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Representation and Resistance as the Supreme Court Deliberates

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on April 22 in a case about whether parents' religious freedom is violated if they can't opt-out their children before books with LGBTQ+ content are read in the classroom. Most media coverage of the case indicates that the majority-conservative court will rule in favor of the plaintiff parents. While we can't know for sure, here's what I do know.

If the court finds for the plaintiffs in the case, *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, LGBTQ+ students and those with LGBTQ+ parents or other family members would be stigmatized by seeing peers leaving the classroom rather than hearing stories about people like them. They might feel uncomfortable speaking about themselves or their families in class. And even if they try to do so, teachers might be reluctant to let them. A child sharing about their weekend attending their uncle's wedding to another man, for example, would be relating a situation similar to that in Sarah Brannen's "Uncle Bobby's Wedding," one

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 2*

Pope Francis's complicated legacy with LGBTQ+ Catholics

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

On Easter Monday, the world received the news of Pope Francis's passing at the age of 88. The news was a surprise after the pontiff's herculean battle with pneumonia and his appearance at Easter Sunday Mass. Francis was one of the most beloved popes of the Catholic Church. He was called the People's Pope.

However, when it came to LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Church, Francis left a complicated legacy, one of dashed hopes and waiting for change.

"Many of us had high hopes that some positive changes around LGBTQ+ teachings would come from the worldwide Synod. That has not

see **MONROE,** *page 5*

Photo by Zebra48bo, via Wikimedia Commons.

NEWS FROM... THE HISTORY PROJECT

Rescued from Erasure: An LGBTQ+ Boston Audio Tour Returns

Queer History is American History, and American History Belongs to the People.

Earlier this year, the National Park Service removed "Their Dreams, Their Rights, and Their Love," an LGBTQ+ audio tour of Beacon Hill and Downtown Boston, from its website.

While the National Park Service under the direction of the Trump Administration can decide what to display on their website, this tour belongs to the public - not the politicians. Work created by government employees in their official roles is public domain, and should be available to our community as we continue to fight for visibility, truth, and joy.

The History Project exists to document, preserve, and share queer and trans stories; our work is especially vital when institutions fail to protect or respect our history.

We've made this tour accessible again, and we invite you to walk through queer and trans history in resistance against those who want to erase us.

Since 1980, The History Project has been dedicated to documenting, preserving, and sharing Boston's LGBTQ+ past and making it accessible to all. As we mark our 45th anniversary, your support keeps our mission alive—funding archival preservation, programming, oral history projects, and more. Help us honor our past and build our future by donating today.

Supreme Court argues procedure over PrEP

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

No one talked about HIV prevention drugs or breast cancer screenings at the U.S. Supreme Court Monday, April 21, but federal funding for those critical medical efforts and others were at jeopardy in the case before it: *Health and Human Services v. Braidwood* (aka *Kennedy v. Braidwood*). While talk on the surface was all about procedure and the meaning of various words within relevant constitutional clauses and statutes, the court's eventual decision could put controversial medications on a trapdoor controlled by political or religious hostilities.

The battleground is the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA). When Congress passed the ACA 15 years ago, the legislation included a requirement that health insurance coverage provided by private employers include certain "preventive health services" at no cost to employees. Congress designated the existing U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (PSTF) to recommend which preventative treatments would be so covered.

Fast-forward to six years ago: The PSTF recommended coverage be extended to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to help prevent HIV infection. According to a brief filed by Lambda Legal for Equality California and 34 AIDS organizations, PrEP "reduces the risk of acquiring HIV

see **PREP,** *page 4*

Supreme Court, Fracas over LGBTQ+ books in classroom

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

It was a combative day at the U.S. Supreme Court Tuesday (April 22), as the justices wrestled over whether parents of four elementary school-aged children in a Maryland public school should be able to opt out their students from English lessons that incorporate stories about LGBTQ+ people.

Early on in the two-plus-hour-long argument, Justice Samuel Alito misrepresented the content of a book called *Unde Bobby's Wedding*, in which a little girl's favorite uncle announced he was marrying Jamie, another man. Everyone in the family was happy and smiling —except the little girl, Chloe.

Alito, preparing to pose a question, recounted the story and then remarked, somewhat gravely, that "everyone accepts this, except for the little girl, Chloe, who has reservations about it."

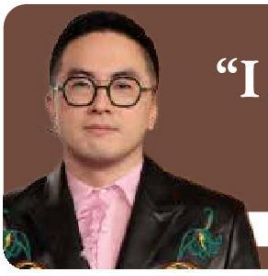
"Wait a minute," interrupted Justice Sonia Sotomayor, understanding that Alito's remark could suggest to some that the little girl was upset. "The reservation is about—."

