



Book Bans Skyrocket Amid Sweeping Attacks on Multiple Titles

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

The number of books being banned or facing attempted bans in schools and libraries increased dramatically in 2022, with books that have LGBTQ and/or Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) characters predominant among them, as two new reports show. While these trends are not new, the reports find disturbing

shifts in the forces behind them.

"Gender Queer," by Maia Kobabe, a memoir about growing up nonbinary and asexual, has topped the American Library Association's annual list of the Top 10 Most Challenged Books for the second year in a row. Of the 13 books on the list (more than 10 because of ties), seven were targeted

because of LGBTQIA+ content.

The list was released April 24th as part of the American Library Association's (ALA's) annual "State of America's Libraries Report," which found a record 1,269 challenges (demands for censorship) to library, school, and

see **MOMBIAN**, page 10

Governor Healey and Mayor Wu to Join Boston's LGBTQ+ Pride Events

Boston's First Pride Parade in Three Years to Take Place, Saturday, June 10

Submitted by
Boston Pride for the People

Boston Pride for the People, the new organization at the helm of the return

of the annual LGBTQ+ Pride celebration, today announced Governor Maura Healey and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu will march and speak at this year's parade and festival on Saturday, June 10. Governor Healey is the first woman and the first LGBTQ person elected Governor of Massachusetts and Mayor Wu is the first woman and the first person of

color elected Mayor of Boston. More than 1 million people are expected to take part in the festivities.

"We're so excited to see the return of the Pride celebration in Boston," said Governor Healey. "In Massachusetts, we stand for civil rights and equality,

see **PRIDE**, page 9

Why Mifepristone battle matters to the LGBTQ community

Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

The escalating clash over the availability of a certain FDA-approved

medication to terminate an early-stage pregnancy has significant implications for many LGBTQ people.

Over the years, various entities have tried to block the use of hormones for

gender transition and medications for HIV prevention. Now, the court battles raging over the abortion drug RU-

see **MIFEPRISTONE**, page 7

North Brookfield Pride event, including drag show, given go-ahead

By Associated Press

NORTH BROOKFIELD, Mass. (AP)—A Pride celebration that includes a drag performance scheduled for a small Massachusetts town has the proper authority to take place as originally planned, the town's lawyer wrote in a letter to the American Civil Liberties Union, ending weeks of uncertainty about the event.

The clarification Friday from a lawyer for the town of North Brookfield came two days after the three-member select board rescinded a previous vote to

see **BROOKFIELD**, page 9



An unidentified drag performer sings the popular song "This is Me," on the West Brookfield Town Common, in West Brookfield, Mass., Saturday, June 26, 2021. (Sarah Fahey-Frazier via AP)

Montana Rep. Zooney Zephyr sues over removal from House floor



Rep. Zooney Zephyr, D-Missoula, works from the lunch counter outside House of Representatives chamber in the Montana State Capitol in Helena, Mont. on Monday, May 1, 2023. (Thom Bridge/Independent Record via AP)

By Amy Beth Hanson
and Matthew Brown

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana state Rep. Zooney Zephyr asked a court Monday to allow for her return

to the House floor after she was silenced and barred for chiding her Republican colleagues over legislation to restrict gender-affirming health care

see **ZEPHYR**, page 5

Angels Still True



From left: Maurice Emmanuel Parent, Kari Buckley, Eddie Shields (seated), Nael Nacer, and Helen Hy-Yuen Swanson in Central Square Theater-Bedlam production of "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches" at Central Square Theater. NILE SCOTT STUDIOS

Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part 1: Millennium Approaches.

Central Square Theater and Bedlam, at Central Square Theater, Cambridge, through May 21. 617-576-9278 or centralsquaretheater.org

By Jules Becker
Contributing Writer

Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz, in paying respects at the passing of Sarah Ironson at the start of "Angels in America, Part 1," speaks of the 1985 United States as a "melting pot where nothing melted." Later Ironson's liberal gay

see **ANGELS**, page 11

THE CHECKOUT

Corazón Cabo Resort & Spa

Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

By Ed Salvato

Courtesy of the National LGBT Media Association

www.corazoncabo.com



Photo courtesy of Kalene Santana

TOP/BOTTOM LINE

The new Corazón tower at the Corazón Cabo Resort & Spa brings affordable luxury and upscale Mexican fiesta vibes to the very center of Cabo San Lucas, located at the tip of Baja California, a direct, non-stop flight from NYC, Dallas, Los Angeles, and other major U.S. destinations. Neither Cabo nor Corazón is an LGBTQ hot spot, but they're both incredibly comfortable for and welcoming to LGBTQ folks, and particularly popular with gay couples.

AMENITIES

The resort offers sufficient amenities to keep you entertained and pampered during a long weekend stay. Almost embarrassed to say that during this trip we only left the resort once to visit a remote beach (see below.) After months of hard work, it was exactly what we needed.

If you can tear yourself from your private balcony hot tub, you'll want to head to the resort's Beach Club to enjoy Playa El Medano. Book a plush cabana or side-by-side chaise lounges, order from the lunch and bar menu and enjoy the constant stream of city-sanctioned hawkers of massage and mariachi services, surprisingly well-crafted souvenirs, cheesy hats, and bizarrely worded sashes ("Eat my booty") destined for boozy bachelorette parties.

