

BCBS fixes same-sex marriage policies

BY NICOLE ZELNIKER
STAFF WRITER

Blue Cross Blue Shield is North Carolina's number one health insurance provider.

But last month, when BCBS systematically cancelled 20 family insurance policies of same-sex couples, its reputation took a hit.

"It was wrong, and it shouldn't have happened (this) way," said North Carolina resident Al Hinman in an interview with the *Houston Chronicle*. "For 24 years, (my husband and I have) been on the same insurance."

North Carolina resident and Eckerd College sophomore Molly Hurd was also enraged.

"As a North Carolina resident and as someone who has BCBS, I'm pissed about the fact that they took away those policies," Hurd told *The Guilfordian*.

"As someone who supports equal rights and businesses adhering to their deals, I think this is a ridiculous revocation," Hurd said. "Blue Cross, along with North Carolina, needs to start getting with the times and accepting that there is more than one type of line."

Appalachian State University junior

Emily Forester, on the other hand, acknowledges BCBS's rights as an organization.

"BCBS is 100 percent within their rights to cancel these policies," Forester told *The Guilfordian*. "That's why voting on the definition of marriage was such an issue — and not only in NC."

According to Kerry Hall, North Carolina's Insurance Department spokeswoman, BCBS could not legally offer family plans to same-sex couples at the time.

"BCBS of North Carolina was legally bound to invalidate the policies because of standard language in the insurer's individual policies that define 'spouse' as 'opposite sex,'" Hall said in an interview with the *Houston Chronicle*.

Health economics expert and Assistant Professor of Economics Natalya Shelkova speculates about the company's word choice.

"I think that they mentioned a mistake in the wording of the insurance contract, but it appears strange that they could not resolve it internally without disrupting the coverage for same-sex couples," said Shelkova. "The unwillingness to make such an effort is just bad business."

However, on Jan. 29, BCBS declared a

reinstatement of their policies for same-sex couples, beginning March 1.

Junior and Pride President D'vorah Nadel was thrilled to hear the news.

"It is nice to see a corporation (or) business that is recognizing where it has committed a disservice to people and is implementing immediate plans in order to fix it," Nadel said.

Conversely, first-year and Pride member Taylor Brown believes that BCBS is getting more credit than it deserves.

"Why did BCBS even change their policies in the first place?" asked Brown. "Same-sex couples were getting the same benefits initially. What difference does it make now?"

As to why BCBS incorporated exclusive language to begin with, Associate Professor of Sociology & Anthropology Julie Winterich suspects an error, rather than BCBS wishing ill will on same-sex couples.

"Under the new health care act, it's illegal to discriminate by sexual orientation," Winterich said. "I doubt they intentionally sought to exclude same-sex couples (and) families, especially since they give same-sex benefits to their own employees."

Olympic construction ruins Russian village



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BY ALLIE BADDLEY
STAFF WRITER

For over five years, the residents of the village of Akhshtyr have suffered due to construction leading up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

Construction has depleted the village's resources and left its residents with limited running water for drinking and crop irrigation. Although Russian authorities have recognized the problem and made efforts to deliver water on a weekly basis, the residents continue to complain that Akhshtyr still does not receive an adequate supply of water.

And Akhshtyr's post-construction woes do not end here. The absence of a single entry or exit ramp along the 48-kilometer road connecting the two Olympic venues has contributed to Akhshtyr's isolation from all other Russian cities.

Furthermore, villagers reported to the Human Rights Watch that there is no secure way to cross the road, which cuts through an important path. This path is the primary medium to access the main avenue connecting villagers with buses and taxis to get to school and work. Without access to the path, residents of Akhshtyr say that their average commute times have increased by two hours, according to the Human Rights Watch.

To make matters worse, several trucks transporting building materials have created noise and dust pollution amidst the village. For many of the villagers, who rely heavily on crop fields for income, the resulting pollution has damaged their crops and threatened their livelihoods.

Akhshtyr resident Tatiana Velikaia told the Human Rights Watch, "My neighbor couldn't sell anything because a layer of cement dust (had settled) on the peaches (that she was growing)."

