

# Q Notes

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Now that the gay community has its own national historic landmark, New York's Stonewall Inn, do you believe that signals a higher acceptance of gays and lesbians as a "class" of people?

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## Civil unions advance in Vermont

by Dan Van Mourik  
Q-Notes Staff

MONTPELIER, VT—Civil unions legislation in Vermont was recently passed in two Senate committees, advancing the measure to the full Senate. But the bill received from the House was not simply rubber-stamped and the votes did not come as soon as expected.

The Senate Judiciary Committee held additional hearings and debated several issues before passing the bill 4-2. The legislation is in response to a court order stating that same-sex couples should be entitled to the same benefits as heterosexual couples.

The committee grappled with the issue of how to deal with out-of-state residents who might seek a civil union license and how that license would be viewed in their home states. Senators finally decided to delete any mention of that from the bill after concluding they couldn't accommodate each other's differences. That particular issue, however, may be revisited when the bill is debated by the full Senate.

"There's no way to avoid the fact that in the future there will be people going to court," said Sen. Richard McCormack (D-Windsor).

Immediately following the Judiciary vote, the Finance Committee voted 4-3 to recommend the bill, after reviewing tax implications.

The Senate version is quite similar to the version passed by the House. While gay and lesbian couples will be prohibited from marrying, they would be granted marriage benefits through parallel civil unions.

If passed, civil unions would confer on same-sex couples all the benefits that the state of Vermont controls, including tax breaks, hospital visitations, medical decision-making for a partner and inheritance rights. That does not include federal benefits granted through marriage,

including taxes, immigration and many insurance benefits.

The other major debate revolved around what to name the new legal structure. The House named the legal relationships "civil unions" in an effort to get away from the term domestic partnerships, which some gay couples objected to and others argued could be confused with narrower benefits. Senators retained the original name because it had taken on a dignified meaning and particularly liked the inclusion of "civil" in the title.

Sen. Richard Sears (D-Bennington), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the biggest difference between the House and Senate versions was the effective date. Under the Senate bill, provisions related to taxes and insurance would not take effect until next January. However, most other provisions of the bill would take effect July 1. Under the House bill, most provisions would not take effect until September 1.

The Senate bill also changed emphasis on certain provisions. Both bills start with a long list of findings. The first finding in the House bill refers to Vermont's history of independence and equal treatment and respect for all Vermonters. It also quotes the "common benefits clause" of the Vermont Constitution, which formed the basis of the court's ruling that same-sex couples were entitled to the same rights as opposite-sex couples.

The first finding in the Senate bill is a statement confirming that marriage under Vermont law is a union between a man and a woman. The second finding refers to Vermont's history of independence and the "common benefits clause."

The Senate was also scheduled to consider a  
*See VERMONT on page 17*

## ACLU files suit against state-funded religious group for firing lesbian

by Eric Ferrero  
Special to Q-Notes

LOUISVILLE, KY—In a first-of-its-kind case that may change the landscape of the national debate over whether religious groups that discriminate should receive taxpayer funds, the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State have filed a lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Kentucky and a publicly-funded religious organization that fired a lesbian employee.

For several weeks, the ACLU has been negotiating with the Commonwealth of Kentucky, which has been reexamining its contracts

with Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children because of the organization's religious policy against hiring gay men and lesbians. Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children received \$13 million of its total \$19 million budget last year from the state.

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with Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children because of the organization's religious policy against hiring gay men and lesbians. Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children received \$13 million of its total \$19 million budget last year from the state.

"Both the state and Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children must be held accountable," said Jeff Vessels, executive director of the ACLU of Kentucky. "Most citizens do not want their tax dollars used to discriminate, which is what is happening here."

The lawsuit, filed April 17, opens a new front in the battle against employment discrimi-

nation by charging that Alicia Pedreira, a lesbian, was fired because she did not share her employer's religious beliefs about homosexuality. As is the case in most states, Kentucky law prohibits employment discrimination based on religion, but does not address discrimination based on sexual orientation. While Louisville's Fairness Ordinance prohibits discrimination against gay men and lesbians, the local law does not apply to religious organizations like Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children.

The case also raises the serious question about where the Constitutional rule of church-state separation draws the line when it comes to government funding of religious organizations. The lawsuit alleges that Kentucky is violating the US Constitution's Establishment Clause by financing a religious organization that discriminates on the basis of religion and uses taxpayer money to fund a particular brand of Christianity.

