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Finding Strength and Hope in the Face of Hate

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

The frequency and vitriol of anti-transgender and other anti-LGBTQ executive orders in the past few weeks have been horrifying. It's hard to hold on to hope—but as parents, we need to find resilience and strength for both ourselves and our children. Here are some suggestions for doing so.

First, know that help exists. LGBTQ-affirming support lines include the Trans Lifeline (877.565.8860), the Trevor Project (for youth; 866.488.7386), the LGBT National Hotline (888.843.4564) and the LGBT National Youth Talkline (800.246.7743). If you or your loved ones are in need of legal assistance, you can reach out to the GLAD Law Answers Legal InfoLine, Lambda Legal Help Desk, NCLR Legal Information Hotline, or Transgender Law Center Legal Information Helpdesk, which can easily be found online. You may also wish to know about The Trans Youth Emergency Project (southernequality.org/tyep), which offers logistical and financial support to families needing access to gender-affirming care.

We must also keep ourselves informed. Some places to start: Trans-led sources of news and information include Assigned Media (assignedmedia.org) and Erin in the Morning (erininthemorning.com). Reliable sources

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 3*

A list of government web pages that have gone dark to comply with Trump orders

By Jonathan J. Cooper
Associated Press

A number of U.S. government web pages changed or went dark Friday as agencies scrambled to comply with President Donald Trump's executive orders declaring his administration would recognize only two genders and ordering an end to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

In a letter sent on Wednesday, the Office of Personnel Management directed agency heads to terminate grants and contracts related to "gender ideology," ask staff to remove pronouns from their government emails, and disband resource groups on the issue, too. The directive, which ordered agencies to institute changes by 5 p.m. on Friday, also asked agencies to remove the term "gender" from government forms and swap it out with "sex."

Here is a list of changes and missing pages seen so far. A number of pages have popped up since being taken down, some with changes:

1. National Park Service pages for historic sites related to the internment of Japanese Americans, the Tuskegee Airmen and the Stonewall Uprising for gay rights were inaccessible. The Tuskegee site was back online a short time later but the others remained

see **PAGES,** *page 5*

GLAD Law and NCLR File Challenge to Trump's Transgender Military Ban

Submitted by GLAD

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) have filed a federal lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia challenging President Trump's January 27, 2025, order banning transgender people from serving in the U.S. military.

The suit, Talbott v. Trump, was filed on equal protection grounds on behalf of six active service members and two individuals actively seeking enlistment.

"When you put on the uniform, differences fall away and what matters is your ability to do the job," said Nicolas Talbott, Second Lieutenant, Army. "Every individual must meet the same objective and rigorous qualifications in order to serve. It has been my dream and my goal to serve my country for as long as I can remember. My being transgender has no bearing on my dedication to the mission, my commitment to my unit, or my ability to perform my duties in accordance with the high standards expected of me and every servicemember."

Plaintiffs serve across all branches of the military and are contributing among the highest levels, including a Major, a

see **GLAD,** *page 7*

Trump directives hit hard against LGBTQ and allies

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

The Trump administration directed all federal departments and agencies January 29 to take "prompt actions to end all programs that use taxpayer money to promote or reflect gender ideology."

The directive came through an Office of Personnel Management (OPM) memorandum January 29 from Acting OPM Director Charles Ezell. The memo gave top government officials fewer than two days to complete several actions and until Friday, February 7, to complete others.

Among the actions dictated to agencies and departments through the memo were to:

Review all agency programs, contracts, and grants and terminate any that "promote or inculcate" gender ideology,

Review all agency email systems and turn off any settings that prompt users to identify their pronouns,

Terminate any agency position that involves "inculcating and promoting" gender ideology,

Take down all websites, social media accounts, and other media directed at the public that "inculcate or promote" gender ideology, and

Identify bathrooms and other intimate spaces as available to people by "biological sex and not gender identity."

There are several more actions called for by the memorandum, which is said to be in response to Trump's January 20 executive order entitled, "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government."

see **ALLIES,** *page 2*

Trump order aims to end federal support for gender transitions for those under 19

By Zeke Miller,
Geoff Mulvihill
and Hannah Schoenbaum
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order aimed at cutting federal support for gender transitions for people under age 19, his latest move to roll back protections for transgender people across the country.

"It is the policy of the United States that it will not fund, sponsor, promote, assist, or support the so-called 'transition' of a child from one sex to another, and it will rigorously enforce all laws that prohibit or limit these destructive and life-altering procedures," the order says.

The order directs that federally-run insurance programs, including TRICARE for military families and Medicaid, exclude coverage for such care and calls on the Department of Justice to vigorously pursue litigation and legislation to oppose the practice.

Medicaid programs in some states cover gender-affirming care. The new order suggests that the practice could end, and targets hospitals and universities that receive federal money and provide the care.

The language in the executive order — using words such as "maiming," "sterilizing" and "mutilation" — contradicts

see **TRANSGENDER,** *page 4*

"Seeing that video, it's hard to believe that it's actually genuine and real because she's an actress."

