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What LGBTQ Families Should Know for Back-to-School Time

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

As school-related anti-LGBTQ legislation and policies continue to rise, what should LGBTQ parents know about recent moves and how to protect their families? Two experts from Family Equality shared their thoughts with me.

The number of legislative attempts to restrict school materials and discussion about LGBTQ identities (so-called "Don't Say Gay/LGBTQ" bills) rose to 23 in 2022, up from five in 2021, per PEN America. Florida and Alabama became the fifth and sixth states to enact them into law. PEN America also reports that LG-

BTO-inclusive books were banned in school districts in at least 26 states. The year has also seen a continued rise in anti-transgender legislation, much of it impacting children and youth in schools.

Family Equality's Director of Education Law & Policy, Senior Policy Counsel Nikhil Vashee said, "First, know this: Your family has nothing to be ashamed of, and your children deserve the right to learn and grow in a classroom that affirms their family composition no matter what."

They also emphasized, "Students and families still retain federal pro-

tection against discrimination based on sex and gender identity, and the Department of Education is working on new regulations that will codify these protections. In the meantime, if you or your family experience discrimination—whether you live in a state with a "Don't Say Gay or Trans" law or not—you can and should file a complaint with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights."

The new Department of Education regulations are updates to the landmark Title IX civil rights law. In

see **MOBIAN**, page 4

'Don't Say Gay' law confuses some Florida schools

By Anthony Izaguirre & Adriana Gomez Licon
Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP)—Some Florida schools have moved library books and debated changing textbooks in response to a law critics call "Don't Say Gay"—and some teachers have worried that family pictures on their desks could get them in trouble.

As students return from summer break, educators are cautiously adjusting and waiting to see how the new law governing lessons on gender and sexual orientation will be interpreted and enforced.

The new law, championed by Florida's GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis, bans lessons on sexual orientation

and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade as well as material that is not deemed age-appropriate. Most educators do not expect a major change in lesson plans—one of the key reasons critics cited in saying the law was unnecessary was that teachers do not cover such subjects in early grades anyway.

But some worry it sets a tone that will leave LGBTQ teachers and kids feeling ostracized.

"The messaging of this law is horrible. It's toxic, it's discriminatory," said Gretchen Robinson, a lesbian high school teacher in Orange County. "It targets, very obviously, LGBTQ students, it 'others' them, and that is not OK."

Workshops about the law that her school district's legal team held over

the summer caused confusion. Some staff said they were told teachers in kindergarten through third grade could not display pride flags or photos of their same-sex spouses. The district later said the law only applied to classroom instruction and that the photos were allowed. It apologized for offering bad guidance with a hypothetical discussion.

Robinson said schools in her area had given out rainbow-colored lanyards and inclusion stickers, but she was not sure whether teachers would continue to wear or display them. She also worried that some teachers will "err on the side of caution and leave stuff out" during lessons.

The law attracted widespread at-

see **FLORIDA**, page 7

Remembering Chuck Colbert

Long-time reporter covered Catholic clergy sexual abuse

By Karen Ocamb
Washington Blade



Chuck Colbert had a touch of old Cary Grant in him — dashing and debonair in his tuxedo at swank LGBTQ events. But he was also deeply humble and bursting with joy from his lifelong devotion to the core beliefs of the Catholic Church.

His journalistic discipline controlling his personal anguish over the proclamations about homosexual-



Photo via Chuck Colbert/Facebook.

ity enabled him as an out gay man to report professionally on the sex abuse scandals that rocked the Catholic Church in the early 2000s.

see **COLBERT**, page 5

Boston Children's Hospital

BOSTON (AP)—Doctors and other staffers at Boston Children's Hospital are being threatened with violence over its surgical program for transgender youths, administrators said, and other U.S. children's hospitals are also being harassed online.

Boston Children's is home to the first pediatric and adolescent transgender health program in the United States. It became the focus of far-right social media accounts, news outlets and bloggers last week after they found informational YouTube videos published by the hospital weeks ago about surgical offerings for transgender patients.

The hospital swiftly removed the videos. It said in a statement Tuesday that it is working with law enforcement to protect its staff and patients

and to "hold the offenders accountable," adding that it rejects the "false narrative" spreading online.

Some of the same social media accounts are now shifting their attention—and that of their millions of followers—to similar gender care programs at children's hospitals in Pittsburgh and Phoenix. Those hospitals did not immediately respond to email and phone messages seeking comment.

Transition treatment is under attack in many states, with some labeling it a form of child abuse or barring Medicaid coverage. Critics argue that safety should be well established before subjecting youths to potentially irreversible treatments.

But many medical groups support

see **BCH**, page 7



"It has nothing to do with not wanting to see Lea. I text with Lea. She and I are fine. I'm thrilled for her. I love working with Julie. I loved working with Beanie. There's no drama here. None."