"Can I finish, please?" asked Alito. Chief Justice John Roberts gave him the nod.

Alito and the attorney for the parents in this case kept going.

Later, Alito characterized several of the LGBTQ+ storybooks as being about "sex and gender," adding that, as such, they "raise special concerns." Sotomayor jumped in again to correct

see **BOOKS,** *page 3*



"I mean, he's ... look, the guy's a pope killer, okay?"

- Bowen Yang tells the ladies of "The View" his opinion on JD Vance. Joy Behar was quick to smooth any ruffled feathers. "He doesn't mean it literally - he's talking spiritually." Is he?

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo via fayedunaway, Instagram.

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Mombian

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of the books cited in the case. Would a teacher stop them, afraid of parental complaints? As for other children, they would miss out on learning about people in their world—and likely in their neighborhood, class, or family.

A ruling for the plaintiffs would also create a burden for teachers, who would have to solicit opt-outs and determine what opted-out students should do while the books that their parents object to are read. This would likely make teachers more reluctant to choose LGBTQ+-inclusive books in the first place. The ruling could also extend to other content that parents might oppose on religious grounds—including, but not limited to, evolution, women's equality, and eating ham (with or without green eggs).

We've been fighting this fight for a long time. LGBTQ+-inclusive picture books have been challenged in schools for more than 30 years. Two early LGBTQ+-inclusive picture books, "Heather Has Two Mommies," by Lesléa Newman, and "Daddy's Roommate," by Michael Willhoite, were suggested readings in a "Rainbow Curriculum" created by New York City Public Schools in the early 1990s to teach first-graders respect for all. Some found this scandalous. Mary Cummins, president of a school district in Queens, said in a 1992 interview with 60 Minutes that she didn't want her curriculum to include materials that "promote sodomy." There is of course no sodomy or even a hint of anything sexual in either book. More than three decades later, LGBTQ+-inclusive kids' books are still subject to similar smears; this was evident in the *Mahmoud* plaintiffs' legal filings, which implied that one of the books had images of bondage (it didn't; merely a person in a leather jacket) and that the child in another was feeling sexual urges (she didn't; she simply had a crush).

Back in 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court actually let stand a lower court ruling that supported the presence of queer-inclusive books in schools. In 2008, four parents claimed that the Lexington, Mass., public school district violated their constitutional rights by putting picture books with same-sex couples in its elementary school curriculum. In that case, *Parker v. Hurley*, the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals in a unanimous ruling wrote, "There is no free exercise [of religion] right to be free from any reference in public elementary schools to the existence of families in which the parents are of different gender combinations." The Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

Whether the current Supreme Court follows that lead or rules otherwise, I know this, too: Approximately 2.6 million LGBTQ+ people are currently parenting five million children in the U.S., and there are 3.2 million LGBTQ+ youth between the ages of eight and 18, per UCLA's Williams Institute. We are here, we are many, and we are not going anywhere.

I also know that the number of LGBTQ+-inclusive books for children and young adults has skyrocketed since about 2017. The number of recommended titles in the American Library Association's Rainbow List rose from an average of about 40 per year in 2008 to 2018 to an average of over 130 per year in 2019 to 2025. (Each list covers books published roughly in the preceding year and a half.) These books aren't going anywhere, either—although policies, laws, and court rulings could make them harder for many to access.

The range of LGBTQ+ and other identities depicted in these books has grown as well. There are books for all ages of children and youth. The themes and topics are wide and varied; some explore LGBTQ+ families and identities per se, while others simply show LGBTQ+ characters and their families having adventures or doing things unrelated to their LGBTQ+ identities (though the best still have the characters act in ways that feel authentic for those identities). Many of these books have also won major literary awards—not just in LGBTQ+ categories, but in general categories as well; they are good books by any measure, though each may resonate with different readers.

Finally, I know that despite the challenges above, many LGBTQ+ and allied parents will continue to seek these books and share them with young readers; that resolute teachers and librarians will do the same; and that LGBTQ+ people and our children will continue to be visible in our schools and communities. Yes, it will be hard—and our visibility must be balanced with our safety and survival—but we have faced similar challenges before. I still have faith in our ability to do so again.

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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Books

Continued from page 1

the record.