- Criticism of Selena Gomez crying in a video about the mass deportation of illegal immigrants. Trust me, lady, she's not THAT good an actress.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo By Frank Sun, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Allies

Continued from page 1

The OPM memo gives agency heads a week to create a list of actions they have taken and plan to take to enforce Trump's executive order.

Separately, on January 29, Trump signed an executive order that directs the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services to produce a strategy within 90 days (April 29) to eliminate and rescind federal funding for K-12 schools which include pro-LGBTQ-related discussions or policies. Specifically, the order, entitled "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling," calls on the departments to eliminate "Federal funding or support for illegal and discriminatory treatment and indoctrination in K-12 schools, including based on gender ideology and discriminatory equity ideology."

The executive order also instructs the U.S. Attorney General to work with state attorneys general and local district attorneys to enforce the order and file legal action against teachers and school officials who violate the law. Such violations include efforts by teachers and officials to "facilitate" transitioning.

U.S. Rep. Mark Takano, chair of the Congressional Equality Caucus, said February 1, "The Trump Administration is weaponizing the federal government against the transgender community and minorities—just like Project 2025's plan told him to. Trump's efforts to censor the 'T' from 'LGBT,' however, can't remove trans people from our community, and won't divide us. We must stand united against this hate. Republicans in Congress who are silent on Trump's gross abuses of federal power to target minorities are complicit in the damage and pain his attacks are causing Americans."

Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson said the DOE executive order makes clear the Trump administration wants to "limit the ability to talk about the very existence of LGBTQ+ people in our schools and keep all our children from being taught an honest, accurate history of our nation."

"[T]hey want to dictate to children, their parents, and educators what they can read, what they can learn, what they can say, and who they can be," said Robinson in a statement on HRC's website. "… They want to limit the ability to talk about the very existence of LGBTQ+ people in our schools and keep all our children from being taught an honest, accurate history of our nation."

Lambda Legal called the DOE executive order "an out-and-out attack on LGBTQ+ and transgender students, as well as educators, counselors, and school officials who treat such students with dignity and respect." A Lambda statement released January 29 said the order implicates which bathroom to use, what sports they can participate in, and force schools to inform parents if their student requests to be addressed by a different pronoun or name than they use at home.

The OPM memo and K-12 Schooling executive order were just the latest in a series of aggressive moves by the newly inaugurated second Trump administration against the LGBTQ community. Other actions have included:

A January 28 executive order, "Protecting Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation," claims "medical professionals are maiming and sterilizing a growing number of impressionable children under the radical and false claim that adults can change a child's sex through a series of irreversible medical interventions." It states the U.S. government "will not fund, sponsor, promote, assist, or support the so-called 'transition' of a child from one sex to another," and defines child as anyone under 19.

A January 27 executive order, entitled "Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness," that states the military has been "afflicted with radical gender ideology to appease activists…." It states that "expressing a false 'gender identity' divergent from an individual's sex cannot satisfy the rigorous standards necessary for military service." It states that gender dysphoria and shifting pronoun usage are inconsistent with troop readiness.

Some of the issues raised by these executive orders involve constitutional questions currently pending before the U.S. Supreme Court. The nine-member court is currently made up of three members appointed by Trump during his first term and three additional members who have been voting consistently with those three appointees, particularly on LGBTQ-related matters. The court heard oral arguments in December on a case, U.S. v. Skrmetti, to determine whether states can ban the use of gender dysphoria treatment on any child younger than 18.

The Supreme Court will hear arguments later this month, in Ames v. Ohio, about a straight female employee of the Ohio Department of Youth Services filed a lawsuit, arguing that a law banning sexual orientation discrimination should protect her. And the court agreed last month to hear an appeal, in Mahmoud v. Montgomery County, from parents who object to LGBTQ-inclusive storybooks in the classroom.

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Mombian

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of data and research include the Movement Advancement Project (mapresearch.org) and UCLA's Williams Institute (williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu). Two terrific recent books that share the voices of real trans youth are: "American Teenager: How Trans Kids Are Surviving Hate and Finding Joy in a Turbulent Era," by Nico Lang (Abrams) and "Trans Kids, Our Kids: Stories and Resources from the Frontlines of the Movement for Transgender Youth," by Adam Polaski, Alexis Stratton, and Jasmine Beach-Ferrara (Ig Publishing).

We must turn our knowledge into action. We cisgender people who are not already dealing with impacts of the executive orders in our immediate families should nevertheless check in with trans extended family and friends to see how they're doing and assure them of our support. We should continue speaking out to our elected officials, to our communities, and on social media. Additionally, we can donate our time and/or money (as our means allow) to the many LGBTQ and civil rights organizations fighting the onslaught of hate. If you need further ideas, Advocates for Trans Equality (transequality.org) has a helpful list of suggestions for ways to support trans people individually and in the wider world.

We can take heart, too, that legal advocates are already taking steps to stop the executive orders. Let's look at several examples.