We ordered room service a shameful number of times — it's incredibly prompt — but we also enjoyed the tasty treats at the resort's numerous à la carte restaurant options, including Aleta, Rooftop 360, and Baja Brewery. Seafood is a specialty as is Mexican cuisine, naturally, but worry not: You can always order a hamburger and other familiar dishes. Rooftop 360 is the highest open-air dining/cocktail spot in town and offers breathtaking views all around. It's sublime at sunset. The brewery is breezy, laidback, and fun, with live music and streaming sports stations. Book a treatment at Sparitual, the onsite spa. It's pricey, but the amenities (sauna, steam room, hot tub,) and therapist quality are top-notch. An 80-minute massage (\$180) left me pleasantly sore and ready for bed. Request Edgar or Brandon.

These amenities are important, but the best one is the staff which is well trained and constantly working to keep the resort clean and you happy. When you visit, ask for Michel (pronounced "mitch-el"), Experience Manager. He takes care of everyone incredibly well and keeps a special eye out for LGBTQ guests.

ROOM/RATES

Book direct on the hotel website for the best deals. Our room in the remodeled tower, a 400-square-foot Infinity King Ocean View with Hot Tub, starts around \$550 per night in the busy winter season sleeps two and includes a Nespresso machine, a safe, and daily service. (Cabo is expensive — it's surrounded by ocean, desert, and mountains, so nearly everything must be shipped in — so that price is on par with similar resorts.) Marina and City View rooms are also lovely, but we prefer ocean view accommodations, where you can enjoy the breathtaking views of the busy bay and mountains while sipping your Caffè Lungo, or order a bottle of wine and ease into the steamy Hot Tub with your honey and watch the moon rise over the bay.

NEARBY EXPERIENCES

Long a tourist hub, Cabo San Lucas doesn't offer significant historic or cultural assets. So, no demerits for simply staying at the hotel though there are fun options outside Corazón, which is located in the center of Cabo's hotel zone. You can easily walk to the charming marina where you can find the only Starbucks downtown or for a popular, delicious local taco spot, check out **Wachinango's Los Cabos** <https://www.wachinangos.com/>. There's a fun gay bar a 5-minute Uber ride away called **Chandelier**, <https://www.facebook.com/ChandeliersNightClub/> best Thursday through Sunday nights starting around midnight. If you want to see what Cabo looked like 100 years ago hop in an Uber and head to la Curva del Soldado beach, an untouched stretch of rocky coast, sandy beach, and rough Pacific Ocean waves about an hour from the resort.

CABO TIPS

The best time to visit is December through April — with simply perfect hot, dry, and sunny conditions — with March being the ideal time for whale watching, which you can enjoy without leaving the hotel! It's easy to think of this part of the world as an extension of the U.S. We didn't even end up exchanging any money. You can use your credit cards for almost everything, but you'll want to bring lots of small U.S. bills to distribute as tips. Arrange airport transfer with **Baja Travel Transportation**, <https://bajatraveltransportation.com> reliable and reasonably priced.

NYC-based Ed Salvato is a freelance travel writer, instructor at NYU and the University of Texas at Austin's NYC Center, and an LGBTQ tourism marketing specialist. For more information on the National LGBT media Association, visit: <https://nationallgbtmediaassociation.com>.

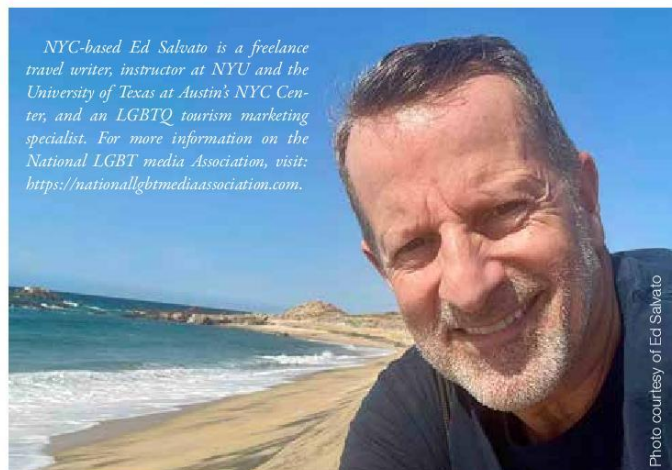


Photo courtesy of Ed Salvato



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Supreme Court, Biden, and Navratilova enter battle over anti-trans laws

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

Transgender athletes saw two significant victories last month: one from the conservative U.S. Supreme Court and the other from the LGBTQ-friendly White House of President Joe Biden. The events triggered a flood of national media attention, and found lesbian tennis legend Martina Navratilova on the side of those wishing to bar transgender females from participating in female sporting events.

Neither of the two developments changes any law at this time, but both represent powerful pushbacks against a wave of hostile legislation in many states.

The Supreme Court vote announced April 6 temporarily stops a recently passed ban in West Virginia against transgender athletes. The law is a variation on the numerous laws against transgender students that are being enacted around the country. The West Virginia law requires that public secondary schools and universities bar any student identified as male at birth from participating in a sport designated for female students.

The Supreme Court voted 7 to 2 in West Virginia v. BPJ to reject the state's request that the Supreme Court vacate a federal appeals court injunction in February that prevented the anti-transgender law from taking effect. The injunction is set to remain in place until the appeals court rules on the constitutionality of the law.

The Alliance Defending Freedom joined the state of West Virginia in its request to vacate the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals' injunction. Twenty-one states joined a brief supporting West Virginia's request, including Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Virginia. And a group of 67 female athletes, coaches, and parents, including lesbian tennis legend Martina Navratilova, submitted a brief in support of the West Virginia law.

"At every level, we are aware that less skilled, less determined males beat higher level female athletes because of innate physical difference in the sexes," said the group's brief. "...When women and girls are asked to compete against male athletes, they are asked to ignore biological reality, the reality that defines female physical bodies."

