



Blind LGBT Pride
The “Inside Out” Newsletter

March, 2011
Volume 11, Issue 1

The Newsletter of Blind LGBT Pride International is published in March, June, September, and December. Material to be published of interest to the membership is welcome. All material for inclusion must be received prior to the first of the month of publication. Items for publication should be sent to: Connie Torrisi, Editor, LavenderQ@comcast.net

Blind Pride is a Special Interest affiliate of the American Council of the Blind and is dedicated to facilitating the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information relative to matters of concern to blind people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Visit us at www.blind-lgbt-pride.org

EDITOR’S NOTE:

You can skip to the next article or section of the newsletter by using your word processor's Find or Search function to find the ## sign.

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From The Presidents Desk

By Don Wilson

A warm greeting to everyone from the peach state of Georgia. I hope 2011 started off well for everyone. I hope this is an eventful year for our organization. Currently our Convention Planning Committee is working on plans for this years Convention in Reno, Nevada. You can read more about the Convention in a later article in this newsletter. For the first time in our history we have received a grant. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence awarded us a \$750 grant.

We will be holding elections for four Board positions at this years Convention. Available positions are Vice President, Secretary & two Member at Large positions. You can read more about becoming a candidate later on in this newsletter. Please consider stepping up to the plate and getting more involved with your organization. Our June issue of the InsideOut newsletter will include information on all the candidates seeking election.

We look forward to seeing you in Reno this July.
Don Wilson, President

2011 Annual Convention and Conference

The 2011 Annual Convention and Conference will be held in Reno, Nevada at the fun-filled John Ascuaga Nugget Resort Hotel. This is the place to be during the week of July 8th through the 16, 2011. The John Ascuaga Nugget Hotel includes a casino along with several restaurants.

In conjunction with the American Council of the Blind's 50th Annual Convention and Conference, Blind LGBT Pride International will celebrate its 11th year as an ACB Special Interest Affiliate.

Our Convention Planning Committee is busy making plans for this year's Convention. On Sunday afternoon we will have our Welcome Mixer and on Monday evening we will hold our Annual Business meeting. We are making plans for a Wednesday evening event as well as a Movie Night on Thursday evening. You can keep up with all the Convention news on our website www.Blind-LGBT-Pride.org.

Hotel room rates are \$87 plus tax, single/double; add \$10 per night for each additional person in your room. Free round-trip transportation from the airport, train or bus station is included. To make reservations, call 1-800-648-1177. Use group code "blind" to ensure that you receive the ACB rate. Be sure to reserve rooms in the West Tower, as that is where our rooms are blocked. You can also make hotel reservations on-line. Visit www.januggetsecure.com/jump/1308 to check it out.

Positions Available on Board of Directors

If you are interested in serving our organization, consider becoming a candidate for a seat on the Blind LGBT Pride International board of directors. These are volunteer positions that require attendance at monthly meetings conducted via telephone conference as well as completing the duties assigned to the specific position.

This year there are four positions open: Vice President, Secretary, and two Member-at-Large seats. Candidates are elected at the Annual Convention by the membership. Each position is a two year term beginning immediately after the close of the 2011 Convention. A brief summary of the duties of each position is as follows:

Vice-President: In the absence of the President, shall oversee the operation of committees as delegated by the President; performs other duties as assigned by the President.

Secretary: Under the direction of the President and Vice-Presidents is responsible for maintaining general records of the organization. The secretary is responsible for taking notes (i.e. minutes) at each board meeting and transcribing them into a reasonably detailed and organized report that shall be distributed to all board members prior to the next meeting.

Member-at-Large: At-Large Board Members serve on the Board of Directors as general representatives of the membership. Duties vary according to the needs of the organization.

The deadline for submitting candidacy information is May 15th. Please send your information to Don Wilson at President@Blind-LGBT-Pride.org with "Nominating Committee" in the subject line, or send by postal mail to Don Wilson, 307 Adair St #E7, Decatur GA 30030.

All bio information and candidate statements will be included in the June issue of the InsideOut Newsletter.

The Nominating Committee will review all information submitted and present a slate of candidates.

