

National News

by David Stout . Q-Notes staff

D.P. benefits bill before Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. — National gay leaders hailed the introduction of the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act in the U.S. Congress earlier this month. The legislation would provide domestic partner benefits for federal employees and their partners. The bill was introduced by U.S. Reps. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) and U.S. Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Susan Collins (R-ME).

The benefits that would be provided include federal health insurance and enhanced dental and vision benefits; retirement and disability benefits; family, medical and emergency leave; group life insurance; long-term care insurance; compensation for work injuries; and benefits for disability, death or captivity. It is unclear at this time when the bill may come up for consideration in either chamber. Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund, applauded the bill's introduction, but decried the fact that the government is playing catch-up with the measure.

"Currently, the majority of Fortune 500 companies, 16 states and over 200 local governments offer their employees domestic partner benefits. It is unconscionable that the federal government, the country's largest civilian employer, does not provide these benefits," she said.

"The time has come to rectify this injustice

and provide domestic partner benefits for federal employees. Thankfully, through House and Senate leadership, this legislation would provide vital benefits to many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender federal employees."

HIV+ man sues retirement home

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Rev. Dr. Robert Franke, a 75-year-old retired university provost and Unitarian minister, relocated here to be closer to his daughter, Sara Franke Bowling. Franke moved into Fox Ridge of North Little Rock, an assisted living facility, after fulfilling all residency requirements — including submitting medical evaluation forms from a local physician.



Rev. Dr. Robert Franke and his daughter Sara Franke Bowling have filed a suit in Arkansas with the help of Lambda Legal.

But the day after Franke moved in, Fox Ridge officials forced him from the facility when they learned he has HIV, despite the fact that he requires no special medical attention beyond daily medication and regular check-ups with a physician. A Fox Ridge staffer went so far as to tell Bowling that her father's per-

sonal effects could stay, but that the "body" had to be out by the end of the day.

Lambda Legal filed suit in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas against Fox Ridge, on behalf of Franke and Bowling. The group is suing for damages under the Fair Housing Act, the Arkansas Civil Rights Act and the Arkansas Fair Housing Act and, by seeking intervention from the court, intend to prevent Fox Ridge from continuing to engage in this kind of discriminatory conduct.

"I was stunned," Bowling said. "The people at Fox Ridge were supposed to make sure that [my father] was comfortable and cared for, and instead they shunned and rejected him, making him feel like a complete outcast."

Fox Ridge is licensed by the state to provide Dr. Franke with the kind of assistance he and his daughter were seeking for him.

"This isn't about money to me," says Franke. "I want to make sure something like this doesn't happen to anyone else — because no one should ever be made to feel the way I did."

Schools' sued for web censorship

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Tennessee sued two Tennessee school districts in federal court May 19, charging the schools are unconstitutionally blocking students from accessing online information about LGBT issues.

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, Knox County Schools and as many as 105 other school districts in Tennessee use Internet filtering software to block websites containing pro-LGBT speech, but not websites

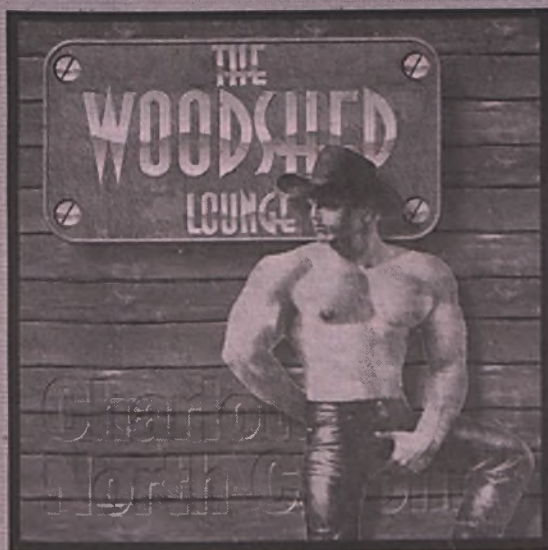
touting so-called "reparative therapy" and "ex-gay" ministries.

The "LGBT" filter is not used to block sites containing pornography, which are filtered under a different category, but it does block the sites of many well-known LGBT organizations including Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

"Allowing access to websites that present one side of an issue while blocking sites that present the other side is illegal viewpoint discrimination," said Catherine Crump, a staff attorney with the ACLU First Amendment Working Group and lead attorney on the case. "This discriminatory censorship does nothing to make students safe from material that may actually be harmful, but only hurts them by making it impossible to access important educational material."

The ACLU filed the case in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee on behalf of two high school students in Nashville, one student in Knoxville and a high school librarian in Knoxville who is also the advisor of the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA).

"Students need to be able to access information about their legal rights or what to do if they're being harassed at school," said Keila Franks, a 17-year-old student at Hume-Fogg High School in Nashville and a plaintiff on the case. "It's completely unfair for schools to keep students in the dark about such important issues and treat websites that just offer information like they're something dirty." ▀



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Free Pool! All day long

Twisted Tuesdays

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Karaoke at 9 pm with DJ Shawn

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Check out the Hot Men in their Boxers!

Frisky Fridays — "you never know what might happen"

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