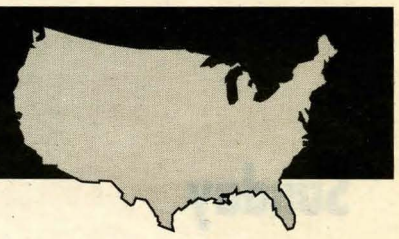
National News



High Court to decide on gays in Boston parade

WASHINGTON - The Supreme Court willdecide whether an Irish-American group representing gays, lesbians and bisexuals must be allowed to march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Boston. The group sued after the parade's organizers, the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council, excluded them in 1992 and 1993 parades.

A trial judge called the parade a recreational event open to the public and ruled that the gay and lesbian group cannot be excluded just because of its members' sexual orientation.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court agreed, holding that the parade's organizers had violated the state's public accomodation law which bars discrimination based on sexual orientation in public places.

The court said requiring the gay group to take part in the parade would not violate the First Amendment rights of the organizers.

The organizers appealed to the Supreme Court, saying they should not be forced in a privately organized parade to include a message they consider "unwanted and antithetical." Rather than "showcasing a message they deemed offensive," the organizers canceled the 1994 parade.

Last week, a Boston Superior Court upheld the parade organizers' right to bar gay groups from the parade.

An earlier decision by a federal judge in New York refused to require that gays be allowed to participate in that city's parade on St. Patrick's Day.

The Supreme Court will schedule oral arguments in the Boston case, with a decision due before June.

NGLTF names new executive director

WASHINGTON - The Board of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) has announced the appointment of San Francisco Health Commissioner Melinda Paras as the new executive director of the organization. Appointed to the San Francisco Health Commission in 1993 by Mayor Frank Jordan, Paras chairs the Budget Committee and serves on the Joint Conference for San Francisco General Hospital.

For the past four months, Paras has headed a transition team at NGLTF, assessing the organization's strengths, challenges and duties, and developing a plan for NGLTF's next two years. The NGLTF board established the transition team in response to the departure of several key staff people, the changing demands of NGLTF's constituents and the altered political atmosphere facing the gay and lesbian community.

NGLTF targets new Congress, radical right effort

WASHINGTON, DC -In an effort to counter the rising tide of anti-gay activity, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) is urging the gay and lesbian community to target Congressional representatives and pro-gay businesses to be sure that each appreciates and hears from gay and lesbian groups. After comments by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA) likening homosexuality to alcoholism, NGLTF believes that education is essential to prevent anti-gay activity in Congress.

NGLTF is also turning its attention to an American Family Association (AFA) effort to pressure businesses and media sympathetic to gay and lesbian civil rights. AFA has been extremely vocal and diligent in its attacks on AT&T's pro-gay company policies, public education and community involvement including the company's sponsorship of Gay Games 1994. The AFA is encouraging members and supporters to switch to Lifeline, a long distance carrier that pledges to donate 10% of its billing to groups opposing abortion and gay and lesbian civil rights. In addition, citing the "awesome power...of the homosexual community in Hollywood," in its November activist newsletter, the AFA recently launched a postcard campaign threatening a boycott of companies that sponsor television shows even mentioning homosexuality.

NGLTF is urging all members of the gay and lesbian community and its supporters to send comments to Newt Gingrich andtheir senators and representatives. Write: US House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515 and the US Senate, Washington, DC, 20510 - call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Or contact Congress through the toll-free number sponsored by the Traditional Values Coalition, a radical right group directed by homophobe Rev. Lou Sheldon. Created to encourage TVC members to swamp Congress with anti-gay comments, the number is 1-800-768-2221.

To show your support for AT&T's pro-gay policies, contact: CERC, 295 North Maple Ave. Basking Ridge, NJ, 07920. Encourage AFA targets to resist current pressure, contact: Michael Miles, Philip Morris Co., 120 Park Ave., NY, NY, 10017, Michael Quintan, McDonald's Corp., 1 Kroc Drive, Oak Brook, IL, 60521 or (708) 575-3000 and Alexander Trotman, Ford Motor Co., PO Box 1899, Dearborn, MI, 48121.