—Jane Lynch's exit interview upon leaving "Funny Girl". She's just FILLED with love for all the Fannys...now that she's left!

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

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Rumblings in the summer twilight The battle for America looms

by Richard J. Rosendall | rosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer



Photo by Max LaRoche, via Unsplash.

A storm approaches this August evening as I sit with a friend at a curbside table. It is Restaurant Week, and we are not to be deterred. The political storms threatening our constitutional republic are of greater concern.

I have written many times about the pathological narcissist who left the White House reluctantly nineteen months ago. Yet it is still hard to believe that so many of our fellow citizens are ready to follow him off a cliff in trashing public norms, the rule of law, and decades of social progress. But then they do not see it as progress. Essentially they want to burn down the house while the rest of us are locked in it with them.

Things are going rather well at the moment. Joe Biden and the Democrats have a string of legislative wins, including the greatest response to climate change ever enacted, which passed without a single Republican vote. Democrats' hopes for holding onto the Senate, and maybe the House, are getting a boost from what Mitch McConnell politely calls the low quality of Trump-endorsed candidates. Democrats and moderates are being motivated by the right-wing Supreme Court's overturn of abortion rights, which set off an orgy of repression in red states.

At the same time, the growing fascist voices do not bode well for our civil order. New York Republican Carl Paladino called for Attorney General Merrick Garland to be executed, then said he was being facetious. Luis Miguel, a Republican candidate for Florida's House, was barred from Twitter after he advocated making it legal to shoot FBI, IRS, and ATF agents.

Opening Pandora's Box is a lot easier than chasing all the demons back into it.

After a generous helping of calamari, the shrimp and scallop risotto is too much of a good thing. I am unused to so much food at one sitting; it's leftovers tomorrow. I finish with a light tiramisu. My Dupont Circle neighborhood is an oasis. But how will our pleasant summer evenings survive mounting social unrest? If you worry about supply chain problems and inflation now, imagine what further chaos fueled by right-wing intolerance would do to the economy.

Anti-abortionists view forced birth as a divine mandate. They have always been with us, but are empowered by Trump and his stacked, radical Supreme Court. And those who come after Trump, like Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, may be more

disciplined, effective tyrants.

DeSantis says, "We must fight the woke in our schools. We must fight the woke in our businesses. We must fight the woke in government agencies. We can never, ever surrender." What Nazi terror is this Churchill wannabe projecting onto us? Racial and gender diversity?

"Woke" may be an annoying term, but the idea that it merits an armed response is as deranged as Chuck Grassley saying IRS agents will menace small business owners with "AK-15s" (confusing AR-15s with AK-47s). Demonizing trans people has replaced the Red Menace. Employees at Boston Children's Hospital received violent threats after false online claims of gender-confirming surgery for children.

Serious conservatism requires intellectual humility and respect for facts, not reflexive belligerence. If Republicans' constitutional originalism were more than a pretext, they would stop reading the right to own semiautomatic weapons into the Second Amendment and restrict us to muskets. Their idea of freedom is that the rest of us are free to agree with them. As it is, their unhinged rhetoric incites deadly violence.

The silver lining is that every time Trumpist incitements lead to tragedy is a chance for the fever to break and for some MAGA mobsters to come to their senses. So far, though, that is not happening. Republicans change voting laws in state after state to lock in one-party rule even as they refuse to concede the last election and insist it was rigged, possibly by a dead Venezuelan dictator. The unreality they inhabit feeds on itself.

This renders unthinkable the prospect of Republicans retaking Congress and (in two years) the White House. Building and sustaining resistance to an oppressive national regime would involve considerable difficulties amid a cacophony of social media trolls, right-wing propaganda outlets, government crackdowns, and armed militias.

In the next two months, before the fascist nightmare overtakes us, supporters of diversity and tolerance must mount an unprecedented get-out-the-vote drive. Time grows short. It is wearying having to battle just to live our lives. But the demons are nearly upon us.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist at rosendall@me.com.

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Serving LGBT Boomers and Pioneers

August 25, 2022



Don't Look Up

by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer



Photo by Alef Vinicius, via Unsplash

Growing up in my Eastern-European Jewish family, I was the son with the "good hair," thick and wavy like my mother's. While my two brothers had straight, thin hair, I had a virtual helmet of red-blond locks with a mind of its own. And that hair grew like an invasive plant. It seemed that I had too much of a good thing, with a mind of its own and an unwillingness to conform to the latest fashion trends.

Still, I tried to look "cool," though as a boy and a young man I was decidedly not. As a young boy, I went to Herman's Barbershop in nearby University Heights where the owner, an older man with a brown comb-over and unplaceable European accent chopped off most of my hair, leaving a bit in front, a modified crewcut called the "Princeton." Herman's was a gathering place for older men in our 'hood, a sort of Jewish *shul* filled with the children of immigrants, most of whom had the wisdom or good fortune to leave Europe before the war.