"In *Uncle Bob's Wedding*, the character, the child character, wasn't objecting to same-sex marriage," said Sotomayor. "She was objecting to the fact that marriage would take her uncle away from spending more time with her."

The fact that the Supreme Court took this case —which is still in a preliminary injunction phase— and gave it more than two hours argument time during a session that has been bombarded with Trump legal emergencies strongly suggests that the justices consider this an important showdown. As such, gloves were off, and facts were blurred.

For instance, the first sentence of the argument, delivered by Eric Baxter, attorney for the parents, was this:

"Parents everywhere care about how their young children are taught sexuality and gender identity." That is a true statement, generally. But it was *not* true about the case at court Tuesday. Later, Baxter claimed that including LGBTQ-related books in an English curriculum, "was clearly indoctrinating students in things that the principal said was introducing things as fact that aren't fact."

Rendering things LGBTQ+ as being about "sexuality" and "indoctrinating" is the right-wing's preferred language. But the actual concern before the court was Montgomery County's decision to include several LGBTQ+ children's books as part of the English curricula at the elementary school level. But here is how Baxter and the Supreme Court summarized the

legal question before the court *(emphasis added)*: "Do public schools burden parents' religious exercise when they *compel elementary school children* to participate in *instruction on gender and sexuality* against their parents' religious convictions and without notice or opportunity to opt out?

The lawsuit, *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, was filed by lead plaintiff Tamer Mahmoud and five other parents, seeking to force the Montgomery County Public Schools, including Superintendent Thomas Taylor, to provide a notification and opt out option when teaching elementary age students curricula that includes storybooks with LGBTQ+ characters.

The parents say books with LGBTQ+ characters have messages that "contradict their sincerely held religious beliefs about marriage, human sexuality, and gender." By not providing an opt-out option, the parents said, the schools are in violation of the First Amendment. They asked the district court for a preliminary injunction to require the school to give them advanced notice and the ability to opt their children out of classroom activities that involve the storybooks or matters relating to family life and human sexuality.

Judge Deborah Boardman of the U.S. District Court for Maryland denied the parents' request for a preliminary injunction before the case could be resolved on the merits of the case.

"The plaintiffs have not shown the no-opt-out policy likely coerces them to violate their religious beliefs," wrote Boardman, therefore, they did not meet the requirements for a preliminary injunction.

Boardman noted that "Every court that has addressed the question has concluded that the mere exposure in public school to ideas that contradict religious beliefs does not burden the religious exercise of students or parents."

The parents then appealed to the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. In a 2 to 1 decision, the appeals panel said, "what is missing here is the evidentiary link showing that the Storybooks are being implemented in a way that directly or indirectly coerces the Parents or their children to believe or act contrary to their religious faith." The panel majority affirmed the district court decision.

Rather than return to district court to present some evidence and argue the merits of the First Amendment claims, the parents —aided by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty— appealed the loss of the preliminary injunction to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In its brief to the Supreme Court, Lambda Legal, PFLAG, and the Leadership Conference Education Fund said that the storybooks with LGBTQ+ characters help create a safe and supportive school environment where all students can thrive. In a separate brief, GLAD (GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders), the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Human Rights Campaign, and several other groups note that the LGBTQ+ books are very similar to other books included without objection in the curriculum.

"The plot of *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* is nearly identical to another book in the elementary English language curriculum, *Uncle Peter's Amazing Chinese Wedding*, which also tells of a young girl who is saddened that her favorite uncle is marrying," noted the groups.

The attorneys general of 24 states lined up behind the parents, including Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Virginia. Attorneys general of Maryland and 17 states and D.C. submitted a brief in support of the Montgomery County schools, including California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New Jersey.

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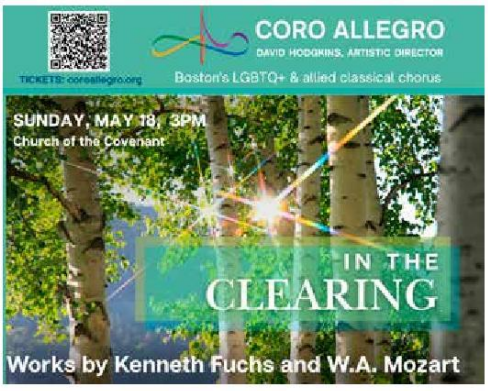

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MAGAs off their meds

What we leave to the crows

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

Just now a pleasant breeze came through my window, and I momentarily forgot that our entire country is coming apart.