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, the Supreme Court's most consistently anti-LGBTQ members, submitted a dissent to the majority's denial of West Virginia's request. They said the court is "likely" to take up the issue "in the near future." Specifically, they said, the issue will be whether Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 or the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause prohibit a state law "restricting participation in women's or girls' sports based on genes or physiological or anatomical characteristics." The dis-

sent also hinted that the majority's vote may have been based on a procedural matter: that West Virginia took 18 months before seeking to vacate the lower court injunctions.

The West Virginia law was due to go into effect in July 2021, but the ACLU and Lambda Legal filed litigation, BPJ v. West Virginia, to challenge the constitutionality of the law and prevent it from taking effect. (Subsequent to filing the lawsuit, the plaintiff in the challenge has been identified as now 12-year-old Becky Pepper-Jackson.)

Biden crafts a moderate proposal

The Biden administration's proposed rule change, from the U.S. Department of Education, cannot take effect until after a 30-day period during which the public can comment on the proposal and the Biden administration can take those comments into consideration.

The 115-page proposed rule change would amend one section of Title IX of the Education Amendments act, the federal law which prohibits discrimination "on the basis of sex" in schools that receive federal funding. The section (106.41b) says schools can have separate teams for males and females for contact sports. The Biden administration proposal seeks to add that, if a school refuses to allow a transgender student play on a team that matches their gender identity, the refusal must be based on a need to "minimize harms" and "be substantially related to the achievement of an important educational objective."

"This clarification regarding Title IX's application to sex-related eligibility criteria is particularly important as some States have adopted criteria that categorically limit transgender students' eligibility to participate on male or female athletic teams consistent with their gender identity," stated the Department of Education's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM). DOE said it developed the proposal after getting feedback from stakeholders through a public hearing, listening sessions, and correspondence. It also stated that it referred to policies developed last year by the International Olympic Committee and the National Collegiate Athletics Association.

DOE referred to reports from these groups and others that indicate how, in schools, participation in sports serves various social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, such as learning to work as a team.

"The Department finds the work of these organizations on this issue to be informative to the extent the organizations aim to balance important interests, minimize harm to students whose opportunity to participate on a male or female team consistent with their gender identity would be limited or denied, and take

account of the sport, level of competition, and grade or education level of students," stated the DOE proposal.

"...Youth participation in athletics is associated with many physical, emotional, academic, and interpersonal benefits for students, including increased cognitive performance and creativity, improved educational and occupational skills, higher academic performance and likelihood of graduation from a 4-year college, improved mental health, and improved cardiovascular and muscle fitness, as well as reduced risk of cancer and diabetes, and has the potential to help students develop traits that benefit them in school and throughout life, including teamwork, discipline, resilience, leadership, confidence, social skills, and physical fitness," stated the DOE proposal.

At deadline, the proposed rule change had not yet been published in the Federal Register. Once it is, interested groups and individuals have 30 days to submit comments for DOE to consider before publishing a final rule change.

In related news, openly gay White House Press Secretary Katrine Jean-Pierre announced at her daily press briefing April 6 that the administration has also created a special helpline for transgender youth. With the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a transgender person can call 988 and then the number 3 to be connected to a counselor who has been specifically trained to help LGBTQ+ youth.

"This has been one of the worst weeks of 2023 so far in terms of anti-LGBTQ bills becoming law in states across America," noted Jean-Pierre. She explained that four states—Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, and North Dakota—enacted anti-LGBTQ bills this week. The Kansas law bans transgender kids from school sports. A total of 14 states currently ban health care professionals from providing gender-affirming care. "Look, this is awful news. Let's be very clear about that," said Jean-Pierre. "LGBTQ+ kids are resilient. They are fierce. They fight back. They're not going anywhere. And we have their back. This administration has their back."

In addition to the anti-trans state laws, national news has prominently featured details about a 28-year-old shooter in Nashville who gunned down three children and three adults March 27 at a private Christian school where the shooter was once a student. Police identified the shooter as Audrey Hale and transgender. Excerpts from Hale's texts indicated he preferred to be called Aidan Hale and use male pronouns. In a text to a friend shortly before the shooting, Hale indicated he planned to commit suicide.

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Get more information at

www.bostonprideforthepeople.org

Vandalism leads to Civil Rights Act complaint against NH teen

By Holly Ramer
Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — A Portsmouth teenager was accused Thursday of violating New Hampshire's Civil Rights Act 22 times, including carrying out an antisemitic, homophobic and racist vandalism spree that damaged 18 properties throughout the city in February.

Attorney General John Formella filed a civil complaint against Loren Faulkner, 17, alleging that the teen targeted businesses, residences, houses of worship and other locations that supported the LGBTQ+ community, had religious practices inconsistent with his beliefs or expressed support for people of different races. Each violation carries a penalty of up to \$5,000.

"Hatred acts that are motivated by intolerance for our fellow citizens have no place in New Hampshire and will not be tolerated," Formella said in a statement.

A phone number could not be found for Faulkner, and it was unclear whether he has an attorney.

In addition to the February vandalism, Faulkner also is accused of stealing or damaging three LGBTQ+ Pride flags, vandalizing a masonic temple and stealing a Ukrainian flag from a church in April 2022. According to the complaint, he also recorded a video denouncing LGBTQ+ individuals and Ukrainians.

"This (expletive) country needs to burn in hell. Can't wait to see all these Ukrainians dies. We love Putin. We love Russia. (Expletive) Ukraine. (Expletive) gay people," he said, according to the complaint.