At 8 or 9, I knew nothing of the Ivy League and that bastion of preppy-ness, and just wanted to fit in with other boys. Years and decades passed and my hair reflected the era I was living in, though I was usually 5-10 years behind the latest trends. (I have a similar relationship with technology: I was just getting into CDs, when other folks were streaming MP3s on their iPods). A case in point — I come across a picture from my prom, June 1975. I stand with my white tux, pink (ugh) shirt, and almost shoulder length hair, the back and sides splaying out in all directions. I look androgynous, half-boy/half-girl, standing next to the real girl beside me.

In the early '80s, I decided to get a perm. I was envious of my friends who had naturally

curly hair and thought I could change my image for the better. I ended up spending two hours at my mother's beauty shop in suburban Cleveland, sitting under a hair dryer as a foul-smelling concoction turned me into a younger version of Bert Convy, the B-grade actor and game show host.

By the mid '90s, I'd settled into a more conservative short hairstyle that seemed to fit my thirty-something status along with a neat goatee, a reasonable look for the 'out' gay man I'd become. It was in the late '90s, when a small bald spot appeared at the crown of my head; an old friend pointed out what I had been missing. At the time, I shrugged it off; I had plenty of hair around that small spot, and since I was 6'1", few people noticed it. And when my goatee began to go from pepper to white, I simply shaved it off.

Fast-forward 25 years and my secret has been exposed; the jig is up. Today, at 65, I walk into my gym and notice the closed-circuit TV that tracks my entrance into the locker room. Looking up, I see a large oval of bare scalp, a yarmulke-sized spot that radiates from my crown. I try to pretend that this is NOT me, but denial no longer works when the evidence is right in front, or in this case *above* me.

Eventually, the spot will merge with my high forehead and defeat my best efforts at my version of a comb-over. In the meantime, I pull myself up to my full height and remind myself to look straight ahead, to avoid the TV monitor and overhead mirrors that reflect my current reality and the state of my hair today.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher, and storyteller in Boston. Find out more at judahleblang.com

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Saturday, August 27 - Friday, September 2, 2022

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Richard J. Murphy School
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Margarita Muniz Academy
20 Child Street,
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Another Course to College
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Hyde Park, MA 02136

BCYF Roche Community Center
1716 Centre Street,
West Roxbury, MA 02132

The Salvation Army Boston
Kroc Center
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Central Library in Copley Square
700 Boylston Street,
Back Bay, MA 02116

Jackson Mann School
500 Cambridge Street,
Allston, MA 02134

BCYF Quincy Community Center
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Charlestown, MA 02129

BCYF Shelburne
Community Center
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Community Center
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ABCD Thelma D. Burns Building
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Dorchester, MA 02121

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Trans kids can play girls sports in Utah after ruling

By Brady McCombs and Sam Metz
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—Transgender girls in Utah will be given the opportunity to participate in girls' sports as the school year begins, after a judge on Friday reversed a ban pending legal challenges from parents.

Instead of an outright ban, transgender girls will now be sent before a commission that will determine on a case-by-case basis if their participation compromises fairness. Utah's Republican lawmakers created the commission in a law passed earlier this year as a fallback plan to be implemented in case of an injunction against the law.

Under the law, the panel will be allowed to ask for and assess the child's height and weight in making decisions about whether a transgender girl would have an unfair advantage.

The commission, which is set to be convened in the coming weeks, will include politically appointed experts from athletics and medicine.

When proposed, the commission was criticized by advocates for transgender student-athletes—who worried they would feel targeted having their bodies measured—and proponents of an outright ban, who argued it didn't go far enough.

The commission is set to go into effect while the court weighs the legal challenge to the outright ban. Members have not yet been appointed but will be in the coming weeks, legislative leaders said.

The state's association overseeing more than 80,000 students playing high school sports has said only one transgender girl competed in their leagues last year and, with school sports already underway, it's unclear how many will go before the commission and when its deci-

sions will take effect.

Utah's ruling marked the latest court development in a nationwide debate over how to navigate the flashpoint issue.

At least 12 Republican-led states—including Utah—have passed laws banning transgender women or girls in sports based on the premise it gives them an unfair competitive advantage.

Transgender rights advocates counter the rules aren't just about sports, but another way to demean and attack transgender youth. Similar cases are underway in states such as Idaho, West Virginia and Indiana.

Utah's ban took effect in July after its Republican-supremacy Legislature overrode a veto by Gov. Spencer Cox, also a Republican.

Utah state Judge Keith Kelly said in the ruling putting the ban on hold that attorneys representing the families of three transgender student-athletes showed they have suffered significant distress by "singling them out for unfavorable treatment as transgender girls."