The crows in my neighborhood like to cavort on the wind at dusk. They fly happily over the rooftops, cawing to one another and maybe to me. I realize I'm a short step from Dorothy Gale in Depression-era Kansas singing, "If happy little bluebirds fly beyond the rainbow, why oh why can't I?" — except for me, the inspiration is a murder of crows.

I briefly imagine the entire Trump administration turning into crows and flying away; but the crows are my neighbors and I would never wish that on them.

If I wanted to summarize all the court rulings that went against Trump in the past two weeks, and follow that with highlights (lowlights?) of his sinking poll numbers, I would not have enough space.

Instead, let's talk about the amazingly awful Nevada politician Michele Fiore whom Trump recently pardoned. She raised money to build a statue for a fallen police officer, then spent it on plastic surgery, rent, and her daughter's wedding. She's also a gun fanatic and a fan of Cliven Bundy who fantasizes about Bureau of Land Management officers pointing guns at her so she can shoot at them in self-defense.

Do you ever wake up and wonder who sent you on a trip to Crazy Town? How is it that people are being disappeared for having tattoos or writing mean op-eds while our government is being run by convicted felons and photogenic numbskulls who blab defense secrets into unsecured phones?

After the death of Pope Francis, Trump said that he and Melania were looking forward to attending his funeral, as if boasting that they had scored tickets for a hot new show.

Dear Leader has a gift for tone-deaf observations like that. Another is his lack of concern for the stock market chaos he generated. He also has a habit of saying things like he's been getting calls from world leaders eager to kiss his ass, which sounds like a bullshitting undergraduate.

Every time he says, "People have been telling me," get ready to hear a lie. It's as if random people call him up to chat. Apparently his phone is just as insecure as his defense secretary's. Alternatively, he forgot to take his meds. Don't worry. It's not as if he has the nuclear launch codes. Oh, wait.

I joke to avoid crying, but our basic liberties and values are under assault. Judges are being arrested. People are being abducted by masked men and put into unmarked vans.

So do I feel common cause with Michele Fiore? Not for a moment. At the heart of what is going on is a double standard by which aggrieved white supremacists and Christian nationalists (who are not Christian at all, judging by the teachings in the Gospel) feel entitled to do whatever they please while people of color, religious minorities, immigrants, and queers are treated as criminals or vermin.

Speaking of Christianity, the late Pope Francis was a kind and compassionate man whose pastoral gifts markedly contrasted with the medieval authoritarian he replaced. He had his blind spots, including failing to understand the science of gender identity. But his statement about gays, "Who am I to judge?" was a welcome change from his predecessors.

Reform is a journey that we undermine if our attitude is that you have to be perfect or you can go to hell.

I spent many years working for police reform and improved community-police relations in the nation's capital. My colleagues and I built on the work done by the generation before ours. The LGBTQ+ community has come a long way since gay men were cruised and then arrested by plainclothes vice cops in Lafayette Square. The trans community has had a harder time, including in employment. But the progress made becomes clear in light of the aggressive efforts by Trump to reverse it.

We are never done. We always have more struggles ahead. One problem is that we often judge Democrats more harshly than Republicans. Arguably, that is how Trump won.

I read about the leading opposition candidate in Turkey being arrested by the Erdoğan regime. Trump would do the same to his opponents if he thought he could get away with it. If we do not continue standing up to him, he will. Then the only ones who won't have to fear arrest will be the crows.

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

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PReP

Continued from page 1

from sexual contact by approximately 99%." And quoting a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention paper, the brief added that, "Increased use of PrEP has been linked to a decline in national HIV transmission rates, particularly among young people."

Jose Abrigo, head of Lambda's HIV work, said in a video press release that the case is also about much more than just PrEP.

"This case is about a pillar of the Affordable Care Act —a preventive care pillar of the Affordable Care Act: Cancer screenings, diabetes testing, maternal health services, STI screenings [for sexually transmitted illnesses]." If the court rules for the Braidwood clinic that brought the lawsuit, said Abrigo, "People will have to choose between putting food on the table or getting a mammogram...."

Hashim Mooppan, principal deputy solicitor general for the Trump administration, told the court that the HHS Secretary has ample supervision over the PSTF —he can remove its members "at will" and prevent any recommendation from taking effect.

"In addition, he can require the Task Force to obtain his pre-approval before they issue any recommendation at all," said Mooppan.

Chief Justice John Roberts noted that "What the Task Force does is fairly technical, medically and scientifically. Is the Secretary really supposed to be in the position of going

down the line and saying [to the PSTF members], 'I know you think we should use this particular thing with this atomic structure and all that kind of stuff, but I've got a different view on that.' Is that a pertinent consideration in deciding whether they're adequately supervised?"