Investigators said the video, which was

emailed to the entire sophomore class at Portsmouth High School except Faulkner and one of his friends, showed Faulkner's head and hands as he lit a Ukrainian flag on fire. The complaint also describes the two-hour vandalism spree that started around 1 a.m. on Feb. 21 with a swastika spray painted on a railroad trestle and ended with the words "White Lives Matter" painted on a pedestrian bridge. In between, surveillance video captured Faulkner at eight locations, the complaint alleges.

"This trespass and property damage supports only one conclusion: the defendant's conduct was motivated by animus toward, among other protected characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, and national origin, and was designed to discourage those houses of worship and residents from expressing their support for the many different communities living in, visiting, and welcome in Portsmouth," wrote Formella, who is seeking an immediate restraining order that would keep Faulkner 350 feet away from any of the targeted properties.

In response to the February vandalism spree, local nonprofit groups and city officials organized "Love in Bloom," a weekend aimed at highlighting hope instead of hate. Residents were encouraged to pick up fresh flowers from a coffee shop that was among the vandalized buildings and distribute the blooms to the other targeted locations. A synagogue that was vandalized also hosted a public "Community Gathering for Love" with music and speeches.

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Murfitt said he would not comment on the lawsuit, and Regier did not return telephone messages and an email seeking comment.

Residents of the Missoula area said in declarations filed as part of the lawsuit that they wanted Zephyr heard in the Legislature.

Anna Wong, who lives in Missoula County with her transgender child, supported Zephyr in the 2022 election with the expectation the lawmaker would "speak out against the onslaught of bills targeting transgender youth."

"Suicide amongst transgender youth is not imaginary," Wong said. "It is not a game and it is not a political foil. It is real. It is heartbreaking. And it is the responsibility of my representative to speak out against bills promoting it."

Zephyr's attorneys hoped to get a ruling as quickly as possible on their request for a temporary restraining order against Regier and Murfitt. One of the most important pieces of the Legislature's work, finalizing a budget for the next two years, is unfinished.

"Every minute matters," said Alex Rate, legal director of the Montana ACLU and one of Zephyr's attorneys. "Without Zephyr having her full rights and privileges restored, her 11,000 constituents are voiceless."

Democratic Minority Leader Kim Abbott appeared to concede that the removal of Zephyr was

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Zephyr

Continued from page 1

and for encouraging protesters.

Attorneys for the first-term lawmaker sued in state district court in Helena on behalf of Zephyr, a transgender Democrat who represents a liberal district in the college town of Missoula, and several constituents who the attorneys said were being denied their right to adequate representation.

Zephyr, whose comments in the Montana Legislature have made her a prominent figure in transgender rights and in conversations about the muffling of dissent in statehouses, said in a statement Monday that she and her constituents were targeted "because I dared to give voice to the values and needs of transgender people like myself."

The legal challenge against House Speaker Matt Regier and Sergeant-at-Arms Brad Murfitt comes with just days left in the Legislature's biennial session.

A spokesperson for Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen — a Republican whose office will defend the case — said the lawsuit was frivolous.

"This is performance litigation — political activism masquerading as a lawsuit," said Emily Flower, Knudsen's press secretary. She added that a court decision blocking the Legislature's censure of Zephyr would violate the separation of powers between branches of government.



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For a more complete list of employment opportunities and job descriptions, and to apply for any of the above positions, applicants should visit:

www.governmentjobs.com/careers/andoverma

Andover Public Schools seeks candidates who embody our ethos, which includes valuing the identities of all students, high expectations for all students, teaching excellence, collaboration, innovation, respect, and responsibility. APS is committed to hiring and supporting a racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff. Racially and ethnically diverse teachers produce a myriad of positive outcomes for all students, especially the most historically marginalized students. EOE.

billy masters

"Don't f\$*k it up!"

—Glenn Close's bit of advice over the Paramount+ series based on "Fatal Attraction".

Darren Hayes has a nice bum. I hate to start in such a coarse way—not that I have firsthand knowledge of how coarse his bum is. But I was fortunate enough to catch the final show of the former Savage Garden frontman's recent solo tour. That this happened within spitting distance from whence I was born is a happy coincidence. In addition to all of his solo and group hits, he performed a generous smattering from his latest collection, "Homosexual". His voice is truly a marvel, and hearing it in such an intimate setting was a privilege—especially at such an economical price. I'd not seen Darren in the flesh before, and I hope this will not be our last encounter.

Darren opened the show wearing tight black trousers, a lacy see-through black shirt, and black boots. As luck would have it, I had on a strikingly similar outfit. As I entered the theater, someone approached and said the most extraordinary thing. "Not offense, but you look like Billy Masters." "No offense?" "Excuse me? Still, a fan's a fan!"

If someone were to be involved in a Photoshopping scandal, you probably wouldn't expect it to be a member of the British Royal Family. And yet, all fingers point at **Kate Middleton**, which means **Meghan's** off the hook this week. It started when the **Prince and Princess of Wales** posted a previously unpublished pic of the late QEII surrounded by a number of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren (**Harry's** kids didn't make the cut). It didn't take royal-watchers long to note that the snap had been altered. The popular conjecture is that **Louis** wasn't even in the room when the photo was taken. But it's also possible that he was sporting a grimace, which was fixed in post. One parent chimed in saying, "It isn't easy to get the perfect photo with 10 children."

If you happen to be going to the coronation (and I know many of you are), let me caution you to behave in pubs. Last August, **Dustin Lance Black** was in a dust-up in a London pub with **Teddy Edwards**, a lesbian television presenter. Oh, yes—Lance was in a bar fight with a girl! While there are differing accounts of how it started, at some point Black threw a drink at Teddy. She responded by giving Lance (in her words) "a little tap on the back of the head". Black then called the police, but no arrests were made at the time. A couple of months later, Black said he experienced what he described as a "life-altering concussion"—which he traced back to that "tap". And now Teddy is pressing charges! Dustin was charged, released on bail and is set to appear in court on August 8th.

