

N.H. focus of capital abolition

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty urged the New Hampshire State Senate and Gov. Jeanne Shaheen to erase capital punishment from the Granite State's law books.

The move comes at a time when the momentum of the national agenda seems to be moving toward moratorium on the death penalty. The presidential bid by Gov. George Bush (R-Texas) has further pushed the matter into the national spotlight since Texas executes convicted lawbreakers in higher numbers than any other state in the nation.

"We are asking New Hampshire lawmakers to recognize the historical significance of their position," said Steven Hawkins, the group's executive director. "The countries of the world are turning away from capital punishment in droves. Fifty years from now, when the death penalty exists only in U.S. history books, New Hampshire could be remembered as the state that set the precedent in the U.S."

The effort to abolish the death penalty in New Hampshire has been a target of the abolition movement since last year, when the House of Representatives not only firmly rejected an effort by the Shaheen to expand the death penalty, but fell 40 votes short of sending an abolition bill to the Senate. Last March, the New Hampshire House passed a bill that would eliminate capital punishment by a vote of 191 to 163. Passage of the proposal marked the first time since 1976 that a state legislative body moved to remove the death penalty from their law books.

Subsequently, Shaheen, widely thought to be on Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore's short list of vice-presidential candidates, declared she would veto the bill if it actually made it to her desk. Undaunted, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted 5-1 to send the bill to the floor.

With the Senate version scheduled for floor debate, New Hampshire abolitionists are working hard to attain a 13-vote majority in the 24-member body.

"We're close, but it's still way too close to call," said Renny Cushing, a former New Hampshire state representative and current executive director of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation.

New bill would give tax break to Internet telecommuters

WASHINGTON — U.S. Reps. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Jerry Weller (R-Ill.), both members of the House Ways and Means Committee, announced they have introduced bi-partisan legislation that would give tax relief to workers given home Internet access by employers.

The legislation, known as the DATA (Digital Divide Access to Technology) Act, for tax purposes treats the Internet access and first \$1,260 of the value of a computer and equipment (monitors, keyboards), including software, tech support and Internet access as a working benefit one not subject to income tax. The current tax code exposes workers to higher taxes if they accept computers and Internet access as tax-free contributions like health and pension benefits.

"The object of the DATA act is to ensure that no one is left behind in the new economy," said Ben Fallon, a Weller spokesman. Fallon pointed out one-third of the jobs created in the last five years have been technology based.

Fallon says the bill would encourage employees who would like to give computers to their employees, but are hesitant because of the tax burden.

Over the past several months, four major companies — Delta Airlines, Ford Motor Company, American Airlines, and Intel — have announced programs to provide home computers to their computers to their employees.

Prominent leaders call on African Americans to join the Peace Corps

WASHINGTON — National Summit on Africa CEO Leonard Robinson and University of the District of Columbia President Julius Nimmons have spent their lives serving others. While their careers differ greatly, they share a common starting point: the Peace Corps.

Now both distinguished leaders are encouraging African Americans to jump-start their professional lives by helping people in developing countries as Peace Corps Volunteers. "It would take a young African American 15 or 20 years to get the kind of experience and the kind of credibility that they can get from the Peace Corps," says one executive from a private corporation.

Peace Corp volunteer Tameka Salis agrees, saying that "Prospective employers look at Peace Corp volunteers as being creative, hardworking and dedicated."

The Peace Corps ranks second on The Black Collegian Magazine's list of "The Top 100 Employers for the Class of 2000" up two spots from last year.

The number of people of color in the Peace Corps has more than doubled over the past decade, from six percent in 1989 to 15 percent today. The agency is committed to recruiting a more ethnically diverse volunteer corps. Atlanta Peace Corps recruiter Leslie Etienne says: "Highly motivated people with an interest in community service make good Peace Corps volunteers and the Peace Corp offers its volunteers the opportunity to have a broader world view and build valuable conflict resolution skills."