Mooppan replied that the Secretary "clearly has the authority to do so."

Justice Neil Gorsuch jumped in to note that the authority of the Secretary to appoint the members was not confirmed by the Fifth Circuit decision. (The PSTF website indicates the Secretary appoints them.) Gorsuch wondered whether that issue should be sent back to the appeals court. Mooppan urged the court to make a ruling on the matter.

Jonathan Mitchell, attorney for Braidwood, said the PSTF's "preventive care coverage mandates are neither directed nor supervised by the Secretary of Health and Human Services or by anyone else who has been appointed as a principal officer."

"And it is not even clear that Congress would have approved a regime in which politicians, rather than an independent Task Force, decide the preventive care that insurers

must cover," said Mitchell. He said he doesn't agree with the Trump administration's argument that the HHS Secretary can exercise all sorts of power over the PSTF.

"We don't see any way that statutory language can be squared with the regime envisioned by the government, where the Secretary can come in and influence the Task Force decisions on the front end —which Mr. Mooppan once again acknowledged at oral argument he believes the Secretary can do that. And we don't see how that can be squared with the actual statutory language."

Braidwood Management, which oversees a Houston holistic medical practice, couched its legal objection to PrEP in procedural terms: It claims the president should appoint each of the 16 members of the PSTF, and the Senate should confirm them. The Trump administration is relying on the Constitution's Appointments Clause which requires the president appoint and Senate confirm any "officer" of the U.S. government who has "significant authority." But Braidwood argued that the president does not need to appoint the PSTF members if the Secretary of Health and Human Services can review and reject any of the PSTF's recommendations.

In its original lawsuit, Braidwood contended the requirement that employers cover PrEP forces the company to "encourage homosexual behavior, intravenous drug use, and sexual activity outside of marriage between one man and one woman." And the company says that violates their religious beliefs.

The Biden administration, which was in office January 10 when the *Braidwood* case was accept-

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VERIFIED AUDIT CIRCULATION

Monroe

Continued from page 1

happened as of yet. We are waiting for the report from the working group charged with addressing controversial issues," stated Meli Barber, President of DignityUSA.

"But the discussion of LGBTQ+ issues is now part of the mainstream of our Church. LGBTQ+ Catholics, our family members, friends, fellow Catholics, and frontline ministers all spoke openly about our lives, our gifts, the discrimination we have faced, and the depth of our faith. This cannot be erased."

I remembered his statement in 2013 when Francis responded to a question about a possible "gay lobby" in the Vatican. His answer set off global shock waves. "When I meet a gay person, I have to distinguish between their being gay and being part of a lobby," he said. "If they accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them?"

The pontiff's public statement was then the most LGBTQ+-affirming remark the world had ever heard from the Catholic Church. The Advocate named Pope Francis its 2013 Person of the Year.

Pope Francis commanded attention around the world with his liberal-leaning pronouncements, but the pontiff was a complicated, if not confusing, figure to LGBTQ+ people. On the surface, Francis displayed a pastoral countenance to his papacy that extended to our community. However, during Francis's tenure as pope, I came to depict him as the consummate flip-flopper whose good intentions never fully followed up with good actions. And in some cases, the pontiff exhibited outright hypocrisy.

For example, Pope Francis approved blessings for same-sex couples if the rituals don't resemble marriage. In October 2020, while being interviewed for the documentary "Francesco" about his life, Francis made a full-throated endorsement of same-sex civil unions. Again, setting off global shock waves.

"Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God," the pontiff said in the film. "You can't kick someone out of a family nor make their life miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way, they are legally covered."

Francis's statement was a Hallelujah moment for many LGBTQ+ Catholics. It optimistically suggested a game-changer —having dogma-transforming ramifications— for the Church in this 21st century despite conservative priests still hell-bent on continuing on an anti-modernity track of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI.

However, marriage equality was out of the question because Francis repeatedly criticized "gender theory" as an "ideological project" that "denies the natural difference between a man and a woman."

"Marriage between people of the same sex? "Marriage is a historical word. It's always between a man and a woman in humanity, and not only within the Church. We cannot change that. This is the nature of things. This is how they are. Let's call them "civil unions," Francis stated in 2017 to New Ways Ministry, a pro-LGBTQ Catholic organization.

Francis called for the decriminalization of homosexuality, which LGBTQ+ advocates hailed as a milestone that would help end harassment and violence against us, as he also publicly distinguished between homosexual acts as a sin and not a crime.