The transgender girls and the parents filed the lawsuit last May, contending the ban violates the Utah Constitution's guarantees of equal rights and due process.

The ruling was thrilling news to the girls and their families, said Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, who also represented same-sex couples in a landmark court case against Utah last decade.

"The pressure, the strain this was putting them under was so enormous," Minter said. "It is just a huge relief to have that weight lifted."

Utah state Sen. Stuart Adams, a Republican, said in a statement Friday that the commission that will now make decisions in a way "to protect equitable and safe competition while preserving the integrity of women's sports."

The commission will include a medical data statistician, a physician with experience about "gender identity healthcare", a sports physiologist, mental health professional, collegiate athletic trainer, representative of an athletic association and a rotating member who is a coach or official in the sport relevant to each case.

Minter said he hopes the commission will act merely as a safety net, with the presumption being that transgender girls can play unless there is an obvious issue of competitive fairness.

"How it is done is very important," Minter said.

The ruling follows a revelation this week by the Utah High School Activities Association that it secretly investigated a female athlete—without telling her or her parents—after receiving complaints from the parents of two girls she had defeated in competition questioning whether the girl was transgender.

The investigation—which was roundly criticized by Cox—determined she indeed was female after poring through her school records dating back to kindergarten, association spokesman David Spatafore told lawmakers this week.

Critics of the ban were upset but said they were not surprised by the investigation. They said it highlighted how the impact of politicizing girls' sports affected more than transgender student-athletes and subjected all girls to scrutiny in ways they anticipated.

"It creates such a negative atmosphere based on stereotypes about girls and how they should look," Minter said. "It is really is harmful to all the kids in the state."

The sequence of events also laid out how officials may pursue complaints now that youth sports and the associations governing them are the subject of state laws. Spatafore said the complaint was among several the association had looked into in its efforts to comply with the Utah law, which went into effect in July.

Mombian

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June 2021, the department issued guidance stating that Title IX protects students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Although a federal judge in Tennessee temporarily blocked the guidance in 20 states last month, arguing that it had not gone through a formal regulatory rulemaking process, Vashee said that they disagree with the decision and "it may ultimately be a moot point" since the Biden Administration in June initiated the rulemaking process for these changes.

President Biden also issued an executive order in June aimed at advancing LGBTQ equality, including developing policies "supporting LGBTQ+ students' well-being and academic success" and ones to "promote safe and inclusive learning environments in which all LGBTQ+ students thrive and to address bullying of LGBTQ+ students." All these moves "show the Administration's clear commitment to protecting LGBTQ+ students and families from discrimination," Vashee asserted.

On the state level, one positive move this year was Maryland's Inclusive Schools Act, which requires public schools and publicly-funded private schools to have comprehensive nondiscrimination policies that include protections for LGBTQ students and families. Shelbi Day, chief policy officer for Family Equality, said, "Getting this law passed was a multi-year effort by Freestate Equality and others on the ground in Maryland." She hopes other states will follow Maryland "by introduc-

ing laws that specifically protect LGBTQ+ students and students with LGBTQ+ families." She explained, "With 1 in 4 students with LGBTQ+ parents reporting feeling mistreated in school (even before states began trying to pass 'Don't Say Gay or Trans' bills), it's imperative that we continue to pass laws and policies that allow young people to learn in safe, welcoming environments."

Some courts, too, are seeing anti-LGBTQ bills for the discrimination they are. In two recent examples, the 3rd District Court of Utah on August 19th halted enforcement of a state law barring transgender girls from playing on girls' sports teams, and the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana on July 26 issued a preliminary injunction requiring that a 10-year-old trans girl be allowed to rejoin her school's girls' softball team.

Day said, however, that she expects the next legislative session will see more bills targeting LGBTQ kids and families in schools. She invites people to sign up for Family Equality's e-newsletter at familyequality.org to receive action alerts about harmful bills in their states and opportunities for getting involved and speaking out.

Additionally, she said, "We encourage all families to reach out to their elected officials and share why it's so important to have safe, affirming classrooms for LGBTQ+ families. She suggested finding or starting a group of other local parents to receive advocacy training and find ways to "mobilize the power and passion of parents in creating concrete change."

She also observed that parents can have a "huge influence" by "[Getting] involved in your school commo-

nity if you feel safe to do so." She suggested, "Introduce yourself to your child's teacher" and, if possible, "consider volunteering in your child's classroom or taking on a leadership role with the PTA, diversity committee, or curriculum review committee. These are concrete ways you can make your voice heard!"

Vashee advised, too, that many children "have some understanding of what's happening" via social media, news, or new classroom policies or programs. "Don't be afraid to start honest, age-appropriate conversations with them about how the presence of these laws in their classroom makes them feel," they recommended. Family Equality's website, familyequality.org, has resources for having these conversations as well as for finding family groups and creating inclusive classrooms.