Two lawsuits have already been filed by GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) on behalf of several trans women in federal prisons who would be transferred to men's facilities under the executive order that says the federal government will treat people based on assigned sex at birth (either male or female). Judge George O'Toole of the U.S. District Court for Massachusetts issued a temporary restraining order on January 30 in one case, which means the plaintiff can stay in a women's facility while O'Toole considers whether to issue a longer injunction.

Six active-duty transgender service members and two aspiring service members have also filed a lawsuit (again with the help of GLAD Law and NCLR) challenging the executive order that would ban trans people from military service. One of the plaintiffs is Major Erica Vandal, an Army officer, trans woman, and parent, and the lawsuit reminds us that Vandal would lose access to military benefits not just for herself, but also for her spouse and two children. Her G.I. Bill benefits, too, which can be used to fund an education or job training, "would be negatively impacted, as would her ability to transfer these benefits to her children." Another lawsuit against this executive order is expected shortly from Lambda Legal and HRC.

Lambda Legal is also planning action against the executive order that bans gender-affirming medical care for anyone under 19. Although some health clinics, such as ones at Denver Health and Virginia Commonwealth University, are starting to cancel appointments for gender affirming care for those under 19 in response to the order, others, like Mass General Brigham and more in the Boston area, have said they will continue care until "agencies issue regulations implementing these changes and/or legal challenges are exhausted," per WBUR (1/31/2025).

The California Department of Education and several school districts across the country have issued statements affirming their support for trans students in the face of the executive order which would withhold federal funds from schools that teach "gender ideology," "equity ideology," or support trans and nonbinary students in social transition (e.g., by using their requested names and pronouns).

Importantly, too, we must remember that we are the ones who define our own identities and families. Our kids are the ones who define theirs. No one can take that away. And no matter what our kids' identities are, across any aspect of identity, we parents can help them feel positive and empowered by being thoughtful about the language we use, by offering role models (in person or through books and media), and by connecting them with relevant peer communities, offline or online. While there is never a guaranteed outcome, those actions can offer important emotional protections against stigma and hate.

The word "unprecedented" gets thrown around a lot these days—and in many ways, these are indeed unprecedented times. But I also know that we queer folks have a long and precedented history of resilience and resistance. May the wisdom and strength of those who have gone before inform and inspire us to stand firm in the present and create a better future.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog for LGBTQ parents plus a searchable database of 1,700+ LGBTQ family books.

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Say goodbye to your PrEP, and…

By Mark Segal
Philadelphia Gay News

If that headline shocked you, it should have. The executive orders that President Dondald Trump has been signing may very well affect your health. Oh, you thought Trump was only attacking the "T" in our community? Nope. He's targeting the "L," the "G," and the "B" as well. Let me give you some critical facts that explain why you should be alarmed — very alarmed.

Point one: There are health disparities in the LGBTQ+ community. Some diseases disproportionately affect certain populations — sickle cell anemia primarily impacts Black individuals, and Tay-Sachs is more prevalent among Jewish communities. Similarly, there are health concerns that disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ people. Are you surprised? While you may be aware of HIV and AIDS as health issues in our community, there are other needs that are less discussed. For instance, certain cancers occur more frequently in LGBTQ+ individuals than in heterosexual populations.

Now, here's the kicker: one of Trump's executive orders will halt studies investigating why this happens. In some cases, it will also hinder treatments and restrict access to information that could be vital to you if you're affected. This is more than a health issue — it's an attack on our ability to protect ourselves.

Point two: Let's talk about PrEP. The United States is involved in a program that helps provide PrEP to approximately 26 million individuals in Africa. Our government has been underwriting the costs to pharmaceutical companies. Well, thanks to Trump, that program just ended. Do you think pharmaceutical companies will absorb the loss? Highly unlikely.

Here's what that means for us: if you're on a government-assisted program to access PrEP, especially through an LGBTQ+ clinic, you could lose access. For those with insurance, brace yourself for significantly higher co-pays. The pharmaceutical industry isn't known for prioritizing affordability over profits.

Point three: Funding for LGBTQ+ health clinics is at risk. You might think living in a blue state protects you, but think again. States often rely on federal block grant funds to support these clinics. Without those funds, many clinics — especially those providing HIV/AIDS services — will be forced to shut down or reduce services. The ripple effects could be devastating.

Point four: Conversion therapy bans and book bans. Another executive order has halted government efforts to fight conversion therapy, and yet another has stopped federal agencies from opposing book bans. These policies actively harm our community by erasing protections and silencing vital education.

Point five: The end of federal DEI programs. Think diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives don't affect you? Many of these programs fund schools and nonprofits, often training future leaders in advocacy and health care. Under Trump's orders, funding for programs deemed "politically disagreeable" can be cut, forcing schools to drop related courses and initiatives. The long-term impact on our community could be severe.

Point six: International consequences. Remember Uganda's "kill the gays" law? The Biden administration successfully pressured Uganda to back down by threatening to withhold foreign aid. Now that Trump has removed that leverage, what do you think will happen next?