Patti LuPone recently expounded on her reasons for giving up her Actors Equity card. "I don't want to work on Broadway anymore. Broadway's now turning into a combination of Disney, Las Vegas, and the circus." "Now turning"? I think that ship has sailed. Or perhaps the shit has sailed. Because apparently there is a phantom pooper on Broadway. I'm admittedly late to this party, but this is indeed a real thing. "When **Hillary and Chelsea Clinton** were in the audience [of 'Some Like It Hot'], the lights came up for intermission, and there were two human turds in the aisle just near the famous political duo," said one source. Color me skeptical. First, I imagine they were sitting in the front section of the orchestra. I find it unlikely that such defecation is happening in real time. Adding fuel to the fire, the theatre manager was overheard saying this is the fourth such incident. I think someone's bringing poop in. As to whether it's human or not, I'm awaiting confirmation from the lab.

There's a transition here, but I'm just going to plow ahead. There's a new development between **Lukas Gage**

and **Chris Appleton**—they've gotten married! Before you ask, yes, we've only been talking about this coupling since February. But, truly, we don't know how long they've been dating. They might have met. . . I dunno. . . weeks earlier! They were seen sporting matching wedding bands at last week's "Daily Front Row Fashion LA Awards". We later found out that the couple got married at the Little White Chapel in Las Vegas in front of six guests after getting a marriage license in Clark County, NV. Later that night, they went to see Usher with **Kim Kardashian**, who actually officiated the ceremony. Well, if they've got the blessing of Kim, it should last. . . days. Far be it from me to poop on their parade (which they might enjoy).

Cheyenne Jackson recently made a brave revelation—after 10 years of sobriety, he's fallen off the wagon. "I took my eye off the ball. I stopped doing what I needed to do to keep myself on the path of my personal integrity. I could blame it on Covid. I could blame it on the state of the world. Mass shootings. A nation divided. The death of my co-star. But the truth is, I thought I had it all handled. I thought, 'I got this. But I don't. I am a work in progress. Always.' I don't know if I've ever found him more attractive."

Billy Porter is on a roll. He just released some new music and is about to kick off a concert tour this week. He's also announced his next acting project. He will play writer and activist **James Baldwin** in a big-screen biopic—based on the 1994 biography by **David Leeming**. In making the announcement, Porter said, "I stand on James Baldwin's shoulders, and I intend to expand his legacy for generations to come."

It's not been a good week for cable news anchors. FOX let **Tucker Carlson** go, around the same time **Don Lemon** was terminated from CNN. Believe it or not, Lemon's firing was less of a surprise. CNN has not seemed to know what to do with Don ever since Discovery took over. Add in the rumored history of questionable behavior, and the writing was on the wall. Interestingly, both gents have secured the services of **Bryan Freedman**, a lawyer who has negotiated multimillion-dollar settlements for such ousted anchors as **Megyn Kelly** and **Chris Cuomo**.

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Drew in Chicago. "Thanks for the nude photos of **Richard Armitage**. Someone told me he's gay, but you didn't mention that. So is he or isn't he?"

Yes, Armitage is gay. In fact, you weren't the only one with that question this week. A UK paper asked him about coming out, and he was very upfront about it. "That happened when I was 19—to anybody who mattered—and I was always waiting for that question to punch me in the face, and it never did. I thought, 'Are people being polite, or is it that they don't want to know?' He'll be quite happy you wanted to know. And in case people missed his nudity in "Obsession", you can see every inch of Dicky on BillyMasters.com."

When we're running reruns in May, it's definitely time to end another column. This week's column is coming to you from Fort Lauderdale, where it is Fleet Week—and, no, it doesn't have anything to do with enemas. Well, there was that night with the platoon from Annapolis. Those guys really do live to serve! The rest of you can check out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that proves a hard man is good to find. If you've got something worth saluting, drop a note to me at Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before someone thinks mistaking me for Billy Masters is a good thing! So, until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.



Photo via Patti LuPone, Facebook.



Photo via Billy Porter, Facebook.



Photo by Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons.

Mifepristone

Continued from page 1

486 (also known as mifepristone) could determine whether any federal judge has the power to pull any controversial medication off the market.

So, there was guarded appreciation Friday (April 21) when the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it would grant a stay against a lower court decision in Texas that sought to pull RU-486 off the market. (Two justices – Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito—dissented from the stay.)

“While today’s ruling to keep this safe, effective drug available for the time being is a sense of relief,” said U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, “our fight to preserve a woman’s right to control when and if to have a family continues.”

The Supreme Court’s procedural action came in a consolidation of two appeals, *FDA v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine* and *Danco Pharmaceuticals v. Alliance*. Both appeals asked the Supreme Court to stay an order issued by a U.S. district court judge in Texas until the merits of the case could be appealed.

Alliance v. FDA began when an anti-abortion coalition asked a federal judge (appointed by then President Trump) in Amarillo, Texas, to strike down the FDA’s long-standing approval of RU-486. The judge did so on April 7. That same day, another federal judge (appointed by then President Obama) in Spokane, Washington, issued a ruling to ensure that RU-486 would remain available in 18 states which joined a lawsuit by the company that distributes RU-486 (Danco).

The Texas decision moved quickly to the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals which issued a stay against only part of the district court’s ruling taking effect until the appeals court could rule on the merits of the decision. The FDA quickly appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and, on April 21, the Supreme Court stayed the district court’s entire order.