Day also urged LGBTQ parents with any school-age children, and the children themselves if they are 13 or older, to take the LGBTQ+ Families and Schools Study launched by Family Equality, GLSEN, and COLAGE (glsen.org/familystudy). This will "help inform education policymakers and the public about what's really going on in our nation's schools for LGBTQ+ families" and be "an important tool for fighting anti-LGBTQ+ bias."

"We know that being out and sharing your story isn't always easy, especially in times like this," she affirmed. "But it's more important than ever. Putting a face to the work is essential in demonstrating just how impactful these harmful bills are and just how urgently we need to pass protections for our families."

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of *Mombian* (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, with a searchable database of 1000+ LGBTQ family books, music, and more.

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Colbert

Continued from page 1

As a regular freelance contributor to the National Catholic Reporter and other media outlets, Chuck debunked tirades against gays and often underscored how girls and young women had been raped and abused by priests and church officials, too.

I thought about this a lot when I heard that Chuck had died on June 30. He was 67.

I was shocked by his sudden passing and how long it took to find out he had died. I met him decades ago through the National Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association. Why did it take a month and a half for news of his passing to spread?

Chuck's friend Karen Allhouse posted news on his Facebook page: "I've learned that while visiting in Johnstown [Pa.] he developed a serious medical issue (involving his esophagus reportedly) and he needed to be transferred to a higher level of medical care and was transferred to a Pittsburgh hospital. Respiratory complications developed and he died. For those who are concerned about his mom — a former high school teacher of his (English) accompanied him to the cemetery for the committal service."

I considered Chuck a loving friend and a journalistic colleague but I realized I actually knew little about him. Our friendship ranged from email exchanges to quick chats at events to deep conversations about religion, including the influence of Thomas a Kempis' "The Imitation of Christ."

If anyone sought to imitate Christ, it was Chuck Colbert. He was kind without thinking about it. He walked the walk and scolded those who didn't but claimed to have created the path.

On March 17, 2002, two months after the Boston Globe exposed the sexual child abuse by priests robbing the foundation of the Boston archdiocese (depicted in the movie "Spotlight,") Chuck wrote an op-ed in the Boston Herald entitled "Leaders of Catholic Church Must Listen to All the Faithful."

"Clearly, the Catholic Church in Boston is in crisis. Some blame 'militant homosexuals' among the clergy, branding them 'a true plague on the priesthood.' Is the crisis, in fact, rooted there? Let me offer another perspective — one based on more than 25 years of faith life as a convert. First, I have failed, somehow, to encounter any Catholic Church culture characterized by 'priestly homosexuals run amok with no fear of condemnation.' The reality is significantly more boring," Chuck wrote.

He went on to describe his scholarly and theological journey from the University of Notre Dame to Georgetown University, Harvard University and Weston Jesuit School of Theology, receiving degrees at each stop.

"Still, it was not until I arrived in Cambridge 15 years ago that my spiritual desolation over the conflict between my sexual identity and my religious conviction found its positive counterpart: consolation," Chuck wrote in the Boston Herald. "The catalyst for that life-saving, personal transformation began when a bright and theologically astute Jesuit priest became my spiritual director.

"He listened," Chuck continued. "Over time, I broke the silence of my anguished pilgrim journey and its struggle with homosexuality. He understood that I carried with me the

heavy baggage of church teaching, those deeply wounding, soul-shaming words from the Catechism, 'objective disorder' and 'intrinsic evil' that pathologize (and objectify) same-gender love and its sexual expression. Through the respectful, nonjudgmental listening and guidance of spiritual direction and through richer encounters of God's grace in the sacraments, therapy, and prayer, I came to experience God's unconditional love. I now feel, to the core of my being, that God loves me (I suspect you) along with all my quirky postmodern, American, but very human, strengths and vulnerabilities."

Chuck became an expert reporter covering the Catholic Church sex abuse scandal. During a May 7, 2002, appearance on CNN, Chuck responded to a question about the culpability of Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston.

"I think the question raises a very interesting question, or point," Chuck said. "And it is not just the personality of the cardinal. Other bishops who were auxiliary bishops at the time [of Fr. John Geoghan's arrest for child molestation and release] and are now bishops in other places, as the [Father Paul] Shanley documents have been revealed, these show higher levels of involvement of knowledge. And so it is systemic — but it is also the leadership, the broad leadership that Cardinal Law mustered to either handle or mishandle this scandal, and I think that we will see more of that come out in court."

Chuck's expertise was invaluable to the LGBTQ+ community, as National LGBTQ+ Task Force Communications Director Cathy Renna told the Windy City Times.