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Customs sued for alleged racial profiling

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

NEW YORK — The American Civil Liberties Union charged the U.S. Customs Service with racial profiling in a federal lawsuit, responding to claims by the agency that the humiliating physical search of a young African-American woman at Newark International Airport last year was nothing more than a routine "pat-down."

The incident occurred in the wake of several lawsuits being filed around the nation by black women who claim they are being targeted for harassment by U.S. Customs officials.

Yvette Bradley, a 33-year-old advertising executive at SpikeDDB, a partnership between filmmaker Spike Lee and DDB Needham Advertising, said that as she and her sister arrived at Newark Airport last April from a vacation in Jamaica, they, along with most of the other black women on the flight, were singled out for searches and interrogation by Customs agents.

"Inside that Customs office, I experienced one of the most humiliating moments of my life," Bradley said of the search.

According to the ACLU lawsuit, Bradley was led to a room at the airport and instructed to place her hands on the wall while an officer ran her hands and fingers over every area of her body, including her breasts and the inner and outer labia of her vagina. The search did not reveal any drugs or contraband.

Bradley said she decided to go ahead with the lawsuit after U.S. Customs officials categorically denied that her search was anything more than a routine "pat-down."

"Yvette Bradley's experience is a textbook example of racial profiling," said Reginald Shuford, one of the ACLU

attorneys representing Bradley. "And yet the Customs Service has denied any wrongdoing in her case. 'No one should be forced to ask herself whether taking a well-deserved vacation is worth the likelihood of being targeted for an invasive, degrading search.'"

In a statement, Lee said he was "outraged and saddened" by Bradley's experience, "not only on her behalf but on behalf of all African-American women who have come to expect and fear this humiliating treatment."

In recent months, Customs Service officials have publicly stated they are taking steps to end the practice of racial profiling. Customs Commissioner Raymond Kelly has said in

news interviews that the agency is increasing supervision of officers who conduct the searches in airports, training them in cultural differences, and tracking the race and gender statistics of those they search.

But while these remedies are important first steps, the ACLU said the searches are so offensive and so widespread that independent judicial supervision may be necessary to ensure that the appropriate reforms are implemented.

Lenora Lapidus, legal director of the ACLU of New Jersey and one of Bradley's attorneys, said "flying while black" racial profiling is not limited to a single airport or part of the country.

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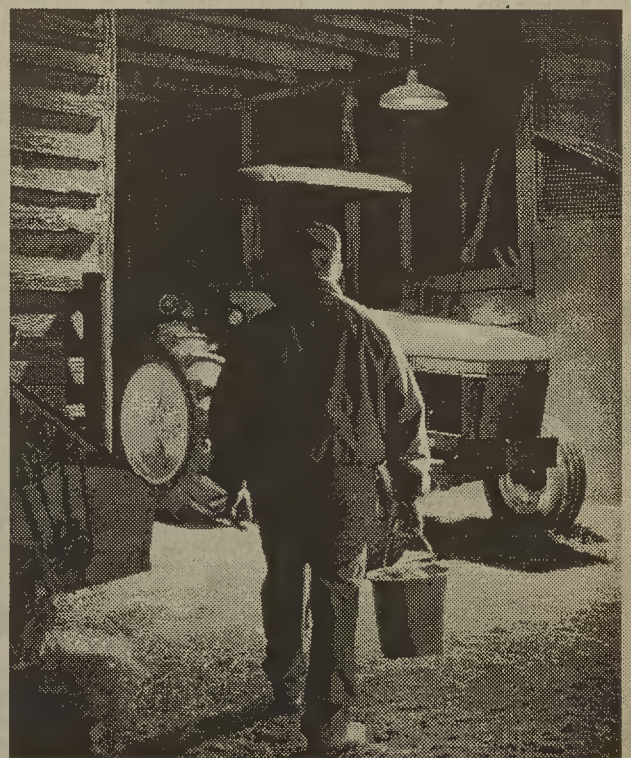
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