To my fellow journalists: I understand that it's sensational to focus on what Trump is doing to the transgender community, but it's irresponsible not to inform the entire LGBTQ+ community about these broader attacks. We must prepare ourselves and our readers for what lies ahead.

Mark Segal is an American journalist. He is the founder and publisher of Philadelphia Gay News and has won numerous journalism awards for his column "Mark My Words," including best column by The National Newspaper Association, Suburban Newspaper Association and The Society of Professional Journal.

Transgender

Continued from page 1

what is typical for gender-affirming care in the United States. It also labels guidance from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health as "junk science."

On his Truth Social platform, Trump called gender-affirming care "barbaric medical procedures."

Major medical groups such as the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics support access to care.

Young people who persistently identify as a gender that differs from their sex assigned at birth are first evaluated by a team of professionals. Some may try a social transition, involving changing a hairstyle or pronouns. Some may later also receive puberty blockers or hormones. Surgery is extremely rare for minors.

"It is deeply unfair to play politics with people's lives and strip transgender young people, their families and their providers of the freedom to make necessary health care decisions," said Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson.

The order encourages Congress to adopt a law allowing those who receive gender-affirming care and come to regret it, or their parents, to sue the providers.

It also directs the Justice Department to prioritize investigating states that protect access to gender-affirming care and "facilitate stripping custody from parents" who oppose the treatments for their children. Some Democratic-controlled states have adopted laws that seek to protect doctors who provide gender-affirming care to patients who travel from states where it's banned for minors.

Lambda Legal promised swift legal action.

Michel Lee Garrett, a trans woman whose teenage child only partially identifies as a girl and uses they/them pronouns, said such policies aim to erase trans people from public life but will never succeed. Her child has not elected to pursue a medical transition, but the mother from State College, Pennsylvania, said she won't stop fighting to preserve that option for her child and others.

"I'll always support my child's needs, regardless of what policies may be in place or what may come … even if it meant trouble for me," Lee Garrett said.

For Howl Hall, an 18-year-old freshman at Eastern Washington University, taking testosterone not only changed his body but dramatically improved his experience with depression. With that treatment now under threat, Hall said he's concerned that getting off testosterone would hurt his mental health.

"I would be alive, but I wouldn't be living," Hall said. "I wouldn't be living my life in a productive way at all. I can guarantee that I would be failing all of my classes if I was even showing up to them."

The push is the latest by Trump to reverse Biden administration policies protecting transgender people and their care. On Monday, Trump directed the Pentagon to conduct a review that is likely to lead to them being barred from military service. A group of active-duty military personnel sued over that on Tuesday.

Hours after taking office last week, Trump signed another order that seeks to define sex as only male or female, not recognizing transgender, nonbinary or intersex people or the idea that gender can be fluid. Already that's resulted in the State Department halting issuing passports with an "X" gender marker, forcing transgender people to apply for travel documents with markers that don't match their identities.

Trump said he would address these issues during his campaign last year, and his actions could prove widely divisive.

In the November election, voters were slightly more likely to oppose than support laws that ban gender-affirming medical treatment, such as puberty blockers and hormone therapy, for minors under the age of 18 who identify as transgender, according to AP VoteCast. About half of voters, 52%, were opposed, but 47% said they were in favor.

Trump's voters were much more likely to support bans on transgender care: About 6 in 10 Trump voters favored such laws.

"It's very clear that this order, in combination with the other orders that we've seen over the past week, are meant to not protect anyone in this country, but rather to single-mindedly drive out transgender people of all ages from all walks of civic life," said Harper Seldin, a staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union's LGBTQ & HIV Project.

Seldin said the ACLU is reviewing the order "to understand what, if anything, has immediate effect versus what needs to go through continued agency action."

Even as transgender people have gained visibility and acceptance on some fronts, they've become major targets for social conservatives. In recent years, at least 26 states have adopted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors. Most of those states face lawsuits, including one over Tennessee's ban that's pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Republican-controlled states have also moved to keep transgender women and girls from competing in women's or girls' sports and to dictate which bathrooms transgender people can use, particularly in schools.

"These policies are not serving anyone," said Shelby Chestnut, executive director of the Transgender Law Center. "They're only creating confusion and fear for all people."

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and Schoenbaum from Salt Lake City. Associated Press writers Carla K. Johnson and Hallie Golden in Seattle and Linley Sanders in Washington contributed reporting.

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"Ain't No Mo" is a no-holds-barred tragicomedy about race

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Numerous Back-to-Africa movements in the U.S. have sought to return enslaved Africans to the Motherland to resolve the problem of racism. Jordan E. Cooper's tragicomedy "Ain't No Mo" brilliantly highlights the urgency of the idea, especially in light of this present moment. With the premise that the United States government offers Black Americans who are descended from enslaved people a one-way reparations plane tickets to Africa, Cooper, a young black queer male playwright, unashamedly shows the ongoing struggle with America's Original Sin.