"Chuck was a friend and colleague — one who was extraordinarily principled and helpful, especially when addressing issues related to the LGBTQ+ community and the Catholic Church. He was instrumental in helping us frame and address the abuse scandal when church leaders scapegoated gay priests, as a person of faith and an intellectual," Renna said. "[W]orking with him was a vital part of my work taking on the Catholic Church hierarchy while at GLAAD, along with other queer and allied groups. But he was also a pleasure to be friends with, who found joy in life and our community, and was one of the people I most looked forward to seeing at the NLGJA convention and other events. He will be greatly missed."

Chuck caused some ripples in my life after an interview we did for the online LGBTQ+ press trade newsletter Press Pass Q in 2016 about my being laid off as news editor by my longtime publisher Frontiers Newsmagazine.

Chuck had interviewed Bobby Blair, chief executive officer of Multimedia Platforms Worldwide, and the new publisher of Frontiers.

"Unfortunately, Karen fell where we realized we were moving toward a digital and Millennial audience, and we wanted to give the generation of Millennials a real shot at creating our content," Blair told Chuck. "Did you get that on tape?" I asked him.

Chuck Colbert summed up his philosophy via a quote from Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace":

"Life is everything. Life is God. Everything shifts and moves, and this movement is God. And while there is life, there is delight in the self-awareness of the divinity. To love life is to love God. The hardest and most blissful thing is to love this life in one's suffering, in the guiltlessness of suffering."

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BAY WINDOWS

billy masters

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While **Anne Heche** was on life support, **Rosie O'Donnell** took to social media to say she was "feeling bad that I made fun of her when she was talking to **Barbara Walters** about having a relationship with space aliens." After her death, Rosie decided to sit down and read Heche's memoir, "Call Me Crazy." It didn't take long before she found a troublesome passage —which I will quote here: "I was promoting, I think, 'Donnie Beasco', and I went on the 'Rosie O'Donnell Show'. So when I was in my dressing room, I got a knock on the door and Rosie comes in and sets herself down uncomfortably in front of me and basically states, 'Let me cut to the point. If you bring up the fact that you and **Ellen** are a couple, I will not promote you. We will erase this episode...If you bring her up, if you bring up gay love, if you bring up love, if you bring up anything to do with the movement that you feel that you're a part of, you will not have your film promoted.'" Heche hastens to add that O'Donnell was not out at that time.

Rosie responds to this portion of Anne's book, "I would say not true and not likely. I can't imagine ever saying anything like that to anyone, never mind a guest about to appear on my show. So no, that was not accurate, and kind of shocking to hear it, truthfully. No way in God's green hell. So I'm sorry that we never got to talk about that. But I never said that to anyone in my life." Rosie kinda affirmed her stance by posting a second appearance by Heche on her talk show where they both spoke openly about Ellen. So there!

Before "American Idol", there was "Pop Idol" in the UK. The first winner of that show was **Will Young**, who has since come out (and just released a new collection of music a few months ago). The second runner-up was **Darius Danesh** (sometimes billed as **Darius Campbell**), who I met years later when he did "Chicago" in the West End, and got to know better when he appeared on the UK reality competition "Popstar to Operastar" —which he won. For some time, he was married to **Natasha Henstridge**, and appeared in the West End production of "Funny Girl" —on which the much-maligned Broadway production is based. Last week, Darius passed away suddenly at the age of 41. He was a lovely lad. Charming, charismatic, talented, and had a mischievous twinkle in his eye. Rest in peace.

I skipped the first runner-up on "Pop Idol", **Gareth Gates**. He was a cute, unassuming young man who had some success. He kinda fell off the radar, until a few years ago when he emerged with a body closer to a Marvel superhero than the tyke who warbled "Unchained Melody". When asked about his chiseled exterior, he quipped that women preferred him when he was a "skinny beanpole" —which goes to show what women know about male beauty. "But I think I look better now —it's taken me six years to get this body." Six years? I'll be collecting my pension by then! At least I have several sexy stills of Gareth to share on BillyMasters.com.

Last week **Tom Daley** and hubby **Dustin Lance Black** went to a drag show at Ku Bar in London's Chinatown. After the show, they went to another gay bar, Freedom. There they met **Teddy Edwardes**, founder of LICK Events. She claims that she invited them to join her group and even bought them drinks. Then a random guy sat down and made them feel uncomfortable. So Teddy asked security to move the guy away. While this was going on, Lance started grumbling and got up to leave. And that's when he threw a drink at Teddy, which she said was "pretty much unprovoked". The term "pretty much unprovoked" got my hackles up (whatever the fuck "hackles" are).

