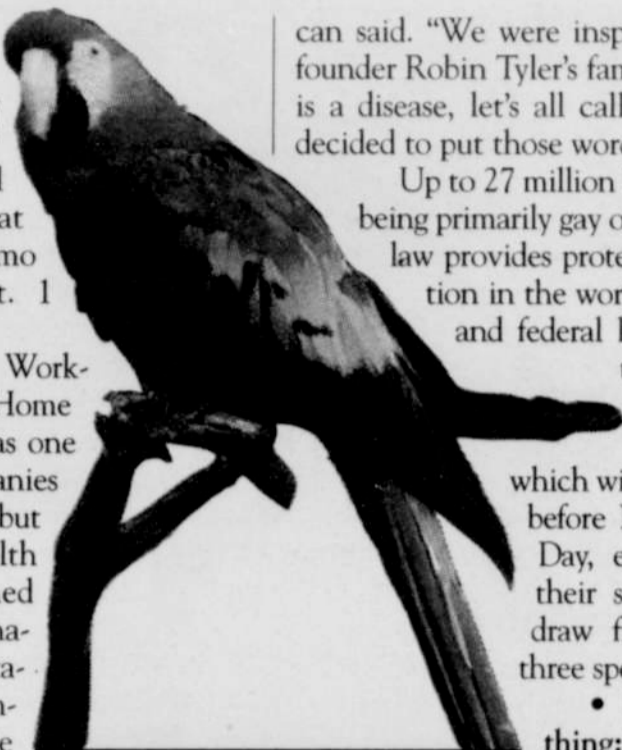
"Paying for a parrot's but not a person's hospital stay is absurd," Jacques said. "This is no joke. Employees deserve better from these companies."

Home Depot had been slated to earn a failing grade on WorkNet's Corporate Equality Index, to be released later this month. The addition of domestic partner health insurance benefits will raise its score to 71 percent, which is also Sprint's tentative score. Waste Management is slated to receive 43 percent; Ecolab will not be scored because the company never replied to the HRC questionnaire. The index measures how equitably companies treat their queer employees, consumers and investors.

"The only thing keeping Home Depot from a perfect score is its lack of a nondiscrimination policy covering gender identity," said Kim I. Mills, HRC education director. "We will continue to work with the company to ensure all its employees get equal treatment."

A nationwide economic "walkout" will be held Oct. 8 to highlight the economic impact of the U.S. sexual minority population, which spends an average of \$1.4 billion each day. The Boycott for Equality is designed to highlight the contribution that queers make to the domestic economy and tax base while being denied the full legal protections and civil liberties afforded heterosexual citizens.

"We want to remind those in our nation who don't always see the impact of our community in terms of dollars and cents that we do have real market power," boycott co-founder Dale Dun-



Some Fortune 500 companies offer insurance for employees' parrots, but not for their domestic partners

can said. "We were inspired by Don't Amend founder Robin Tyler's famous quip, 'If being gay is a disease, let's all call in sick to work' and decided to put those words into action."

Up to 27 million U.S. citizens identify as being primarily gay or lesbian, yet no federal law provides protection from discrimination in the workplace, and many state and federal laws prohibit access to the rights and responsibilities of marriage. The boycott, which will be held on the Friday before National Coming Out Day, encourages queers and their straight allies to withdraw from the economy in three specific areas:

- **Don't purchase anything:** Do not generate sales tax or business revenue.
- **Don't work:** Take the day off. Do not generate payroll taxes or income taxes or add to the economy.
- **Don't use cell phones:** Dropping out of the communication network is a way to measure the impact of your presence.

CONNECTICUT

Seven gay and lesbian couples from across Connecticut who were recently denied marriage licenses in Madison filed suit Aug. 25 in New Haven Superior Court challenging the state's discriminatory denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples. The plaintiff couples, who have been in committed relationships for between 10 and 28 years, many of them raising children, contend that only marriage will provide them with the protections and benefits they need to live securely as a family.

"This case presents a historic opportunity for Connecticut," said Mary Bonauto, Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders civil rights director. "Marriage is both a profound personal commitment and unique legal relationship that provides enormous protections to families. As a simple matter of equality, it is time for Connecticut to end this discrimination against same-sex couples and their families."

GLAD represented plaintiff couples in the 2003 Massachusetts case that led to the first-in-the-nation ruling ordering the state to issue marriage licenses to same-sex residents beginning May 17. In addition, GLAD was counsel in the 1999 Vermont case that resulted in the Legislature granting civil unions to gay and lesbian couples, another historic outcome.

In the Connecticut case, five of the seven couples have young children; some have faced health issues and worry about being denied access to one other in times of crisis. While all the couples are concerned about receiving the full range of protections that only flow through marriage, many also believe that only marriage will convey the depth and commitment of their relationships to their families and the world at large. **JM**

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



Geraldine (left) and Suzanne Artis, parents of a 6-year-old and 4-year-old twins, are suing the state of Connecticut for the right to marry

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- 8/27, Fri. Scandals Manhunt Party
Scavenger hunt for interesting guys with prizes (no cover)
- 9/3, Fri. CC Slaughter's Dancing/Find-A-Guy Party (no cover)
- 9/17, Fri. Boxxes/The Brigg 1984 Dance Party
Big Brother is Watching... & playing the Best 80s Music & "videoing" you & your friends. (\$2 donation)
- 10/1, Fri. CC Slaughter's Dancing/Find-A-Guy Party (no cover)
- 10/8, Fri. Boxxes/The Brigg 1984 Dance Party 2.0

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