Supreme Court Allows Anti-gay Protesters at Funerals

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Supreme Court ruled Wednesday (March 2ns) that a grieving father's pain over mocking protests at his Marine son's funeral must yield to First Amendment protections for free speech. All but one justice sided with a fundamentalist church that has stirred outrage with raucous demonstrations contending God is punishing the military for the nation's tolerance of homosexuality.

The 8-1 decision in favor of the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kan., was the latest in a line of court rulings that, as Chief Justice John Roberts said in his opinion for the court, protects "even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate."

The decision ended a lawsuit by Albert Snyder, who sued church members for the emotional pain they caused by showing up at his son Matthew's funeral. As they have at hundreds of other funerals, the Westboro members held signs with provocative messages, including "Thank God for dead soldiers," "You're Going to Hell," "God Hates the USA/Thank God for 9/11," and one that combined the U.S. Marine Corps motto, Semper Fi, with a slur against gay men.

Justice Samuel Alito, the lone dissenter, said Snyder wanted only to "bury his son in peace." Instead, Alito said, the protesters "brutally attacked" Matthew Snyder to attract public attention. "Our profound national commitment to free and open debate is not a license for the vicious verbal assault that occurred in this case," he said.

The ruling, though, was in line with many earlier court decisions that said the First Amendment exists to protect robust debate on public issues and free expression, no matter how distasteful. A year ago, the justices struck down a federal ban on videos that show graphic violence against animals. In 1988, the court unanimously overturned a verdict for the Rev. Jerry Falwell in his libel lawsuit against Hustler magazine founder Larry Flynt over a raunchy parody ad.

What might have made this case different was that the Snyders are not celebrities or public officials but private citizens. Both Roberts and Alito agreed that the Snyders were the innocent victims of the long-running campaign by the church's pastor, the Rev. Fred Phelps, and his family members who make up most of the Westboro Baptist Church. Roberts said there was no doubt the protesters added to Albert Snyder's "already incalculable grief."

But Roberts said the frequency of the protests - and the church's practice of demonstrating against Catholics, Jews and many other groups - is an indication that Phelps and his flock were not mounting a personal attack against Snyder but expressing deeply held views on public topics.

Indeed, Matthew Snyder was not gay. But "Westboro believes that God is killing American soldiers as punishment for the nation's sinful policies," Roberts said.

"Speech is powerful. It can stir people to action, move them to tears of both joy and sorrow, and - as it did here - inflict great pain. On the facts before us, we cannot react to that pain by punishing the speaker," Roberts said.

Snyder's reaction, at a news conference in York, Pa.: "My first thought was, eight justices don't have the common sense God gave a goat." He added, "We found out today we can no longer bury our dead in this country with dignity."

He said it was possible he would have to pay the Phelpses around \$100,000, which they are seeking in legal fees, since he lost the lawsuit. The money would, in effect, finance more of the same activity he fought against, Snyder said.

Margie Phelps, a daughter of the minister and a lawyer who argued the case at the Supreme Court, said she expected the outcome. "The only surprise is that Justice Alito did not feel compelled to follow his oath," Phelps said. "We read the law. We follow the law. The only way for a different ruling is to shred the First Amendment."

She also offered her church's view of the decision. "I think it's pretty self-explanatory, but here's the core point: the wrath of God is pouring onto this land. Rather than trying to shut us up, use your platforms to tell this nation to mourn for your sins."

Veterans groups reacted to the ruling with dismay. Veterans of Foreign Wars national commander Richard L. Eubank said, "The Westboro Baptist Church may think they have won, but the VFW will continue to support community efforts to ensure no one hears their voice, because the right to free speech does not trump a family's right to mourn in private."

The picketers obeyed police instructions and stood about 1,000 feet from the Catholic Church in Westminster, Md., where the funeral took place in March of 2006.

The protesters drew counter-demonstrators, as well as media coverage and a heavy police presence to maintain order. The result was a spectacle that led to altering the route of the funeral procession.

Several weeks later, Albert Snyder was surfing the Internet for tributes to his son from other soldiers and strangers when he came upon a poem on the church's website that assailed Matthew's parents for the way they brought up their son.