"Everyone agrees that Alicia Pedreira was a good counselor. She was fired not because she couldn't do the job, but because of religious intolerance and discrimination," said Michael Adams, associate director of the ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project and lead attorney. "If Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children believes that its religion teaches it to discriminate, that's its right. But to pay for it with taxpayer money violates the separation of church and state required by the Establishment Clause."

*See SUIT on page 27*

## StopDrLaura.com organizes first station protests, more anticipated

by Wanda Pico  
Special to Q-Notes

DALLAS, TX—On April 15, a wide-ranging coalition of demonstrators gathered at the Dallas offices of CBS affiliate KTVT, Channel 11 to demand that the station drop plans to air a television show hosted by radio talk show host and anti-gay activist Laura Schlessinger. A similar protest was held in Chicago the same day. Both events were

Dallas Gay and Lesbian Alliance (DGLA) and Dave Gleason of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) met with Jones for over an hour. They shared their concerns about Schlessinger's upcoming show, explaining how she already uses her current radio program to rail against gays and lesbians, calling them "deviants" and "biological errors" and suggesting that a "huge portion" of gay men are pedophiles.

Jones promised that KTVT would monitor the program for balance and content, but said he was unable to cancel it at the current time.

During the meeting, he presented a memo from CBS stating that Schlessinger had apologized for her comments against gays. When the community representatives pointed out that Schlessinger had recanted her apology a few days later, Jones appeared surprised and expressed disdain that CBS had failed



GLAAD's Cathy Renna speaks to KTVT protestors

to share that information with him. Before leaving, the activists requested that Jones relay the GLBT community's concerns to top management at both CBS and Paramount, the show's producer.

Afterward, the meeting was labeled a beginning for continuing dialogue, but the following day's protest was deemed necessary due to KTVT's unwillingness to cancel the show.

Over 125 protesters attended the rally.  
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## Observer: Dr. Laura show "DOA"

by Tom Paine  
Special to Q-Notes

It was an ethical dilemma worthy of the "Dr. Laura" radio show. A gay Hollywood "extra" shows up for a taping of the *Leeza* talk show at Paramount Studios, but suddenly finds that the show has been canceled and in her place is the queen-of-mean herself, anti-gay radio talk show host Laura Schlessinger. "I didn't know if I should walk out, yell at her, or stay and take notes," Jim [not his real name] recalls thinking as Ms. Schlessinger walked into the studio. The unwitting observer decided to stay and later sought me out to tell his story. By his account, Laura Schlessinger's new TV show is DOA.

The experience of this first taping may be enough to convince Paramount to abandon the program before it's launched this fall. The company is facing intense criticism for its decision to add Dr. Laura to the lineup. Schlessinger has called gays and lesbians "biological errors," sexual deviants and pedophiles. Civil rights advocates accuse Paramount of a double standard on prejudice, saying the studio would never give a show to someone who had voiced similar unfounded slurs about African Americans, Jews or other minorities.

### Negative and boring

As an "extra" who has attended many such tapings, Jim knows what's expected of him: "sit, smile and clap," he told me. Pretty routine stuff. That's why he was surprised by the

secrecy surrounding the first taping of Dr. Laura's show. The studio audience was made up entirely of paid extras and no one was forewarned that their host would be the good doctor — who in real life is a physiologist, not a psychologist.

"This has never happened before; [the studio] always tells us where we're going," Jim said. He overheard another audience member saying that "she had gay friends and had she been told it was Dr. Laura, she wouldn't have attended."

It was 7:30 in the morning when Laura Schlessinger entered the studio. She was shorter than expected, wearing a nondescript suit, and her hair was "better than usual," Jim said. Schlessinger immediately tried to warm up the audience.

"She kept trying to bribe the audience," he said. "She tried to get us all in a good mood by giving us a tee-shirt and a water jug. Usually, the warm up will give you a prize or two, but never to this extent. Afterwards, she gave every person in the audience her 'Ten Commandments' book," Jim noted. "A lot of us said we were going to have a book burning party."

The studio proceeded to tape several long segments. Jim said the segments are normally edited so that only the best parts air. "I don't think there were any good parts," he said. "I don't know what they're going to cut. She wasn't even being controversial — just negative, boring, ignorant."

*See SHOW on page 27*