“LGBT people should care about this case,” said Jenny Pizer, chief legal officer for Lambda Legal. In fact, she said, LGBTQ people should be “profoundly alarmed” by the Texas judge’s “utterly lawless ruling” and “only slightly less” alarmed by the Fifth Circuit’s willingness to let part of the judge’s ruling take effect.

“First, many LBTQ people need ready access to emergency contraception for a range of medical reasons, including the decision not to continue a pregnancy for one’s own reasons,” explained Pizer. “...The trial court’s approach just as easily (or perhaps more easily) could be aimed at HIV-related medications and puberty blockers and hormone treatments, as well as medications for many other health conditions that are specially relevant for our communities.”

Lambda Legal and other LGBTQ groups have long warned that any damage done to the right to choose an abortion could have deep implications for the right to have intimate relations, including marriage, for LGBTQ people. Abortion, said Pizer, “is an LGBTQ+ issue for personal medical reasons, liberty and autonomy doctrinal reasons, and [for] broad, movement partnership reasons.”

Lambda Legal and the National Center for Lesbian Rights were among the more than 200 civil rights, health, and justice organizations which submitted a brief to urge the Supreme

Court to block the Texas judge’s ban from going into effect. Twelve out of 13 of Congress’ openly LGBTQ members signed onto a similar brief from 253 members of Congress.

The Congressional brief against allowing the Texas judge’s ruling to take effect said the ruling and the Fifth Circuit’s upholding of part of it had “perilous consequences reach far beyond mifepristone.”

“Providers and patients rely on the availability of thousands of FDA-approved drugs to treat or manage a range of medical conditions, including asthma, HIV, infertility, heart disease, diabetes, and more,” said the brief. “Moreover, the prospect of courts second-guessing FDA’s rigorous drug safety and effectiveness determinations will disrupt industry expectations and could chill pharmaceutical research and development.”

The District of Columbia and 23 states also submitted a brief to the Supreme Court, asking it to stop the Texas judge’s ruling from going into effect. Those states, including California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Oregon, said that taking RU-486 off the market would increase the need for surgical abortions, thus increasing the stress on many clinical facilities and causing delays that affect all patients.

“Delays resulting from increased demand for [surgical] abortion procedures will obstruct access to other forms of care at those facilities, inevitably resulting in higher rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, barriers to early detection and treatment for breast, ovarian, and testicular cancers, and worsened health outcomes for patients’ overall sexual and reproductive health and beyond. Those harms,” said the states’ brief, “will disproportionately impact groups already underserved by the health care system, including women of color, low-income women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals.”

The Texas case will now go back to the federal appeals court to rule on the merits of the litigation and then, almost certainly, will be appealed again to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“If the [Fifth Circuit] appeals courts were to accept the trial court’s brazen disregard of the decades of evidence that mifepristone is safe, that pregnancy and childbirth are riskier, and that many, many other medications are far riskier,” said Pizer, “we all will be living in a much more dangerous society.”

Meanwhile, just three days after the Texas judge issued his decision, Massachusetts’ newly inaugurated lesbian governor, Maura Healey, directed her state to stockpile RU-486 to ensure that women who need the drug can get it.

“Here in Massachusetts, we are not going to let one extremist judge in Texas turn back the clock on this proven medication and restrict access to care in our state,” said Healey. California Governor Gavin Newsom made a similar announcement the same day (April 10).

Oregon’s new lesbian governor, Tina Kotek, announced April 20 that her state would stockpile RU-486, saying the Texas judge’s decision “set an alarming precedent of putting politics above established science, medical evidence, and a patient’s health, life, and well-being—with potential implications beyond this one medication.” Kotek said the Alliance’s lawsuit is “part of a larger campaign to ban abortion in every state, including those with legal protections for abortion access.”

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Pride

Continued from page 1

and proudly embrace all of our communities. I've always enjoyed participating in the Pride Parade and am especially looking forward to celebrating this year."

This year's parade is the first to take place in Boston since 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Boston is going to have a terrific Pride season this year," said Mayor Wu. "There are so many great opportunities to celebrate with Boston Pride for the People, Youth Pride, Trans Resistance March, Urban Pride, the LGBTQ Prom, and more. The City of Boston is honored to be working alongside LGBTQ+ community members and organizations to help make all of these events successful celebrations of our city."

Boston Pride for the People is a new organization led by community volunteers who are reestablishing an annual Pride celebration in Boston.

"Governor Healey and Mayor Wu are unwavering champions of LGBTQ equality," said Tanya Nesluslan, Executive Director of MassEquality and

secretary of the Boston Pride for the People board. "Their achievements underscore how movements intersect and reinforce each other. Women. People of color. LGBTQ+. When we come together for Pride, we celebrate progress for all."

"There is widespread enthusiasm for the return of Pride," said Gary Daffin, Executive Director of Multicultural AIDS Coalition, the fiscal sponsor of Boston Pride for the People. "Parade registration is growing daily. Booths for the festival are being reserved rapidly. And fundraising is going well. We're just over half way to our goal and there are still opportunities for major partnership. We are blessed by the support of our amazing communities."

Information on registering for the parade, tabling at the festivals, volunteering, and becoming a sponsor can be found at www.bostonprideforthepeople.org.

Boston Pride for the People (BP4TP) is a new grassroots organization leading the way for a reimagined Pride celebration for Boston. Learn more about Boston Pride for the People at www.bostonprideforthepeople.org, and follow the organization on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok @bostonprideforthepeople

Brookfield

Continued from page 1

deny a permit for the event organized by the Rural Justice Network because it included a drag show, which two members of the board found objectionable.

The board then held another vote on whether to give the green light to the event, but those two members abstained, meaning the measure failed.