Soon after, Snyder filed a lawsuit accusing the Phelps of intentionally inflicting emotional distress. He won \$11 million at trial, later reduced by a judge to \$5 million.

The federal appeals court in Richmond, Va., threw out the verdict and said the Constitution shielded the church members from liability. The Supreme Court agreed.

Forty-eight states, 42 U.S. senators and veterans groups had sided with Snyder, asking the court to shield funerals from the Phelps family's "psychological terrorism."

While distancing themselves from the church's message, media organizations, including The Associated Press, urged the court to side with the Phelps family because of concerns that a victory for Snyder could erode speech rights.

Roberts described the court's holding as narrow, and in a separate opinion Justice Stephen Breyer suggested that in other circumstances governments would not be "powerless to provide private individuals with necessary protection."

But in this case, Breyer said, it would be wrong to "punish Westboro for seeking to communicate its views on matters of public concern."

FYI: Air Carrier Access Act

The Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) sets out requirements for disability access at airports and on airlines. Generally the ACAA rules:

prohibit U.S. and foreign airlines from discriminating against passengers on the basis of disability;

- require airlines to make aircraft, other facilities, and services accessible; and
- require airlines to take steps to accommodate passengers with a disability.

Here is a summary of the air travel rules as they relate to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind:

Information and Reservation Services Must Be Accessible: Information and reservation services must be accessible to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. If an airline provides telephone reservation and information service to the public it must make this service available to individuals who use a text telephone (TTY). This can occur through the airline's own TTY, through telecommunications relay services, or through other technology.

Information at Airports Must be Accessible After Self-Identification:

Passengers must self-identify to airline personnel that they are deaf or hard of hearing if they wish to receive accessible information. U.S. airlines must ensure that these deaf and hard of hearing passengers have prompt access to the same information provided to other passengers.

Televisions at Airports Must Have Captions Turned On: Airlines must display captioning at all times on all televisions and other audio-visual displays.

Communication on Aircraft Must Be Effective After Self-Identification: Passengers must self-identify to airline personnel that they are deaf or hard of hearing if they want to receive accessible information on the aircraft. U.S. airlines must ensure that these deaf and hard of hearing passengers have prompt access to the same information provided to other passengers.

Service Animals Permitted: Airlines must permit a service animal to accompany a passenger with a disability.

Safety Assistants for Travelers who are Deaf-Blind: An airline may require a deaf-blind passenger to travel with a safety assistant in some situations. Airlines are concerned about two main issues:

- airlines' ability to communicate the safety briefing to deaf-blind passengers; and
- the evacuation of deaf-blind passengers during an emergency.

Airlines are permitted to put the burden of establishing a means of communication on the deaf-blind passenger. The passenger must be able to establish a means of communication with airline personnel for communication of the safety briefing and to enable the passenger to assist in his or her own evacuation of the aircraft in an emergency. If the passenger cannot do this, the airline may require the passenger to travel with a safety assistant.

Complaints: If you believe that an airline has violated any of the ACAA rules, you should [file a complaint](#) with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). DOT provides an on-line, easy to use complaint form at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/escomplaint/es.cfm>.

Indian Court Defers Gay Rights Hearing

By Advocate.com Editors

The Supreme Court of India said that it would defer until April hearing all petitions regarding the landmark gay rights decision that decriminalized gay sex.

According to Tehelka, “The Bench, comprising Justice GS Singhvi and Justice AK Ganguly, was hearing several petitions filed by political, social and religious organisations opposing the Delhi High Court order that decriminalised homosexuality. The Bench said, ‘We have read through all the 19 petitioners and there is substantial matter in all. Hence, we will hear all the 19 petitions.’”

Of the 19 petitions, four support the 2009 Delhi High Court ruling that overturned Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a remnant of British colonial rule that made homosexuality punishable by a prison term up to a life sentence. Some 15 petitioners oppose the ruling.

“Of the 15 petitioners opposing the order in the Supreme Court were BP Singhal, a senior VHP leader, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, the Utkal Christian Council and the Apostolic Churches Alliance among others,” reports Tehelka.