Teddy continues, "I didn't have a drink to throw back so I did choose violence, but I wasn't that violent. He got a little tap on the back of the head." I need some clarification on how we are defining a "little tap"? There's my "little tap", and then there's a lesbian "little tap" —which might render me unconscious! Teddy adds, "Tom Daley was lovely throughout. He was just trying to diffuse the situation, but unfortunately, his American, Oscar-winning filmmaker husband had other plans...what a fucking mess." The other plans were as follows. "Tell me why he is crying outside saying it's a targeted attack and that he's

traumatized and called the police, and I had to wait there for hours whilst the police were asking questions...And now I have been cautioned and I have to go in for interviews. I'm sorry, but what level of rich, privileged shit makes someone think they can throw a drink over someone and nothing will happen? Because if I throw a drink over someone, I expect shit to go down!"

Hours before filing this column, I went to the world premiere of a musical based on the film "Mr. Holland's Opus". This new musical of the same name was written and directed by our own **BD Wong** with music by **Wayne Barker**, and it's been a passion project for over five years. Since it's a world premiere, one needs to view it as a work in progress. So, not surprisingly, it has a long way to go. The episodic nature of the story does not lend itself effortlessly to cohesion —which is particularly problematic in the first act. One never gets a handle on anything or anyone, so the audience is never truly invested. How to fuse these elements together is something Wong has yet to crack. An additional wrinkle is the score, which is overly ambitious and not particularly tuneful. Ensemble pieces work well, but little else lands. The second act is far more successful. Not only does it have a more straightforward narrative, it has the advantage of **Joshua Castille** turning in a touching performance as Holland's deaf son.

Head and shoulders above everyone in the cast is **Anastasia Barzee**. What she makes out of Holland's wife is miraculous. And vocally she turns in a performance reminiscent of **Alice Ripley's** in "Next to Normal". But the whole show hinges on Mr. Holland, and in that regard, **Akron Watson** is out of his depth. As an actor, he may be plausible. But as a singer, he is woefully lacking —which is surprising given his credits. Perhaps he was having a bad night. Certainly the idea of an African-American Holland adds an interesting layer to the story (although the woke references in the '70s vignette do not ring true). The production and direction are serviceable —except for the entire Cleopatra scene, which must be funnier and more over-the-top (Wong is many things, but he is not what I'd call a laugh riot). What can I say —it's a mixed bag. It's not hopeless, but based on what I saw, I'm not hopeful. But check it out for yourself —the run ends on September 10th. For more details, go to OgunquitPlayhouse.org.

Earlier this year, "Take Me Out" was a big hit on Broadway. It won Tony Awards for Best Revival of a Play and Best Featured Actor for **Jesse Tyler Ferguson**. It was such a hit, it's coming back. Starting on October 27th, Ferguson will join the revival's mesmerizing star **Jesse Williams** for a strictly limited 14-week run. We don't know which former cast members will return, but we do know that phones will again be locked to prevent nude footage from leaking out. Of course, you can already see the entire Broadway cast nude on BillyMasters.com.

Our "Ask Billy" question came out of left field (you see how I did that?). Norm in Chicago writes, "Someone told me there are new photos of **Aaron Schock** circulating. Have you seen them?"

If they're the photos I'm thinking of, they're no big deal. But the reaction is interesting. Every bar has a presence on social media where they will post photos of their more attractive clientele. The Eagle in NYC is no different —except usually their clientele is in some form of undress...or leather...or, occasionally, both. Eagle eyes spotted the disgraced congressman flashing his flesh next to someone sucking on something (don't get your hopes up). One person commented, "It's pathetic how low the gay community will go for a guy with abs." Trust me, I can go lower. In fact, head on over to BillyMasters.com and you, too, could be Schock's proctologist!

When we can't go any lower, it's definitely time to end yet another column. And there's even more to see on www.BillyMasters.com —the site that gets to the bottom every time. If you have a question, dash it off to Billy@BillyMasters.com, and I promise to get back to you before Rosie's next book review! Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.



Anne Heche



Dustin Lance Black & Tom Daley



Aaron Schock

BCH

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allowing varying types of medical treatment for transgender youths, citing evidence that it can improve their well-being, although rigorous long-term research on benefits and risks is lacking.

Republican candidates have also been disparaging transgender people in midterm election campaigns in a strategy designed to motivate the conservative base and sway swing voters, political observers say.

C.P. Hoffman, senior policy counsel at the National Center for Transgender Equality, said this is the first time they've heard of intense, targeted online attacks on children's hospitals, though other organizations that provide services to trans people have faced significant harassment.

"It really makes one worry about the safety of trans youth and their families and the individuals who provide services to them," they said.

The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition also condemned the attacks as baseless claims continuing an assault on trans youth and trans health care that is spreading across the U.S.

"Attacking children and those who care for them for seeking appropriate medical care is an indefensible position and at its core, an ill-fated attempt to erase transgender people from public life," the coalition said in a statement.