Pope Francis had a complicated relationship with the transgender community. In the pontiff's 2015 tome, "Pope Francis: This Economy Kills," Francis compares transgender people to nuclear weapons as destroyers of God's creation of male and female. However, he also embraced a transwomen community.

In Torvaianica, Italy, a community of transwomen, many who are sex workers, were welcomed and seated as Pope Francis's guests for lunch to celebrate the Catholic Church's World Day of the Poor in 2023. This wasn't their first time lunching with the pontiff. They received the VIP seats to Pope Francis's monthly gatherings since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also, in 2023, the Vatican agreed to baptize transgender Catholics and allow them to be godparents. This was a-180 from 2000 when the Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith denounced the existence of transgender people. Nothing in terms of church doctrine changed, sadly. The Catholic Church's Church's World Day of the Poor, with the message "Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor," was an example of the Church at its best regarding welcoming everyone. It allowed the faces of transgender people not to be hidden.

The Catholic Church still excludes the LGBTQ+ community from officially receiving any sacraments. Since 2015, DignityUSA has advocated for "sacramental equality" in the Catholic Church. With COVID-19 death rates hitting the LGBTQ+ community globally as hard as other minority communities worldwide, one would think the Church could put aside its homophobia.

Pope Francis was no doubt a humble man with a sincere heart. But he looked the other way when it came to his LGBTQ+ worshippers. It was not enough for Francis to say he embraced our community. He also needed to do it.

May Pope Francis rest in peace.

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"Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride of **Paul Revere**. On the eighteenth of April, in seventy-five; hardly a man is now alive who remembers that famous day and year." That's how **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** began his 1860 poem about Paul Revere's ride. Today, the only one still alive who remembers that famous ride is **Dame Joan Collins**! This ride has always been celebrated in my native hamlet of Medford. Fun fact — Revere never said "The British are coming". After all, everyone was British! He said, "The Regulars are coming out." Even back then, coming out was big news! In Medford, he alerted **Captain Isaac Hall**. During my childhood, Hall's home was the Gaffey Funeral Parlor. Someone playing the good Captain would pop out of the second-floor window in a nightcap and ask what all the ruckus was about. Then he'd invite Revere in for a cup of rum. Oh, as kids we enjoyed this pageantry...and the rum! Today, Hall's house is the Islamic Cultural Center. On this 250th anniversary, Hall still popped out the window, put down his prayer rug, faced Mecca, and the tradition continued.

You heard it here first. Sure, everyone saw the photos of **Robert Irwin** posing in his skivvies with a python. But I believe I was the first to get a glimpse of something big. Lo and behold, he's been cast on "Dancing with the Stars". Am I the only one envisioning some version of "I'm a Slave 4U" with the snake? Or, perhaps, whatever song **La Toya** was singing while a snake was wrapped around her nether regions? Come to think of it, there may not have actually been a song. And that video might not have been on MTV. It might have been the Playboy Channel.

Rosie O'Donnell has expressed shock that **Ellen DeGeneres** (and **Portia**) also left the US. "I've never really known Ellen to say anything political in her life, so I was surprised to read that she left because of **President Trump**. Like, that shocked me, actually." Without getting into her issues with Ellen (and vice versa), Rosie wishes her well. "I don't want to fight against another gay woman. It's not like we're tenaciously opposed to each other. We're just very different people. We have had some stuff in the past that was never resolved. And not in any way as, as partners or lovers or anything like that. Just as friends and comedians. But I wish her the best. I seriously do."

And, now, a public service announcement — one I feel compelled to make before it leads to an inevitable tragedy. I believe the time has come for someone to put seat belts on any chair **Liza Minnelli** sits in. There she was, chatting with **RuPaul**, being honored for basically remaining conscious for so long. She's moving, and spinning, and shaking, and twitching. At one point, her head is on her lap and one of her legs is in the air — a position I'm not unfamiliar with! What was going on? It was like she was auditioning for Mummenschanz! At a certain point, I needed a Dramamine. I'm all for live and let live — but please, Liza, live and stay safe.