Other opponents of the gay rights decision include famous yoga expert Baba Ramdev, who claims that homosexuality can be “cured” through breathing exercises

Lesbians Make Good Mothers

In an article published by The Williams Institute, that researchers, 24 years into the longest-running study of lesbian families, recently reported that the rate of abused children in those families is far lower than the national average. So low, it’s actually zero.

In the study 78 children (39 boys and 39 girls, all age 17) of lesbian mothers were asked about sexual abuse, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior. All reported that they had not been abused in any way, though one did report being verbally abused by a stepmother.

The findings were compared to the 26 percent of American teens who report physical abuse by a parent, and 8.3 percent who report sexual abuse.

The report said of the lack of abuse found in lesbian-parented households, “This finding contradicts the notion, offered in opposition to parenting by gay and lesbian people, that same-sex parents are likely to abuse their offspring sexually.” The study went on to say that, “Growing up in lesbian-headed households may protect children and adolescents from these types of assault.” Not only are children protected from assault but according to research, daughters and sons of lesbian mothers rate higher in academic competence and lower in social problems such as rule-breaking and aggressiveness.

The report also mentioned that daughters of lesbian mothers are more likely than their peers to identify as bisexual or to have had sexual experiences with the same sex. This is

possibly due to the fact that lesbian-parented families are more open, and children are less likely to be victimized for same-sex attraction.

Not only is this research valuable because it confirms what we already know (lesbian moms are awesome), but it also provides a useful family model to healthcare professionals and child protection agencies looking for family models in which violence is completely absent.

The study was conducted by Nanette Gartrell, M.D., Henny Bos, Ph.D. (University of Amsterdam), and Naomi Goldberg, M.P.P. (Williams Institute).

(Editor's Note: The Williams Institute is a think tank at UCLA Law.)

Transgender Day of Action

Transgender Day of Action Draws Advocates and Allies

by Angela Alberti, (Bay Windows contributor, Feb 1, 2011)

Despite snow-covered roads on Thursday, Jan. 27, more than 75 transgender rights advocates and allies from across Massachusetts traveled to the State House in Boston to visit their legislators. Their goal was to show support and gather legislative co-sponsors for "An Act Relative to Transgender Equal Rights," a bill that, if passed, would add gender identity and expression to existing Massachusetts civil rights laws.

"Our goal is to make legislators aware that there are constituents in their districts who care about this bill. Some of the folks visiting today are transgender themselves, some are friends, family, and allies," said Gunner Scott, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC), which sponsored the Transgender Equal Rights Action Day. Scott said the number of legislative co-sponsors is indicative of the level of support that can be expected if the bill is voted on.

The bill was first introduced in the 2007-2008 legislative session by Representatives Carl Sciortino and Byron Rushing, but over the past three sessions has been sent to committee study and has not been acted upon, despite having 104 co-sponsors -- the most co-sponsors of any bill in last year's session.

"There are thousands of bills filed each year and many never make it to the floor for a vote," Scott said. He thinks that the bill will have as many co-sponsors this year, and is optimistic that it will make it to the floor this session.

Zippy Ostroy, a retired speech pathologist from Brookline, doesn't know anyone who is transgender, but wanted to show her support for the issues. "Supporting equal rights for transgender people seems like an obvious thing. It's necessary," she said. "I didn't even realize the extent of the problem until I got involved with Keshet."

Keshet is a Jewish organization that works for the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. "But I'm not concerned just with the problems that the Jewish community has with this -- it's a broader problem. And the discrimination and negative impacts of discrimination, including violence, employment problems, and housing problems, they shouldn't be there," Ostroy said.

Ostroy said another reason she attended the day of action was because she thinks that organizations fighting against trans rights are slowing the process down. "The anti-rights groups, they're very vocal and organized. So I think any visible support for this bill is beneficial," she said.

Joan Stratton, a clinical social worker from Mattapoisett, travelled almost two hours to show her support at the State House. "I'm going to Senator Montigny's office and Representative Straus's office to say this is really important to me as a trans woman," she said. Stratton said that the trans people she knows in her area are not openly identified as trans because they're afraid of discrimination. "They could lose their jobs if their employers find out they identify this way," she says.

