

National News

by David Stout . Q-Notes staff

Hate crimes bill back in Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Last month, Rep. John Conyers of Michigan re-introduced The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, H.R. 1913. Better known as the Matthew Shepard Act, the bill would extend federal law to provide hate crimes protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It is identical to the hate crimes bill passed by the House of Representatives in 2007 and includes the language that transgender advocates requested. It is also the first transgender inclusive bill to be introduced during this legislative session.

To track the bill's progress, the Human Rights Campaign has established a hashtag for Twitter users to contribute to and stay current on the measure's status. By entering #FightHateNow at search.twitter.com, anyone can review the real-time updates submitted by Twitter users on the hate crimes legislation. HRC's blog, HRC Back Story (www.hrcbackstory.org) has also been providing live coverage of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee markup of the hate crimes bill on Twitter using the #FightHateNow hashtag.

Faith-based effort for equality

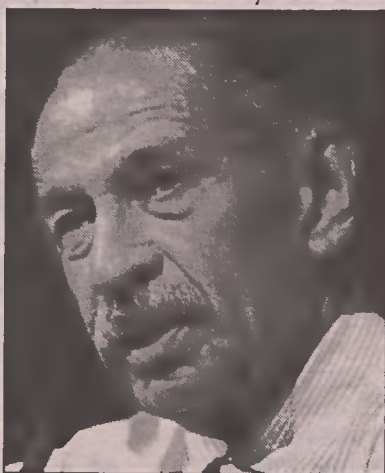
AUSTIN, Texas — Advocates for LGBT equality, looking to develop dialogue about gay rights with members of faith communities across the nation, will embark on the Sundays of Solidarity campaign — visiting churches, synagogues, and other faith community gatherings across the U.S. — for seven straight Sundays this month and into June.

The nationwide action, co-sponsored by Austin-based organizations Atticus Circle and Soulforce, aims to engage members of a wide variety of faith communities in discussions

about faith, dignity and equal rights for LGBT individuals and couples. The actions will start on May 17, which is observed as International Day Against Homophobia by a growing number of international gay rights organizations, and will end on June 28 — the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in New York City.

Participants in the campaign will wear T-shirts and buttons pro-

claiming "Gay? Fine by Me" and "Gay Marriage? Fine By Me," available via the Atticus Circle website (www.atticuscircle.org), while attending worship services and other faith community meetings across the country.



U.S. Rep. John Conyers of Michigan

Pols vote to expand DP law

OLYMPIA, Wash. — With both portions of the Washington Legislature strongly supporting a bill that expands the rights and responsibilities associated with the state's domestic partnership registry, Gov. Christine Gregoire is expected to sign the measure into law at press time. The House passed the legislation by a 62-35 vote, following the Senate's passage by a vote of 30-18.

Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, applauded the move. "This measure will bring same-sex couples in Washington state one step closer to realizing equal treatment under the law. Particularly in times of economic crisis, it is vital that same-sex couples and their families have access to health care and other critical protections provided through this legislation.

"While clearly not a substitute for legal marriage, it is a step in the right direction ... and we look forward to the day when full legal marriage is a reality for same-sex couples in Washington state."

Students allowed to form GSA

PHILADELPHIA, N.Y. — Just days after Lambda Legal filed a federal lawsuit against the Indian River Central School District, the District relented and allowed the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). On April 8, Lambda Legal and Kirkland & Ellis LLP filed a lawsuit representing former student Charlie Pratt and his sister, current sophomore Ashley Petranchuk, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York. The suit described the severe harassment that Charlie endured throughout his time as a student in

the Indian River Central School District.

"After years of denying students like Ashley, her brother Charlie and others their right to form a GSA, Indian River is taking an important first step toward righting its wrongs," said Lambda Legal attorney Michael Kavey.

According to the lawsuit, students attacked Pratt relentlessly with antigay and sexist slurs, pushed him into walls and lockers, threatened him, threw food and other objects at him, spat on him and vandalized his locker with antigay slurs. Staff members at the high school often joined the harassment by ridiculing Pratt with stereotypically effeminate gestures in front of other students.

D.C. Council supports marriage

WASHINGTON, D.C. — By a vote of 12-0, the D.C. Council initiated an effort to fully recognize marriages by same-sex couples legally entered into in other jurisdictions. The Council also voted to recognize civil unions and broad domestic partnerships entered into in other jurisdictions as domestic partnerships under D.C. law. A final Council vote on both bills is expected May 5. The bills would then be sent to Mayor Adrian Fenty and, if approved, forwarded to Congress for review.

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese, said, "We look forward to the final Council votes, and urge Mayor Fenty to sign this common-sense legislation. We also hope that Congress will respect the Council's votes and will respect the District of Columbia's choice to provide equal recognition for couples who have legally entered into relationships in other jurisdictions." ▀



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