Friends were sure I heard about "Ugly Betty" alum **Eric Mabius**' scuffle with the law. But, what can I say — he's really not on my radar. I feel I'm not alone in that department, so let me share the sordid details in case you don't know and/or care. I should start by saying it happened in Florida — where most sordid stories start. The incident happened in Fernandina, Florida — which is just outside of Jacksonville (oh, this just keeps getting worse). Eric was at a bar with a female companion, who was asked repeatedly to leave after other patrons complained about her rude behavior. How rude? At one point, she was spitting on people. Ah, that Eric Mabius — he's got an eye for the classy ladies. When his companion spit on another woman, a tussle ensued. That's when Mabius sprung to action and somehow knocked both gals to the ground. Here's where it gets good, according to the police report of what happened to the alleged victim: "Eric got on top of her and was pulling her hair, ripping a handful of her hair from her scalp!" OUCH! Once police arrived, Mabius "became more belligerent" and attempted to leave the scene. Police had him sit on a bench and arrested him for "resisting without violence". Well, they didn't want him to pull their hair!! This led to a doozy of a mugshot, in which he is wearing what I hope is an ensemble provided by the penal system. I can just picture him explaining to his cellmates why he's in the pokey. "I pulled a girl's hair!"

A different type of show happened at the Broadway production of "Sunset Blvd". A matinee had to be cancelled due to some technical difficulty with the sound system. What made this a column-worthy item is that the audience was informed of the snafu by Norma Desmond herself. **Nicole Scherzinger** told them they could go to the box office and get tickets to an alternate performance or could get a refund. But before they left, she wanted to give them something for their trouble. Brandishing a bullhorn and playing a backing track through her cell phone, Scherzy belted out "With One Look" — to considerable applause. You can see her impromptu performance on BillyMasters.com.

Elsewhere on Broadway, "Pirates! The Penzance Musical" opened at the Roundabout Theatre. While any chance to see **Ramin Karimloo** unbuckle his swash is OK in my book, we send kudos (whatever they are) to the fantastic Jinkx Monsoon, who is assuming the role of Ruth, played by **Angela Lansbury** in the **Kevin Kline** film. Jinkx is getting rave reviews for her comic turn. There is even talk that she could snag a Tony nomination. Stay tuned.

When the Tonys are distributed on June 8th, someone very special will be getting a very special award. It's just been announced that the recipient of the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Tony Award will be.... **Harvey Fierstein**! "Harvey Fierstein's contributions to the American theatre, both as an artist and activist, represent an extraordinary legacy," said the committee about the four-time Tony winner (in competition, **Miss Streisand**).

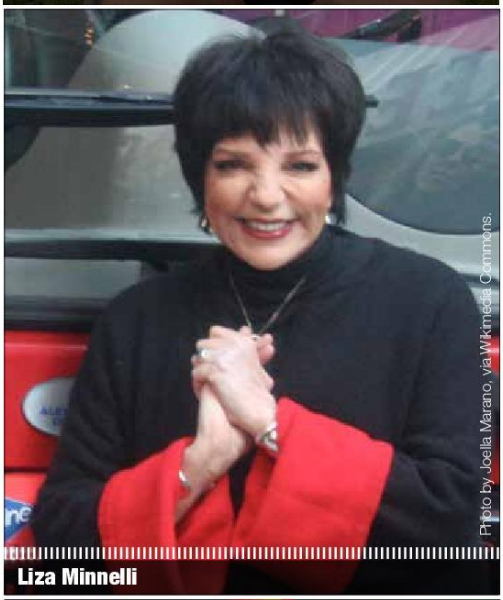
Last week, I was delighted to return to "Billy Masters LIVE!" and bring back our most popular guest — **Bruce Vilanch**. We primarily focused on "It Seemed Like a Bad Idea at the Time" — his book about writing for some less-than-stellar works of stage, screen, and television. We spoke primarily of "The Star Wars Holiday Special", "The Paul Lynde Halloween Special", "The Brady Bunch Hour", and "Can't Stop the Music" — because you know how much I enjoy an **Altovise Davis** story. We also touched on **Carol Channing, Charo**, and his aborted effort for Bravo. The book is loads of fun — as is our chat, which you can watch on BillyMasters.tv or on our YouTube channel.

This week's "Ask Billy" question comes from Harry in Dallas: *"What is up with **Shannon Sharpe**? He was willing to pay someone $10 million to settle rape allegations? Is this the same person he was f*&!ing in that video?"*

This is SO not my m tier, but I've been assured that these are two separate stories (perhaps even more). Regarding the video which we posted weeks ago, Sharpe left an Instagram Live running while he had a tryst with an unknown woman in a hotel room. While we see precious little, what we hear sounds consensual — and somewhat energetic. The legal problems stem from the former pro-football player being accused of assaulting a woman back in 2023. He claims the allegations are false and that it's all a "shakedown" — which seemed plausible until we heard he offered the gal $10 million to go away. She refused the offer. Anyone turning down $10 million is looking for something more than money. Needless to say, Sharpe had to step away from his ESPN duties until this resolves.