New AMA policy seeks greater understanding of gay patients

HONOLULU - Reversing a 13-yr.-old policy, the American Medical Association has urged doctors to seek a greater understanding of their gay and bisexual patients. In an AMA report, adopted earlier this month at Honolulu meeting of the house of delegates, the group's policy making body, also dropped the 13-year-old policy of encouraging programs to acquaint gay patients with "the possibility of sex preference reversal in selected cases."

Benjamin Schatz, executive director of the 1,600 member Gay and Lesbian Medical Association called the new policy an "admirable and "significant" change.

The decision was criticized as a "political maneuver" by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, secretary-treasurer of the National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, whose 380 members treat those who seek to change their sexual behavior.

Dr. M. Roy Schwartz, group vice president of the medical association and chairman of its AIDS task force, said the report's intent was to raise doctor's awareness of sexual orientation.

In a 1981 report, the AMA said some doctors may "harbor traditional anti-homosexual biases...The ethical course to follow is to explain one's dilemma openly to the patient and refer him to another phyisician."

Under the new policy, doctors are encouraged "to seek out local or national experts in the health care needs of gay men and lesbians so that all physicians will achieve a better understanding."

SF bans discrimination against transsexuals

SAN FRANCISCO - San Francisco Mayor Frank Jordan has signed into lawthe nation's toughest city ordinance barring discrimination against transsexuals and transvestites. It prohibits discrimination based on "gender identity" in employment and housing. Companies breaking the law could be banned from city contracts.

"San Francisco now joins the ranks of Minneapolis, Seattle and Santa Cruz (California) in taking steps to eliminate discrimination based on gender identity," Jordan said in a statement.

"If discrimination is tolerated against one group, it becomes acceptable against others and devalues the quality of life in any community," he said.

The measure was unanimously passed by San Francisco's governing Board of Supervisors on December 19 and adds "gender identity" to race, religion, color, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability and place of birth which are already protected from discrimination under city law.

The city law covers around 5,000 San Francisco residents, including transsexuals, whether or not they have had sex change surgery, and transvestites or cross-dressers.

Some transsexuals have complained that they have been fired from their jobs when they changed their sex.

Military board says lesbian officer should stay

SAN FRANCISCO - A military board of inquiryhas recommended that a Navy lieutenant who has publicly declared she is a lesbian should remain in the service.

The decision, handed down by the three-member Navy administrative board of inquiry, unanimously recommended that Lt. Zoe Dunning be retained.

"I feel fantastic," said Dunning following the board's announcement. "I was not expecting it. We know of no one who's won one of these hearings before."

Dunning's attorneys said the ruling was the first in favor of a homosexual soldier under President Clinton's controversial compromise "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Under the policy, personnel can no longer be asked about their sexual orientation but can be dismissed for openly acknowledging their homosexuality - unless they can prove they will not engage in prohibited homosexual sex.

Before closing the hearing, Captain Thomas Berns, president of the naval board of inquiry, said there was no evidence that Dunning engages in, intends to engage in, or is inclined to engage in homosexual activity.

Dunning announced she was a lesbian in January 1993 at a rally in support of gays in the military.

In July 1993, a Navy administrative board recommended Dunning be honorably discharged, an action based on the government's previous policy barring gays from the military.

A new board of inquiry was called to judge the Dunning case under the Clinton policy.

A graduate of the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., Dunning served on active duty for six years until September 1993 when she tranferred to the Naval Air Station Naval near San Francisco. Consistently praised by her superiors, she received notification earlier this month that she has been selected for a promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

The administration board's recommendation will go to the Bureau of Naval Personnel and then to the Secretary of the Navy.