

NATIONAL NEWS

Two More States Extend Rights to Gays and Lesbians

Within the span of a month the number of states with laws protecting the rights of gay men and lesbians has doubled. Hawaii passed a gay rights law in March, followed in April by Connecticut.

Hawaii became the third state with a gay rights law when the legislature voted to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. The bill passed quickly and quietly and was signed into law by Governor John Waihee on March 21 before fundamentalists could rally their forces.

Civil rights legislation for gay men and lesbians had been introduced into the Hawaiian legislature since 1974. This year's success is attributed to stronger gay/lesbian political organizing, to Democratic majorities in both legislative bodies, and to the state's diversity. Hawaii has traditionally been a very liberal state, and was the first state to pass the ERA.

Activists in Hawaii are encouraged by the quick passage this year, and are optimistic that a more comprehensive measure will pass in the next legislative session, in 1993.

By a vote of 21 to 14, the Connecticut State Senate passed a gay rights bill April 17. The bill now goes to Gov. Lowell P. Weiker, Jr., who has said he will sign the bill "enthusiastically."

The bill prohibits discrimination in housing, employment and credit availability. Religious groups and owner-occupants of multiple-family houses are exempt. Sponsors say the bill does not authorize adoption by gays or affirmative action for gays. Although many religious groups opposed the measure, the Roman Catholic Church did not oppose it.

Allegations of discrimination will be brought before the State Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. The Commission now hears cases involving racial and sexual discrimination, and has the power to order remedies such as back pay in employment disputes.

With their new gay rights laws, Hawaii and Connecticut join Wisconsin and Massachusetts, the only two other states to have passed state laws protecting human rights for gays and lesbians. Wisconsin's law, passed in 1982, and Massachusetts', passed in 1989, are similar to Connecticut's, and more comprehensive than Hawaii's. They ban discrimination in housing, public accommodations and credit transactions.--*Washington Blade*, 3/29/91; *Windy City Times*, 4/4/91; *NY Times*, 4/18/91--*Thanks to Mary Davis*▼



Bush Urged To Allow Gay Soldiers

Forty members of the U.S. Congress have sent a letter to President Bush urging him to end the ban on gay men and lesbians serving in the military. The letter, drafted by openly gay representative Gerry Studds (D-MA), was sent to the President March 15. It told the President that 50,000 gay men and lesbians had served "valiantly" in the Persian Gulf while having to hide "an integral part of themselves," because of the Pentagon's no-gays policy.

Since World War II between 1,000 and 2,000 men and women have been discharged from the military each year--some for homosexual conduct, some because of their sexual orientation and others merely because of unsubstantiated rumors about their private lives.

In 1988 a Marine Corps "witch hunt" for lesbians at Parris Island, SC, ended as follows: 14 drill sergeants discharged and two demoted, at least 18 resignations made in fear or frustration or disgust, and three women Marines imprisoned for having engaged in consensual sex with other adult women in private.

In response, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) initiated their Military Freedom Initiative, which has worked on several fronts--personal, public relations, and political--to end the military's institutionalized discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

Three years after the end of World War II President Truman racially integrated the armed forces, against the advice and wishes of the Pentagon. It is hoped that Bush will do the same for gay men and lesbians.

Tim Drake, director of NGLTF's Military Freedom Initiative, said that he was guardedly optimistic that Bush would order the Pentagon to abolish its anti-gay policy. He believes that Bush's popularity is so high that he can afford to take actions that would be considered politically risky if his popularity were less.

NGLTF would appreciate our financial support for the Military Freedom Initiative, so that they can step-up the pace of their work to end this discrimination. Send tax deductible contributions to Task Force Policy Institute, 1734 Fourteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009-4309.--*Condensed from Windy City Times*, 4/4/91; and NGLTF press release▼

NYC Mayor Marches with Gays & Lesbians

New York Mayor David N. Dinkins marched with the gay and lesbian contingent in New York's St. Patrick's Day Parade March 18, rather than at the head of the parade, in one of the strongest supports for gays and lesbians ever by a major US public official. The Mayor's decision to march with Irish gays culminated two weeks of intense controversy (which received almost daily coverage in the *New York Times*) over whether or not the gay group could be part of the parade.

In marching with gays and lesbians, Dinkins experienced first-hand the hatred we live with daily. *New York Times* commentator Sam Roberts wrote, "Few things become an elected official more than standing up for what he believes is right and then stoically suffering public scorn."--*NY Times*, 3/8/91, 3/13/91, 3/14/91, 3/15/91, 3/16/91, 3/18/91--*Thanks to Mary Davis*▼



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