

Democrat, in an effort to overturn an executive order barring employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and perceived gender in state agencies.

Vilsack signed the order in 1999. The Republican-controlled legislature approved a bill to void the executive order, along partisan lines but insisted it was a "nonpartisan issue." Vilsack vetoed it.

**Rocker demoted to minors**

MAUMEE, Ohio (Jun 9) — John Rocker, who shook up the professional baseball world when he snarled his contempt for gays, African-Americans, people with AIDS and immigrants in a *Sports Illustrated* article late last year, was sent by the Atlanta Braves to their minor league team in Richmond, Va.

The Braves management said they sent Rocker to the minors because his pitching was off, but the shift also took place after Rocker had a confrontation with Jeff Pearlman, the report who wrote the interview that landed Rocker a suspension and fine. Braves manager Bobby Cox said Rocker had also been fined "a substantial amount" for his threatening confrontation with Pearlman but insisted sending him to the minors wasn't related.

Rocker said when he arrived in Ohio for the Richmond teams game against the Toledo Mud Hens that he might be leaving baseball for a career in investments and missed his first game.

When he finally showed up for a game in the series, Rocker again had a minor flare-up with reporters.

After warming up for about 10 minutes and most of his pitches going far from the

strike zone, the frustrated Rocker threw a ball into the stands toward a group of news reporters and photographers and stalked off into the clubhouse. The incident came just a day after a Toledo television station claimed the pitcher had made an obscene gesture toward its camera crew.

**New England Methodists defy national church**

BOSTON (Jun 7) — The New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has issued a "New England Declaration" to express its full support for completely welcoming gays and lesbians in the denomination.

The declaration, an openly defiant stand against the national church's General Conference earlier this year, says sex is a gift of God (including homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality), that loving, monogamous relationships are expressions of God's love — including same-sex relationships — and that people

of all sexual orientations can serve as ordained ministers of the church.

**Court rules Texas sodomy law unconstitutional**

HOUSTON (Jun 8) — The Texas Court of Appeals has declared the state's anti-gay 1860 sodomy statute is unconstitutional.

The law, which only targets same-sex sodomy, was overturned by the court in a 2-to-1 ruling largely on the basis of sex discrimination. In the majority opinion the court declared that "the simple fact is, the same behavior is criminal for some but not for others, based solely on the sex of the individuals who engage in the behavior." The ruling also declared that the law "violates the Texas Equal Rights Amendment's guarantee of equality under the law."

The ruling overturned the conviction of John Lawrence and Tyron Garner under the anti-gay statute. The two had been arrested by Houston police in Lawrence's apartment

for having consensual sex in private.

Texas officials say they may ask for a review of the decision.

Twelve states—Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Michigan, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah and Virginia — have laws against heterosexual and homosexual sodomy. Along with the Texas law, Arkansas, Kansas and Oklahoma also have statutes that make homosexual sodomy illegal as well.

**Automakers OK bennies**

DETROIT (Jun 8) — In what is the largest single addition of benefits for same-sex couples, Detroit's Big Three automakers have agreed to extend medical, dental and prescription drug coverage for the domestic partners of its registered employees. The agreement by General Motors, Ford and Daimler-Chrysler covers more than 466,000 workers.

The new benefits package is slated to become available August 1 and will require that workers meet eligibility requirements. The

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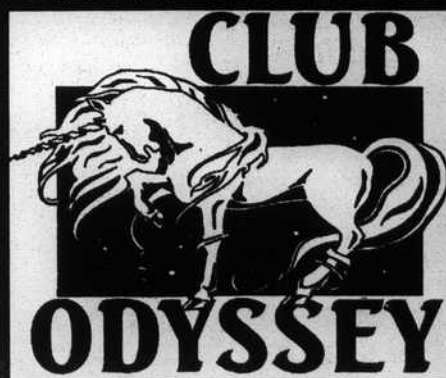
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- Christian Century Magazine, March 1999

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