Cooper grew up during a rash of police killings of black males, which was the impetus for his play, especially the 2016 killings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. In a 2023 interview with the Huffington Post, Cooper said he started writing the play "as a cathartic way to deal with the onslaught of police killings of unarmed Black folks."

As the youngest Black American playwright ever nominated for a Tony Award, Cooper began writing "Ain't No Mo" while a high schooler. Cooper imagines a place where Blacks live unencumbered from the yoke of racism and police violence. However, before we depart, Cooper's vignettes of all too familiar scenes in black life highlight why it's not safe in the U.S.—physically and mentally — to stay. To some, his no-holds-barred approach might appear brash and gratuitous, but Flight 1619, taking the entire African diaspora back to her homeland after 400-plus years, is a glaring reminder of how long the struggle has been.

The play begins in 2008, celebrating Obama's election as the first black president with the hopes of his election ushering in a "post—racial" America. It ends with Flight 1619 taking off in 2016, with Trump and MAGA America storming into power. Although we're in 2025, ironically, you'll feel stuck in a time warp, a continued nightmare that makes the play a profound message about the endurance and persistence of both institutional and individual racism.

There are several vignettes: a funeral inside a Black church with Brother Right-to-complain, the embodiment of protest and injustice, being eulogized; the home of a wealthy "bougie" Black family whose black servants left to catch Flight 1619; a woman's abortion clinic (Sister Girl We Slay All Day Cause Beyonce Say Community Center) showing a black woman's fear of bringing a black male child into the world; a female incarcerated for 15 years realizing the profound loss of time, and a taping of "Real Baby Mamas of the South Side," an outrageous "Real Housewives"-style reality TV show with a transracial woman named Rachonda in black drag-white woman passing as black (remember Rachel Dolezal?).

The vignettes are disparate but smart, with searing, in—your—face moments that you can't glance askance at. The undeniable experiences of black life and a drag queen named Peaches tie the disparate vignettes together. Peaches, a flight attendant, is tasked with welcoming and ushering the entire U.S. black population onto Flight 1619. Each vignette concludes with Peaches's announcement on the airport's PA system to hurry and board the final flight to Africa. "The powers that be have reassured me there's room for everyone." Each character, however, must make their choice to stay or leave.

The humor buffers the blows. The humor keeps you from crying or swelling with anger with its over-the-top satirical dramatizations. "I love finding the humor in those situations because I believe that's how you get through it," Cooper told the Boston Globe. "That's the thing about 'Ain't No Mo.' It

see **MONROE,** *page 7*

Pages

Continued from page 1

down Friday evening.

2. The State Department removed the X gender marker and replaced "gender" with "sex" on online consular forms. A page with tips for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex travelers was altered. It's now titled "LGBTravelers" instead of "LGBTQIA+ Travelers."

3. The U.S. Census Bureau's homepagewas down. Links to reports and topic pages outlining details about the gender identity, sexual orientation and characteristics of the nation's population returned errors. A message on Friday afternoon for one topic page titled "Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity" read, "The area of census.gov that you are trying to access is currently unavailable due to maintenance." Another page titled "Mental Health Struggles Higher Among LGBT Adults Than Non-LGBT Adults in All Age Groups" also was unavailable. Archives of bothpagesshow they were accessible within the past week.

4. Reports by the Intelligence Community Inspector General were scrubbed from website of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Trump previously fired around 17 inspectors general, independent government watchdogs.

5. A Bureau of Prisons web page originally titled "Inmate Gender" was relabeled "Inmate Sex" on Friday. A breakdown of transgender inmates in federal prisons was no longer included.

6. Much public health information was taken down from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website: contraception guidance; a fact sheet about HIV and transgender people; lessons on building supportive school environments for transgender and nonbinary kids; details about National Transgender HIV Testing Day; a set of government surveys showing transgender students suffering higher rates of depression, drug use, bullying and other problems. The agency also removed its data repository, data.cdc.gov. A message said "the website will resume operations once in compliance" with Trump's executive order. 7. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth orderedthe military to immediately stop recognizing identity months including: Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and National American Indian Heritage Month.

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billy masters

This week, I'm writing to you from sunny South Florida-Fort Lauderdale, to be precise. As I boarded the plane, a Facebook memory popped up from 2019. "I'm heading to Fort Lauderdale to compete against **Dan Renzi** in the pole dancing competition at Chat Noir." While I'd like to say my life has changed since then and I've grown up, apparently I'm the same ole Billy—except it's no longer a competition. And, rather than the divine Dan, I was with three dear lifelong friends to celebrate my upcoming birthday. You know what I discovered? Straight women are exhausting (no offense). I adore them, but I must give it up to straight men... which I've always been inclined to do. And, instead of Chat Noir, we were at AquaPlex (formerly Lips) to see my pal **Daisy DeadPetals** host the fabulous drag dinner. Definitely check it out if you're in the neighborhood—FlaDragShow.com.