The Rural Justice Network and the ACLU of Massachusetts were unclear if that meant the Pride event could go on.

But the town's lawyer in Friday's letter said the event—drag show included—could take place on the town common as planned on June 24 because the board's permission originally given in March remains in place.

"The Rural Justice Network has worked hard to make Small Town Pride 2023 an enjoyable experience for North Brookfield, and are ecstatic to hear that we can continue with our plan to give this community the event they deserve," the organization said in a statement.

Friday's letter ended weeks of back-and-forth

over the event.

The select board first approved Rural Justice Network's request during a meeting in March.

But the board voted 2-1 at its April 11 meeting to pull permission, ruling that a drag show violated restrictions on "adult entertainment" in the town of fewer than 5,000 residents about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Boston. They said the event could go on without the drag show.

The ACLU in a letter to the board dated April 18 said the town was violating the Rural Justice Network's constitutional rights and asked the board to restore full permission for the event in order to "avoid potential litigation."

"This is welcome news for everyone in North Brookfield who will enjoy this joyous celebration of inclusivity," said Ruth Bourquin, senior and managing attorney at the ACLU of Massachusetts. "We hope that all Massachusetts communities take note: Discrimination against those who choose to express themselves through drag is inconsistent with our state and federal constitutions."

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Zephyr

Continued from page 5

within the House's authority when she spoke on the House floor as the matter was considered last week. "You absolutely can do this, by rule, by the Constitution... But just because you can do it does not make it the right choice," she said.

Abbott did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Republicans achieved a supermajority in Montana during the 2022 election and now control two-thirds of the state House and Senate, in addition to the governor's office.

GOP leaders, under pressure from hard-line conservatives, silenced Zephyr from participating in floor debates and demanded she apologize two weeks ago, after she said those who supported a ban on gender-affirming care for youths would have blood on their hands. Days later, she raised her microphone in defiance as demonstrators in the House gallery angrily demanded she be allowed to speak, leading to seven arrests and Zephyr's banishment from the House floor.

Republicans moved to sideline Zephyr further by canceling some meetings of the two committees on which she serves and moving the bills they were to hear to other committees, Democrats said.

She spent the first day of her exile last week battling to use a bench in a statehouse hallway. Her key card to access Capitol entrances, bathrooms and party workspaces was deactivated, according to the lawsuit.

Zephyr spoke briefly during a House Judiciary Committee meeting Monday morning. The full House — minus Zephyr — met in the afternoon, with Zephyr casting votes from a statehouse snack bar because several people occupied the bench.

The House adjourned in the evening without a ruling being made in the lawsuit. Lawmakers were scheduled to reconvene Tuesday.

Her situation echoed the ouster this year of two Tennessee lawmakers from that state's legislature for a protest over gun policy.

In retaliating against Zephyr, Montana Republicans accused her of crossing a line that is faint at best in political debate. It's not uncommon for legislators wading into heated issues like abortion or gun rights to be scolded about "blood on your hands" by protesters or even fellow representatives.

Attorneys for Zephyr noted previous legal disputes in which courts sided with politicians who made controversial comments, including a case that involved a conservative Oregon lawmaker's veiled threats against the state police.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last year ruled that a requirement for Oregon Sen. Brian Boquist to give 12 hours' notice before coming to the state Capitol violated his freedom of speech as an elected official and came as retaliation for his words.

The attorneys also cited a 1966 U.S. Supreme Court case in which justices sided against Georgia lawmakers who tried to exclude a newly elected lawmaker — Julian Bond, who later became chair of the NAACP — because he endorsed criticism of the Vietnam War.

Brown reported from Billings, Montana.

Mombian

Continued from page 1

university materials and services in 2022, targeting a record 2,571 unique titles, up from 729 challenges and 1,858 unique titles in 2021, both years charting a hockey-stick rise from 2020 and earlier.

Of the challenged titles, the ALA said, "the vast majority" were by or about LGBTQIA+ and/or BIPOC people. That's unfortunately no different from many past years. The record numbers of challenges now, however, "are evidence of a growing, well-organized, conservative political movement whose goals include removing books addressing race, history, gender identity, sexuality, and reproductive health" from public and school libraries.

The ALA's findings complement those from a recent PEN America report, "Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools," which found that between July and December, 2022, there were 1,477 instances of individual books banned in schools (both libraries and classrooms), affecting 874 unique titles from picture books through young adult books, an increase of 28 percent over the prior six months. "Gender Queer" also topped this list. Over 4,000 bans, affecting 2,253 unique titles, have been recorded since PEN America started tracking them in July 2021, impacting 182 school districts in 37 states and millions of students.

Both the ALA and PEN America note an increase in multiple books being targeted simultaneously. The ALA pointed to "lists of books compiled by organized censorship groups" as the main reason the recent numbers are so high. "90% of the overall number of books challenged were part of attempts to censor multiple titles," it said. Of those attempts, 40% sought to remove or restrict over 100 titles at once.

PEN America added that while parent-led groups in 2021-22 coordinated many of the book bans, state legislation in 2022-23 is "supercharging" them. School districts "respond to vague legislation by removing large numbers of books prior to any formal review." Many books are "banned pending investigation" and "removed from student access before due process of any kind is carried out; in many cases, books are removed before they are even read, or before objections to books are checked for basic accuracy."

The 874 books, across all ages, contained a range of content: themes or instances of violence and physical abuse (44%); health and well-being (38%, including mental health, bullying, suicide, substance abuse, sexual well-being, and puberty); grief and death (30%); race, racism, or characters of color (30%); LGBTQ+ characters or themes (26%); sexual experiences

between characters (24%); and teen pregnancy, abortion, or sexual assault (17%). Many books included content in multiple categories. The first three categories are more common than in the previous school year, "largely due to the removal of long lists of books, often covering a wide swath of topics."