Stratton herself was commuting to work in Rhode Island until recently because it is one of the few states where transgender people are offered equal protection in employment, housing, and credit. There are currently thirteen states with similar laws protecting people on the basis of gender identity. "I'm a social worker; I help people for a living," she said. "I'm [also] a Vietnam era veteran and I've served my country since I was a teenager, and I'd just like to have the favor returned."

Elizabeth Maria Rivera Valentine, a community organizer for TransCEND, an HIV prevention and education program for trans women, says the law is particularly important for her clients, many of whom are homeless or unemployed but want to find work. "This law would put it in the books that they can't discriminate against us based on gender identity," she said. "It's basically adding the 'T' in GLBT to all the laws." According to a 2009 survey by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 97 percent of transgender people surveyed experienced harassment on the job, and respondents experienced unemployment at almost double the rate of the general population.

Valentine, who has a younger sister who is also transgender, feels that her advocacy of trans rights is setting an example for others. "I wanted to prove not only to my family, but to myself, that you can live a successful life as a trans woman," she said. "I think one of the lessons I've learned is that silence won't get you very far. You have to be able to speak up for your rights, and as human beings we deserve to be equal."

A Tipping Point on Marriag

By Kevin Naff, Editor, Washington Blade

Earlier this week, I debated marriage equality on a radio show in Baltimore. The other guests on the show were Mary Ellen Russell, head of the Maryland Catholic Conference, Derek McCoy, president of the Maryland Family Alliance and the former GOP Senate leader in the state.

It seemed I would be outgunned and outnumbered — a Catholic, a pro-family blowhard and a Republican politician versus the lone gay journalist. But my trepidation about the interview quickly melted away when the Republican turned out to be Sen. Allan Kittleman, who broke with his party and endorsed marriage equality. And when Russell and McCoy spoke, their arguments were so hollow and specious that batting them away was effortless. To make matters even easier, the host and all of the callers had my back.

Russell focused on procreation and the importance of child rearing to the institution of marriage. McCoy adamantly opposes same-sex marriage because it would necessitate teaching schoolchildren about gay relationships.

When I asked Russell if the Catholic Conference advocates for rescinding marriage rights for infertile couples, she fell silent. And I reminded McCoy that same-sex marriage is already being taught in schools because it's legal in five states and D.C., along with a growing list of foreign countries.

There was no shouting or name calling; no one got emotional. The debate, if you can call it that, was a real let down and a microcosm of what's happening in communities across the country over the issue of relationship recognition for same-sex couples.

From Maryland, which appears poised to legalize full marriage rights in the coming months, to Hawaii, where the House overwhelmingly approved a civil union bill, the debates are less rancorous, the polls less lopsided and the politicians less fearful of standing up for equality. This week, lawmakers in Washington State introduced a marriage equality bill; Freedom to Marry launched a major national advertising campaign promoting marriage rights; and a new poll in New Hampshire found that 63 percent of voters have no appetite for repealing marriage equality there.

When Kittleman realized his own civil union bill stood no chance of passing, he ditched it and simply endorsed marriage. He said this week that the reaction from Republican friends and constituents was surprisingly low-key, even supportive. And Kittleman isn't alone among state Republicans. Chrysovalantis P. Kefalas, deputy legal counsel to former Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R), said he considers marriage equality to be consistent with the Republican principle of limited government.

Make no mistake that opponents of marriage rights remain active and vocal, but they are increasingly shrill and seen as being on the wrong side of history. At a Senate committee hearing in Maryland last week, opponents showed up in significant numbers to testify against marriage rights.

One witness made national headlines when he warned that extending marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples would open the door to human-robot weddings. Robert Broadus, from Protect Maryland Marriage, said, “If you pass this bill, you will set the groundwork, that one day when artificial intelligence is that advanced, we will be considering whether or not people can marry their androids. ... If you say that any two people who love each other can get married, then you set that precedent.” He wasn’t joking. Broadus referenced “Stark Trek’s” Lieutenant Commander Data’s ability to shed tears and added, “You laugh, but it’s true.”

Other witnesses compared same-sex relationships to pedophilia and incest. “Where do we draw the lines? What comes next? If a man loses his wife to a premature death, shouldn’t he be allowed to marry his daughter, or son, or both,” said Gerard Selby.