It's been a busy week, so let's dispense with the politics quickly. First, how could a fatal collision in mid-air be blamed on **former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg**? "He's a disaster now!" said El Presidente. Yeah, because a former Rhodes scholar who has served in our military and served in both local and federal government is not nearly as qualified as an alumni of "The Real World"! Mayor Pete wasn't taking that lying down. "Despicable. As families grieve, Trump should be leading, not lying."

Did I slip into a time warp and enter the '80s? When did **Caroline Kennedy** dump the Schlossberg name? Not that I really care, but it seems like she's sold the Schlossbergs down the river and become a Kennedy again? I have a good mind to ask for my bat mitzvah gift back! And if she's gonna be Caroline Kennedy, would it kill her to come back and host "The Kennedy Center Honors"? I miss her sidling onto the stage in an ill-fitting dress and carrying a saddlebag. Still, I sincerely appreciate her service to our country.

Clearly it's time for another jaunt in the Filth2Go Wayback Machine. Back in 1974, "Little House on the Prairie" debuted on NBC. After Netflix announced a reboot, **Megyn Kelly** expressed concern over preserving the sanctity of the show. "If you wokeify 'Little House on the Prairie' I will make it my singular mission to absolutely ruin your project." This ticked off **Melissa Gilbert**, who responded. "Ummm... watch the original again. TV doesn't get much more 'woke' than we did. We tackled: racism, addiction, nativism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, rape, spousal abuse and even other 'woke' topic you can think of. Thank you very much." No, thank you, Half Pint!

In 1975, **Cher** televised a TV special which led to her solo variety show. The special included a skit that took place at Final Curtain—Rest Home for Aged Performers. The aged residents included Cher, **Bette Midler and Flip Wilson** in the year 2025. They congregate in the "fun room" to watch the 1975 special. When **Elton John** enters on a motorized wheelchair...well, Cher and Bette cannot keep it together. Check it out on BillyMasters.com.

Back in 1985, **Lily Tomlin** scored a major success with her partner **Jane Wagner's** one-woman show, "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe". She even won the Tony Award. In 1991, it was made into an acclaimed play and Lily reprised the role in a national tour in 1999. Others have tackled the material—most recently, **Cecily Strong** did it off-Broadway and in Los Angeles in 2022. Now, the Aurora Theatre in Berkeley, CA will mount a revival this summer starring our very own **Marga Gomez**. "I couldn't be more thrilled to see Marga Gomez stepping in to Lily Tomlin's iconic role," said Aurora's Artistic Director, **Josh Costello**.

In 1997, **Lisa Kudrow and Mira Sorvino** attended their 10-year high school reunion. Well, not their reunion. It was "Romy and Michele's High School Reunion". Guess what? In a couple of years, it will be their 40th high school reunion. So what a perfect time to talk about a sequel. This time around, Sorvino and Kudrow are involved behind the scenes as executive producers. Since they want to release the film in 2027, they're not in a big rush.

With the Super Bowl around the corner, we're looking forward to some of the ads that will run. **Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan** revisit the infamous deli from "When Harry Met Sally" for Hellmann's. Not being a mayo aficionado, I didn't get too excited about that. Still, there is magic seeing Crystal sitting across from a virtually unrecognizable Ryan. Speaking of unrecognizable, the aforementioned Cher hawks Uber Eats straddling a cannon. She gets a hold of a time machine and tries to go back to the '80s—the 1680s. Eh, at least it's a year she remembers! When villagers remark, "She's both young and old at the same time," you realize she's in on the joke. When they call her a witch, she corrects them. "I'm not a witch—I'm an icon."

Speaking of icons, we come to my favorite story of the week. Have you heard about **Joan Collins'** latest comeback? Talk about going back in time. The 91-year-old legend has signed on to make a big-screen biopic about **Wallis Simpson**! "The Bitter End" recounts Mrs. Simpson's years after the death of the Duke. What nobody seems to know is that Collins manifested this project 40 years ago. Back in the October 1, 1985 issue of "Life" magazine (remember "Life"?), Collins was featured in a pictorial as famous women in history. Queen Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, Cleopatra, **Marilyn Monroe**, Eve (as in Adam and...) and even the Duchess of Windsor. She also dressed as **Josephine Baker**—which is problematic for other reasons. She'll once again don Wallis' drag. "It's a very good script, and it's a great part for me. I've always been fascinated by Wallis, because I think she was unfairly treated," says Collins. Simpson was previously portrayed on screen by Faye Dunaway in "The Woman I Love", **Joely Richardson** in "Wallis & Edward", **Eve Best** in "The King's Speech" and **Lia Williams** in "The Crown".

Pee-wee Herman (aka Paul Reubens) basically took over the airwaves in the '80s. The '90s were mostly mired in a sticky sort of scandal. Reubens successfully revived the character in "Pee-wee's Big Holiday" in 2016. Two years after his death, a documentary debuted at the Sundance Film Festival. "Pee-wee as Himself" was not only well received, but managed to make news. At long last, Reubens came out as gay—in his own words. "I was out of the closet, and then, I went back in the closet. I wasn't pursuing the Paul Reubens career; I was pursuing the Pee-wee Herman career". He also says, "I was secretive about my sexuality even to my friends [out of] self-hatred or self-preservation. I was conflicted about sexuality. But fame was way more complicated." Sounds like a great doc.

