

The FRONT PAGE

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Anti-Gay Protests Across The Carolinas

■ Fred Phelps and other anti-gay advocates protest in the Carolinas.

A small group of anti-gay activists swept through the region during the last weekend in November, with protests in Greenville, S.C. on Friday, Charlotte and Wake Forest on Saturday and Lynchburg, VA on Sunday.

The group was led by Rev. Fred Phelps Sr., 69, minister at Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, KS. Phelps recently led a protest during the funeral of Matthew Shepard, a gay University of Wyoming student who died Oct. 12, five days after being tied to a fence and beaten near Laramie. Kansas Gov. Bill Graves has called Phelps "a source of embarrassment to our state."

Representatives from the group have appeared on nationally broadcast programs including ABC's 20-20, CBS's Eye on America and Hard Copy. According to press reports, they

will be on an upcoming episode of Jerry Springer.

On Nov. 27 in Greenville, S.C., the group protested outside fundamentalist Christian Bob Jones University, which recently decided to allow gays into the school's art museum to preserve the gallery's tax-exempt status. About a dozen protested, saying the university was too lenient with gays because it allows them into its art museum.

Bob Jones, which is known for strict policies including a ban on interracial dating, recently sent letters to gay alumni, warning it will charge them with trespassing if they set foot on campus.

The school later amended that to allow gays into its religious art museum to preserve the gallery's tax-exempt status. But Phelps, a Bob Jones alumnus, said he thinks even that is too tolerant. He and his followers carried signs reading "God hates fags" and "AIDS cures gays."

A woman who answered the phone in Bob Jones' public relations department, Carol Robbins, said she could offer no official

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Learning hate at a young age, this young protester at Rev. Fred Phelps' Wake Forest protest, one of three anti-gay protests, holds a sign depicting murder victim, Matthew Shepard.

(Photos by Gary James Minter)

Georgia High Court Overturns Sodomy Law

■ Georgia Supreme Court rules the sodomy law violates the right to privacy.

ATLANTA (Nov. 23) — Georgia's supreme court has ruled by 6-to-1 that the state's sodomy law violates constitutional guarantees of privacy. The state sodomy law, which had been narrowly upheld in 1986 by the U.S. Supreme Court, prohibits oral and anal sex by both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

In the case under review, a heterosexual man, Anthony Powell, had been sentenced to five years in prison after he acknowledged having anal sex with a woman who later said he had raped her. A jury found him innocent of the rape charge, but convicted him of

sodomy and sentenced him to prison.

Writing for the majority, Chief Justice Robert Benham called sexual behavior "at the heart of the Georgia constitution's protection of the right to privacy." Justice Benham said, "We cannot think of any other activity that reasonable persons would rank as more private and more deserving of protection from governmental interference than consensual, private, adult sexual activity."

In the lone dissent to the Nov. 23 ruling, Justice George H. Carley wrote that the majority misconstrued the state constitution and "usurped the legislative authority of the General Assembly to establish the public policy of this state." He said the Georgia Constitution contains "no express recognition of a right to privacy."

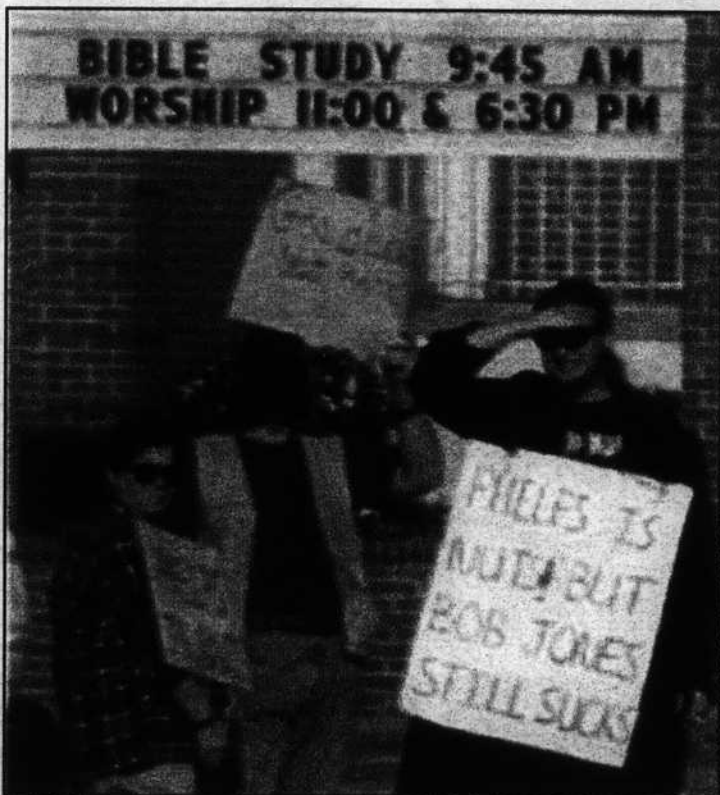
Georgia activists were thrilled

by the definitive ruling, which completely invalidates the state's entire sodomy laws and therefore makes an appeal legally impossible.

"I think that Georgia is preparing itself to move into the 21st century as a just state," said Lynn Cothren, an Atlanta gay activist, in reaction to the ruling. "We are moving forward. This is an issue we had been working on for a long time. There is still a lot of work to be done; it's a slow process."

The legislature, however, could circumvent the ruling by writing a new sodomy law and hope it survives a future court challenge. But because the state high court's ruled so clearly that such laws violate state guarantees of privacy, legal analysts say it is unclear how new sodomy legislation could get

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Members of the gay-straight alliance stand across from Bob Jones University as they protest Rev. Fred Phelps and his family picketing the school Friday, Nov. 27, 1998 in Greenville, S.C.

(AP Photo/Mary Ann Chastain)