The critics cited the videos and snippets of previous language on the hospital's website to claim that Boston Children's Hospital was improperly performing gender-affirming surgeries, such as hysterectomies, on minors and "young" children. The response was swift and relentless, with a barrage of users demanding the hospital be shut down and calling the surgeries "mutilation," "barbarism" and "child abuse," while accusing its doctors of engaging in malpractice or illegal activity.

The hospital said it has received "a large volume" of hostile online messages, phone calls and harassing emails, including the threats of violence.

"We are deeply concerned by these attacks on our clinicians and staff fueled by misinformation and a lack of understanding and respect for our transgender community," the hospital said in its statement.

The hospital has updated language across its websites to emphasize that to qualify for most gender-affirming surgical procedures, patients must be at least 18 and meet certain criteria, including undergoing intensive medical and mental health evaluations and submitting letters of support.

Some of the online critics pointed to information that once appeared on the hospital's website that said to qualify for vaginoplasty at Boston Children's, one must be at least 17 and meet certain criteria, as well as language for chest reconstruction and breast augmentation that remains on the website that says patients must be at least 15

and meet certain criteria.

Vaginoplasty is the creation of a vagina from existing genital tissue. A gender-affirming hysterectomy is the removal of the uterus and fallopian tubes, which can precede a phalloplasty, the surgical creation of a penis.

The hospital said it does not perform genital surgeries as part of gender-affirming care on a patient under age 18. It said that for surgical consultation, a patient must be 17 years old and 18 to 35 years old at the time of surgery.

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health, a global group that sets standards for medical care of trans youths and adults, recently lowered its recommended minimum age for starting gender transition treatment, including sex hormones and surgeries.

The new standards support starting hormones at age 14, two years earlier than before, and some surgeries at age 15 or 17, a year or so earlier than previous guidance. The group acknowledged potential risks but said it is unethical and harmful to withhold early treatment.

The Endocrine Society generally recommends starting those treatments a year or two later but is also updating its guidance. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association are among other groups that support allowing medical treatment for transgender youths but don't offer age-specific guidance.

Florida

Continued from page 1

tention and condemnation earlier this year when it worked its way through the Republican-controlled Statehouse. Critics dubbed it "Don't Say Gay," though it contains no bans on specific phrases and doesn't bar material on sexual orientation considered age-appropriate for grades 4 and above.

Opponents say the law would stifle classroom discussion, arguing that it doesn't clarify what could be deemed inappropriate. It also establishes an enforcement mechanism that invites parents to file lawsuits against districts, potentially heightening tensions between conservatives and school officials.

The Florida debate reflects one that is playing out nationwide, with fights in school boards and state legislatures over what and how children learn about race, gender, sexual orientation and American history. DeSantis and other Republicans have argued parents should be the ones in control of teaching their children about sexual orientation and gender identity.

DeSantis recently addressed some of the concerns at an unrelated news conference, saying: "You know I hear some people say, 'Wow, school's coming up. But, you know, Florida, they have parent's rights in education, they

banned CRT (critical race theory), all this stuff. People, how are they gonna know what to teach or whatever?"

"And I'm just thinking to myself, you know, you teach reading, math, science, the basic stuff. And you don't teach gender ideology, CRT, the sexuality in the elementary schools. That's not very difficult to know and that's not very difficult to understand," he said.

Educators say the state Department of Education has not yet explained clearly how the law will be enforced. In June the agency issued a memo on the law to school district superintendents, but it mostly contained a copy and paste of the legislative text. The agency did not immediately return an email seeking comment from AP.

"The guidance we're giving people is that it is confusing and we don't know how it's going to be interpreted. But what we can do is care for kids and provide the good learning environment that they deserve," said Andrew Spar, president of the Florida Education Association union.

The law has been at the heart of a discussion over sex education materials in Miami-Dade County, which has the state's largest school system. Some school board members said new textbooks showed pictures of condoms, diaphragms and intrauterine devices that were too graphic for middle school students.

When school officials sought the board's approval for the new textbooks in April, after the law had passed, administrators said they would remove chapters that cover gender identity and sexuality. The board members approved the online textbooks, but then reversed their decision last month after coming under public pressure. The board reversed itself again last week to adopt the textbooks without the chapters on gender identity and sexuality.

In Palm Beach County, school officials say they reviewed books and have moved only a handful to a separate section not accessible to children in third grade and younger.

In various school districts, teachers have said they are worried about parents filing complaints over perceived violations while there's still not much clarity around the new law.

Norma Schwartz, mother of a fifth grader and an eighth grader in Miami-Dade schools, said the law may cause some students, families and teachers to feel targeted.

"It goes against our mission and vision, to empower all children, not make them feel like they don't belong," said Schwartz, who is part of the Miami-Dade County Council PTA, which has opposed the law. "As far as parental rights, we are the PTA. We have been around for 100 years. We want parental engagement, we want to empower parents."

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