Every once in a while, people ask me about that film version of **Sondheim's** "Merrily We Roll Along". It's being directed by **Richard Linklater**, and he's got a long-term plan. Given that the musical takes place over 20 years (in reverse chronological order), he wants to film it over a similar time period—except being shot in chronological order (similar to how he shot "Boyhood" over 12 years). Linklater started shooting in 2019 with **Ben Platt, Beanie Feldstein, and Blake Jenner**. However, shortly after filming the rooftop "Our Time" sequence, Jenner left the project. He was replaced by **Paul Mescal**. Problem is—all three actors are already significantly older than their characters were. And, here's another rub—who in God's name is going to care about any of these people in 20 years? I barely care about them now! And, at least in terms of Beanie and Ben—haven't we all suffered enough?

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Frank in Michigan: *"I read online that **Taylor Perez** is becoming an underwear model. For who? And do you have the photos?"*

That's Taylor Zakhar Perez to you, Frankie. Taylor has been signed by Lacoste to be the face...er, the abs...their "global underwear ambassador". In "Red, White and Royal Blue", he was the openly gay son of the US president. In real life, not so open. Taylor said, "I've always admired the history, legacy, and creativity of the brand, and it's with great pride that I now carry the values of the crocodile." His "values" are on full display against a Parisian backdrop and are quite impressive. You won't need a passport to check him out on BillyMasters.com.

When nothing comes between Taylor and his gator, it's definitely time to end yet another column. More wildlife can be found on www.BillyMasters.com—the site that never asks, "Boxers or briefs?". For all your other needs, drop a note to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before someone asks Collins to play Eve from the Garden of Eden (she knew her, too). Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Photo via daisy_deadpetals—Instagram.

Daisy DeadPetals

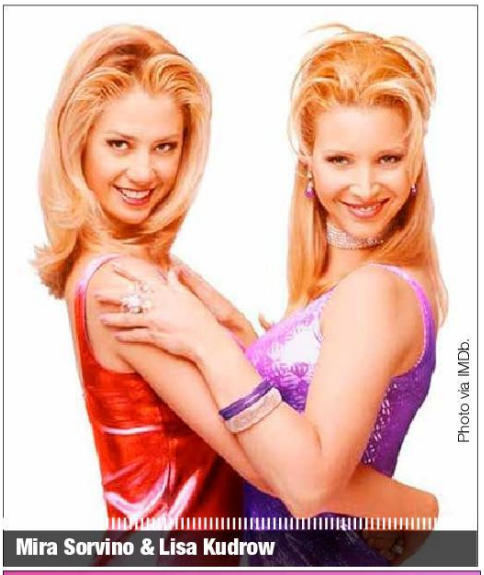

Photo via IMDb.

Mira Sorvino & Lisa Kudrow

Photo by Condé Nast, via Wikimedia Commons.

Taylor Perez

Glad

Continued from page 1

Captain, a Sergeant, and a Navy Pilot. They bring decades of experience, training, and education, including a West Point education and several master's degrees. They have decorated careers, with commendations ranging from Sailor of the Year and Meritorious Service Medals to Joint Service Commendations and a Bronze Star. Some have been a part of decorated military families spanning generations and have served honorably throughout the country and the world on many deployments.

"I've been military my entire life. I was born on a military base," said Ensign Dan Danridge, student flight officer, U.S. Navy. "Every day I lace up my boots the same as everybody else. I pass the same tests as everybody else. Being transgender is irrelevant to my service. What matters is that I can complete the tasks that are critical to our mission."

"My family has a long tradition of military service and it's the only career I've pursued," said Gordon Herrero, Captain, U.S. Army. "Separating qualified Soldiers like me will create critical vacancies across the force and could jeopardize the unit cohesion and trust that are vital to our mission. There's nothing about being transgender that makes me better or worse than any other Soldier I serve alongside. We are all here because we are committed to our country, and we are passionate, willing, and able to serve effectively."

"I've spent more than half my life in the Army, including combat in Afghanistan," said Kate Cole, Sergeant First Class, Army. "Removing qualified transgender soldiers like me means an exodus of experienced personnel who fill key positions and can't be easily replaced, putting the burden on our fellow soldiers left behind. That's just wrong — and it destabilizes our armed forces."

GLAD Law and NCLR led the legal challenge to Trump's first transgender military ban, issued in 2017. Multiple federal courts found that ban to be unconstitutional, blocking it from taking effect for nearly two years. President Biden reversed the ban in 2021.