Looking just at banned picture books, however, nearly three-quarters (74%) featured LGBTQ characters and almost half (46%) featured characters of color or discussed race and racism. (Specific percentages were not given for other age ranges.)

Most instances of bans tracked by PEN America were in Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina, "driven by a confluence of local actors and state-level policy." Yet the influence of these bans goes further, "as policies and practices are modeled and replicated across the country."

The ALA noted, too, that book bans are only part of the problem. School and public librarians themselves are "subject to defamatory name-calling, online harassment, social media attacks, and doxxing, as well as direct threats to their safety, their employment, and their very liberty," wrote Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, in the ALA report. In 2022, she added, 12 states introduced legislation "to permit criminal prosecution of librarians and educators for distributing materials falsely claimed to be illegal and inappropriate for minors." Yet librarians, local residents, library trustees, board members, parents, and other library advocates have in many cases joined together to fight the bans and have had some wins in court, she observed.

All kids need to see themselves, their families, and the world around them reflected in authentic ways. I am heartened by the number of new and upcoming children's and young adult books that include LGBTQ and other marginalized people. Yes, these books will likely face challenges and bans—but I hope that kids will find ways of obtaining them and that enterprising adults (parents, librarians, and otherwise) will help make them available.

If you encounter book censorship attempts in your community, you can confidentially report them to the ALA (ala.org) and/or the National Coalition Against Censorship (ncac.org). For resources on how to prevent and respond to bans and challenges, visit unite-againstbookbans.org (an ALA-led coalition that includes LGBTQ organizations, publishers, and others), pen.org/issue/book-bans, and ncac.org.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of *Mombian* (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, plus a searchable database of 1200+ LGBTQ family books.

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Angels

Continued from page 1

grandson Louis will claim there are no angels in America.

Both when Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play first opened on Broadway in 1993 and 30 years later, the Rabbi's comment still stands as anti-Semitism, racism and ethnic polarization persist.

As for Louis Ironson's claim, "Millennium Approaches" seems to counter with the hope that there are not only unseen spiritual messengers but also protective human ones.

Kushner's timely and transcendent gay fantasia remains a forceful call for caring and understanding—now in a heavenly collaborative revival by Bedlam and Central Square Theater on the latter's home stage.

Bedlam artistic director Eric Tucker—who portrays Roy Cohn at many of the revival's performances—quickly establishes that forcefulness by having the corrupt Republican lawyer move swiftly from call to call on his phone system (with actors ringing with their voices) while seated in an office chair with wheels. At the performance this critic saw, Steven Barkhimer was commandingly imperious as Cohn swore, ordered and maneuvered.

At times the Bedlam director always quickly transforms key items as scenes and sequences change—for example morph-

ing a simple large white sheet from a burial shroud to a bed covering and even a Gloria Swanson diva wrap.

Tucker's trademark spare approach particularly hones in on the contrast between the play's focal couples—word processor Louis and his AIDS-stricken boyfriend Prior Walter on the one hand and pill-popping Mormon wife Harper Pitt and her ostensibly straight Republican husband Joe—who clerks for a Brooklyn federal appeals court judge—on the other.

Phobic Ironson has trouble dealing with Walter's sickness, while Joe is struggling to come to terms with his strong attraction to men.

For her part, Harper seems eager to have a baby. Kushner has Louis speak of the total complexity of a life, and the same goes for the three men and one woman in question as well as Cohn—who sees protégé Joe as a kind of prodigal son and denies he has AIDS, calling his illness liver cancer.

The prophet-like playwright includes observations as true today as in the 1980's. Harper worries about a hole in the ozone layer and melting icebergs before regular concern about climate change. A colleague of Cohn's speaks about abortion issues, making the Supreme Court conservative and turning around liberal political impact—all still very much in the news. Kushner is never preachy here, though these themes and the characters' respective difficulties connecting or empathizing prove equally 'national' (to re-

fer to the play's subtitle).

By contrast, the powerful revival's very talented cast members perfectly connect with their roles. Barkhimer smartly balances Cohn's volatile outbursts and his fatherly counsel with Joe. Gifted Eddie Shields captures Walter's anguish with Louis and tenacity in the face of pressure. His Gloria Swanson-Norma Desmond close-up is a highlight. Zach Fike Hodges finds all of Louis' Jewish guilt and self-doubts. Kari Buckley catches Harper's growing need to escape. Nael Nacer sharply develops Joe's attraction to Louis. Maurice Emmanuel Parent, properly jazzy as unconventional nurse Belize, beautifully understates the black ex-drag queen's reaction to Louis' rattling tirade about anti-Semitism and racism. Debra Wise is a standout as the tallit and yarmulke-wearing Rabbi and equally convincing as Joe's traditional mother Hannah and the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg—whose visit to Cohn is brilliantly lit by designer John Malinowski. Helen Hy-Yuen Swanson makes the most of the approaching Angel.

Ambivalence proves as much of a buzzword here as mendacity in Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." Do not look for any ambivalence in the Central Square Theater-Bedlam collaboration. To borrow from the Angel, the great work has begun with this sublime "Millennium Approaches."

(Look for "Part Two:Perestroika" in September)

JOSEPH J. BENNETT

Jay

MAY 1



"Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grief not, rather find strength
In what remains behind"
William Wordsworth -1804

The years have gone by, and the pain has lessened.
The memories are softer and I remember your smile,
the sun, and your laughter.

~Always,
Gary

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