In response to that ugly, homophobic testimony, Sen. Edward Kasemeyer, who represents a conservative district and had previously declined to reveal his position on the issue, announced he would vote for the marriage bill.

As the Senate inches closer to a vote, the concerns about a protracted, pitched battle have given way to a sense of inevitability. Maryland’s lieutenant governor, attorney general and former Senate minority leader have all spoken publicly about their support for marriage equality. Gov. Martin O’Malley remains a holdout, but pledged in a 2007 interview with the Blade to sign a marriage bill if lawmakers send it to his desk. A public endorsement from O’Malley would be welcome and history’s judgment would be more favorable to him if he spoke out now. But enough elected officials have found the courage to speak out and stand up for justice that O’Malley finds himself on the sidelines in this debate, which is where he is most comfortable. A profile in courage, O’Malley ain’t.

With more and more Americans accepting our relationships, opponents of equality will continue to find themselves outnumbered and relegated to the sidelines. It’s inspiring and surreal to watch. As Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler has repeatedly said, in another 20 years, all 50 states will have marriage equality. It’s inevitable.

Trivia Spot: Economics 101

John Maynard Keynes (1883-1945) an open bisexual Englishman, is considered to be the father of modern economics.

Quarterly Quote

"You could move." ~Abigail Van Buren, "Dear Abby," in response to a reader who complained that a gay couple was moving in across the street and wanted to know what he could do to improve the quality of the neighborhood

In Review

We're All Angels (DVD, 2009)

Description: In the world of evangelical Christianity, the very existence of a gay and Christian singing duo is a source of controversy. By breaking rules and stereotypes, Jason & deMarco hope to prove in We're All Angels that life can be lived beyond conventional rules and without boundaries. We're All Angels is an in-depth look into the lives of real-life lovers, Jason & deMarco - at their music and their lives, at home, in the studio, on stage and on the road. The film fearlessly tackles the struggles of growing up, coming out, falling in love and living and working together. Through their story, the documentary takes on hot-button issues such as religion and its relationship to sexuality and the fiery resistance of many evangelical Christians to the expression of homosexual love. The film has already been condemned by evangelical Christian groups and various Catholic organizations.

Review by Jennifer Foxx:

This is a must see for everyone, gay and straight. While it is the story of a gay Christian pop duo and their struggle for acceptance in the gay and Christian community which traditionally don't mix, at its heart it's a love story. Mr. Nunez does a wonderful job in illustrating the hate that these two must face without preaching to the viewer. It may be a cliché to say "I laughed, I cried, it became a part of me" but with this movie it's all true!

Around the USA in Brief

Washington, DC:

President Obama has decided that the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional and has asked his Justice Department to stop defending it in court.

"The President believes that DOMA is unconstitutional. They are no longer going to be defending the cases in the 1st and 2nd circuits," a person briefed on the decision said.

The act sought to restrict same-sex unions.

Massachusetts:

Governor Deval Patrick signed an Executive Order on February 17th protecting Massachusetts state employees from discrimination based on gender identity and expression.

Virginia:

On February 18th, The House subcommittee has killed a bill to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in state hiring.

Indiana:

The Indiana House approved a constitutional amendment on Feb. 15th to ban gay marriage and civil unions -- a step opponents said was unnecessary since same-sex marriage is already illegal in the state.

New Hampshire:

New Hampshire residents overwhelmingly oppose plans by some legislators to attempt to repeal the state's 2009 law that legalized same-sex marriage, according to polling data released Feb. 9th.

Hawaii:

Hawaii Gov. Neil Abercrombie has signed a bill allowing same-sex civil unions into law, granting the state's homosexuals the same rights as married couples.

California:

California's highest court has decided to wade back into the legal morass surrounding the state's voter-approved gay marriage ban, agreeing to rule on a question of state law considered crucial to the survival of Proposition 8.

Utah:

Three controversial, anti-gay bills brought forward in the Utah Legislative Session this year by State Rep. LaVar Christensen, have been shelved. The three bills--which did not garner much support, even among the more extreme conservatives-- would each have reduced rights and recognition for gay and lesbian couples.

Illinois:

The state law allowing civil unions for same-sex couples goes into effect June 1, 2011.

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