"This ban betrays fundamental American values of equal opportunity and judging people on their merit," said Jennifer Levi, Senior Director of Transgender and Queer Rights at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law). "It slams the door on qualified patriots who meet every standard and want nothing more than to serve their country, simply to appease a political agenda. That's not just un-American, it makes our country weaker by pushing away talented service members who put their lives on the line every day for our nation."

"President Trump's repeated targeting of transgender service members is a stain on our military," said Shannon Minter, legal director at NCLR. "Anyone who meets the standards should be able to serve. There are already thousands of transgender service members currently in the military who have met the standards and more than proven themselves."

In addition to GLAD Law and NCLR, plaintiffs are represented by Joseph Wardenski, Principal Attorney, Wardenski P.C.

Monroe

Continued from page 5

punches at all sides."

"Ain't No Mo" is both "a loathe and a love letter to America," Cooper reminds his audience. The play's complexity raises difficult questions for African Americans, especially with the government offering every Black American a one—way free plane ticket to Africa. If we board Flight 1619, are we willing to leave behind the 400—plus years of building and contributing to the DNA of what makes this country the U.S.?

"Ain't No Mo" director Dawn M. Simmons shared her response: "So much of Black culture is so uniquely American, so uniquely about what happened and was created on this soil — the good, the bad, the ugly about our tragedy and our triumph. If we go somewhere else, it can come with us, but it changes and morphs."

AIN'T NO MO'

Play by Jordan E. Cooper. Directed by Dawn M. Simmons. Co-production by SpeakEasy Stage Company and Front Porch Arts Collective. At Roberts Studio Theatre, Calderwood Pavilion, Boston Center for the Arts. Through Feb. 8. Tickets start at $25. 617-933-8600, www.bostontheatrescene.com

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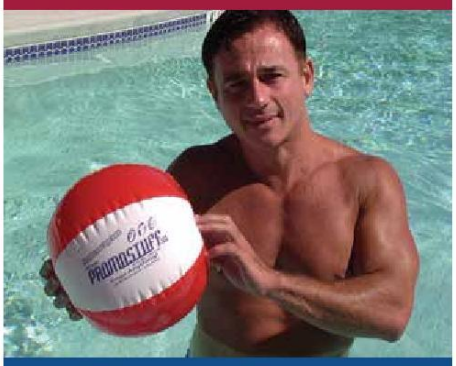

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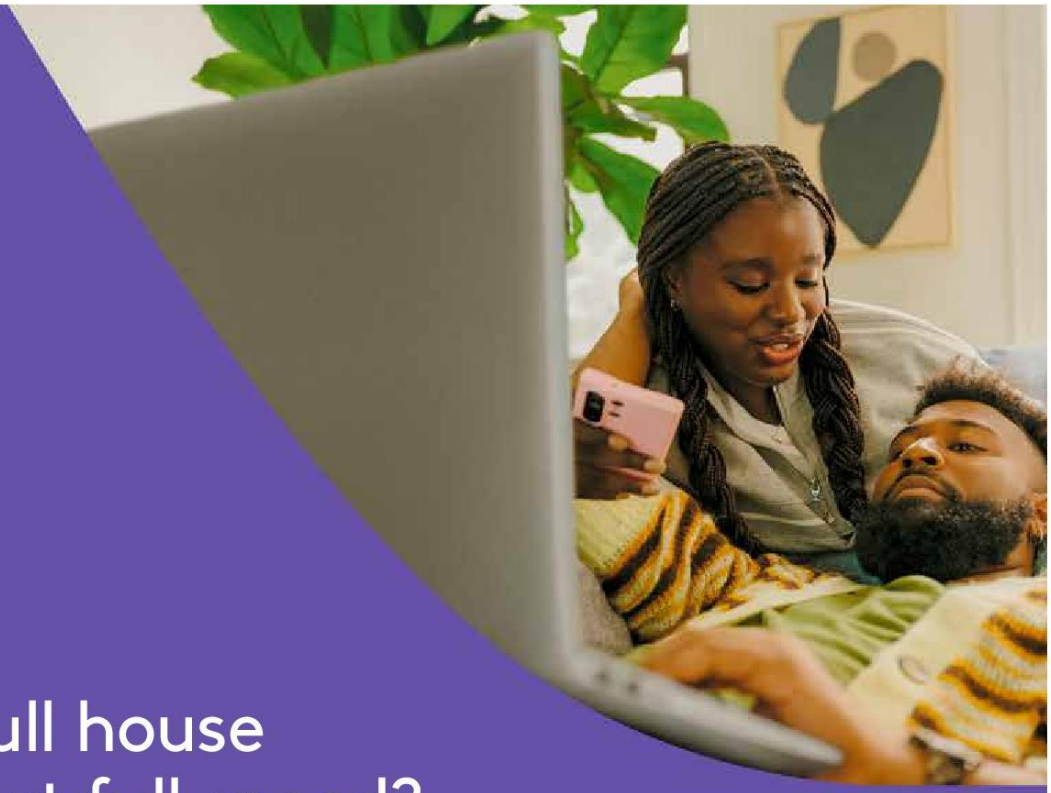

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