



**Charles Merrill, a North Carolina artist and tax resister, enjoys a sunny day in Venice, Italy.**

organized and protested an anti-gay resolution in Rutherford County, N.C., which caught the attention of national media.

**FLORIDA**

**Florida Marriage Ban Effort Fails**

Florida4Marriage.org collected only 455,000 of the 611,009 petition signatures needed to place a marriage definition amendment on a statewide ballot this year, *The Orlando Sentinel* reported Feb. 3.

The effort was backed by the state Republican Party. Florida law already states that marriage is a contract between one man and one woman; the petition effort would have allowed voters to add discriminatory language to the state constitution.

"The Supreme Court has made it crystal clear that, when it comes to their sex lives, consenting adults are free to do whatever they please in private," said Joann Bell, executive director of the ACLU of Oklahoma. "According to the police report, [the Rev. Lonnie Latham] did nothing more than invite another man to his hotel room for con-

sensual sex. It is not a crime merely to invite someone to have completely lawful sex. If it were otherwise, every bar in the state may as well shut its doors."

Latham was arrested Jan. 3 on the misdemeanor charge of "Offering to Engage in an Act of Lewdness." According to the police report, he approached a male plainclothes police officer and invited the officer back to his hotel room for oral sex. It is not alleged that Latham offered money in exchange for the sex act.

Latham's arrest, which generated a significant amount of media attention, forced him to resign from his position as a board member of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

**IOWA**

**Lawsuit Seeks Marriage Equality**

Six gay and lesbian couples have filed suit for protection of their marriage rights in Iowa's first battle to bring gay marriage to the Midwest.

Polk County lawyers filed their first official response to the couples' lawsuit Feb. 6, a written "answer" that formally contests the couples' legal claims but takes no position on same-sex marriage, according to *The Des Moines Register*.


The lawsuit was brought by Lambda Legal and is probably six months away from a decision. The decision will certainly be appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court after that.

**VERMONT**

**Governor Doesn't Want to Revisit Gay Marriage Issue**

Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas said Feb. 6 he would oppose a bill introduced Feb. 1 in the House of Representatives that would extend full marriage rights to gay couples.

In 2000 Vermont was the first state to pass civil unions for same-sex couples. Douglas said he is not in favor of revisiting the issue.

"All of you remember the experience we had about five years ago here which was very, very divisive, and I don't want to go through that again. I think most Vermonters would say, as I would, that we ought to leave the law the way it is and not try to change it at this point," Douglas said, according to Gay365.com. 

Compiled by SARAH DOUGHER

NBC-KSL TV, UTAH



**A youth displays legislative trading cards designed by members of the Gay Straight Alliance during a meeting at the Utah Capitol.**

**UTAH**

**Bill Would Ban Gay Straight Alliances in Schools**

Republican state Sen. Chris Butters has introduced a bill to ban clubs that "involve human sexuality," with an intent to eliminate Gay Straight Alliances in schools throughout Utah, according to a report Feb. 3 in *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

The Utah Progressive Network held a mock GSA meeting Jan. 27 in the state Capitol cafeteria hoping to lure legislators. Three attended the student-led meeting.

A similar but more aggressive measure also might be introduced—that likely will require parental notification, including a possible parental rating system for clubs. GSA members said they will fight the legislation.

**OKLAHOMA**

**ACLU: Dismiss Soliciting Charges Against Baptist Minister**

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a friend-of-the-court brief Feb. 1 urging an Oklahoma court to dismiss charges against a Southern Baptist minister who was arrested for soliciting private sex with another male.

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