"It is shocking that the Olympics can affect the environment in such devastating ways," said Cassie Vaughn, a sophomore on the women's soccer team at Guilford College.

Another concerned student, sophomore Harrison Houlihan, is "disgusted by the ridiculous waste of resources and blatantly open corruption."

How can the Russian government make amends for neglecting the well being of Akhshtyr?

Much of the damage done appears to be irreversible. Worse, the voices of the Akhshtyr villagers may fall on deaf ears when the spotlight leaves Sochi after the Olympics.

Associate Professor of Sport Studies Bob Malekoff noted the need for putting more governmental pressure on the Olympic Committee to be more responsible about the games.

He believes that the Olympic Committee needs to look ahead when planning to host the Olympics and anticipate potential harm to the local population.

In the future, if construction isolates a village or has a lasting impact on people's livelihoods, human rights authorities should be consulted ahead of time. If the committee adheres to the approved planning, citizens of multiple socioeconomic classes can more fully cherish hosting the Olympics.

"The games are supposed to be about unity and not about politics," Malekoff said.

As important as the Olympics are in bringing together countries from all over the world, damaging people's livelihoods for the long-term is no reasonable trade-off.

Plus, as far as the residents of Akhshtyr are concerned, controversy — not unity — will continue to envelop Sochi.

Ukrainian protestors endure

BY ABE KENMORE
STAFF WRITER

For the last two and a half months, the protestors of the EuroMaidan movement have occupied Independence Square in Kyiv, Ukraine. During this time, they have faced freezing temperatures, police violence and harsh anti-protest laws.

Why have they remained?

"For the idea: be free in (a) European country," Kyiv-based journalist and student Yulia Zakutnia told *The Guilfordian* in an email.

"The name 'Ukraine' means 'on the borderline,'" explained Wall Street Journal reporter Matthew Kaminski in a phone interview with *The Guilfordian*.

Since the fall of the USSR in 1991, Ukraine has been pulled between the two forces on either side of that borderline — the European Union in the West and Russia in the East.

The tension reached a breaking point in November when Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich abandoned an agreement that would have strengthened ties with the EU. Instead, he accepted \$15 billion from Russia.

"70 years of Soviet control makes (Ukraine) a place where people in power think they can do what they want," said Professor of Peace & Conflict Studies Jeremy Rinker.

The people of Ukraine disagreed.

On Nov. 21, Ukrainian protestors — many of them university students — gathered in Independence Square in reaction to Yanukovich's sudden change in policy. They took the name EuroMaidan, combining the Ukrainian word "Maidan" (meaning square) with "Europe," their goal.

"There are really many fantastic people (in the Square)!" said

Zakutnia. "Cossacks, Afghani veterans ... students who learn to cook Molotov cocktails ... and grandmothers who do not let their grandchildren to go out, while they themselves are at the forefront."

The Square is now a well-organized tent city, surrounded by anti-police barricades made of tires, sandbags and ice. Protestors have implemented a self-sufficient system of medical tents, latrines and a volunteer security force to keep out weapons and alcohol.

"Ukrainians like to drink ... but the Square is like a dry college campus," said Kaminski.

This occupation has continued despite the government's efforts to suppress it.

"From Nov. 21 to 30, people stood on EuroMaidan only for European integration," said Zakutnia. "But after Nov. 30, when peaceful protestors were beaten ... they began protesting against the violence and for the president's impeachment."

More clashes with the police followed, and, as of Jan. 31, the police confirmed that three protestors had been killed. 54 have disappeared, according to the *Kyiv Post*, and many more have been injured or arrested. In one recent

skirmish, 40 police officers were injured.

What will be the end result of this conflict?

Ukrainians are still searching for a clear answer.

"If I had to guess, in the short term, it is going to be very dangerous ... and problematic," said Kaminski.

Zakutnia, however, takes a more hopeful perspective of the future. "We know what we want ... and we want Europe! We stand for that, for changing the government, because we know: we will achieve that."

Until they do, the protestors in Independence Square remain.



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EuroMaidan protestors brave freezing temperatures and police brutality.