When Jinkx could star in a reboot of "Murder, She Wrote", it's definitely time to end yet another column. I know you're all wondering when I will do the next "Billy Masters LIVE!". I have a few ideas in the works. I suppose the best way to keep tabs on me is to check out www.BillyMasters.com — the site that still enjoys a bit of rum! If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before JD Vance kills again! Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Photo via robertirwinphotography, Instagram.
Robert Irwin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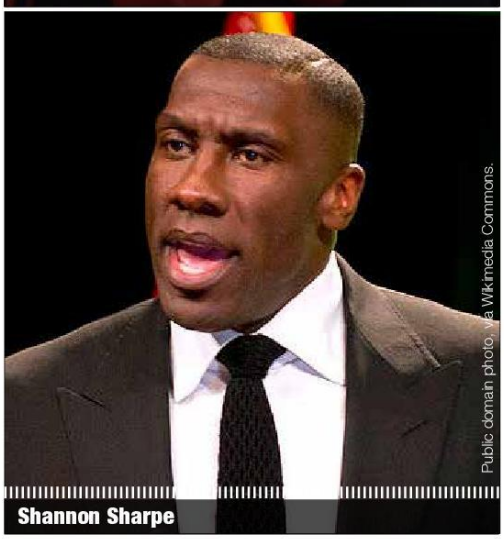
Liza Minnelli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Shannon Sharpe

PReP

Continued from page 4

ed for review by the Supreme Court, appealed the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals decision. Braidwood, which lost at the district and circuit court levels, also filed an appeal of the Fifth Circuit decision, but the Supreme Court declined Braidwood's petition on January 13.)

The Fifth Circuit upheld the federal district ruling that said PSTF members should be appointed under the Appointments Act. But it said that, while the HHS Secretary has the authority to remove any member, it *does not* have authority to reject any PSTF recommendation.

Braidwood Management's original lawsuit claimed the company objects to covering the cost of PrEP. According to various briefs in the case, Dr. Steven F. Hotze owns Braidwood, and Braidwood manages the Hotze Health and Wellness Center in Houston. The center identifies as "holistic" and provides numerous treatments, many involving "bioidentical hormones." The Fifth Circuit decision noted that Dr. Hotze considers Braidwood to be a Christian business and that it refuses to hire LGBTQ+ people.

Braidwood claims it has religious objections to homosexuality and that by making the company provide coverage for PrEP, the government is making Braidwood complicit in facilitating homosexual activity. (Court briefs indicate that none of the company's 70 employees ever sought coverage for PrEP.)

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force sits within the Public Health Service of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Its members are currently appointed by the HHS Secretary to four-year terms.

The legal question the Supreme Court agreed to consider was whether the Fifth Circuit erred when it (1) held that the structure of the PSTF violates the Appointments Clause, and (2) unduly insulates the Task Force from the HHS Secretary's supervision.

"Millions of Americans rely on insurance coverage for preventive services without cost sharing. If allowed to stand," wrote the Biden administration in its petition to the Supreme Court, "the decision below would call into question the legal duty of insurance issuers and group health plans to cover" any preventive service recommended by the Task Force.

A U.S. district court and the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals held that the HHS task force members are covered by the Appointments clause and should have been appointed by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The Fifth Circuit *disagreed* with the district court solution: to vacate all actions by the task force, including that it could not enforce the preventive-care mandates against Braidwood.

Most groups submitting briefs to the Supreme Court expressed support for funding PrEP, including the American Medical Association, The American Association of Public Health, and the American Cancer Society.

Tomorrow morning, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in a case that asks whether parents can have storybooks for elementary school children banned from use because they include LGBTQ+ characters. To listen live at 10 a.m., go to. Supreme Court home page and click on "Live Audio."

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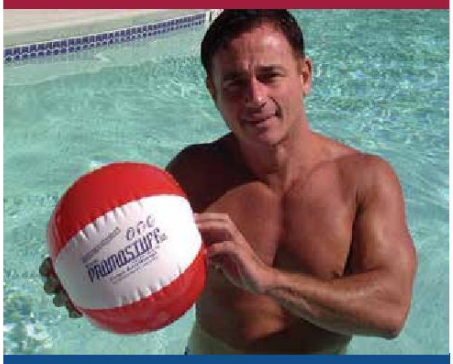
HOT IDEAS



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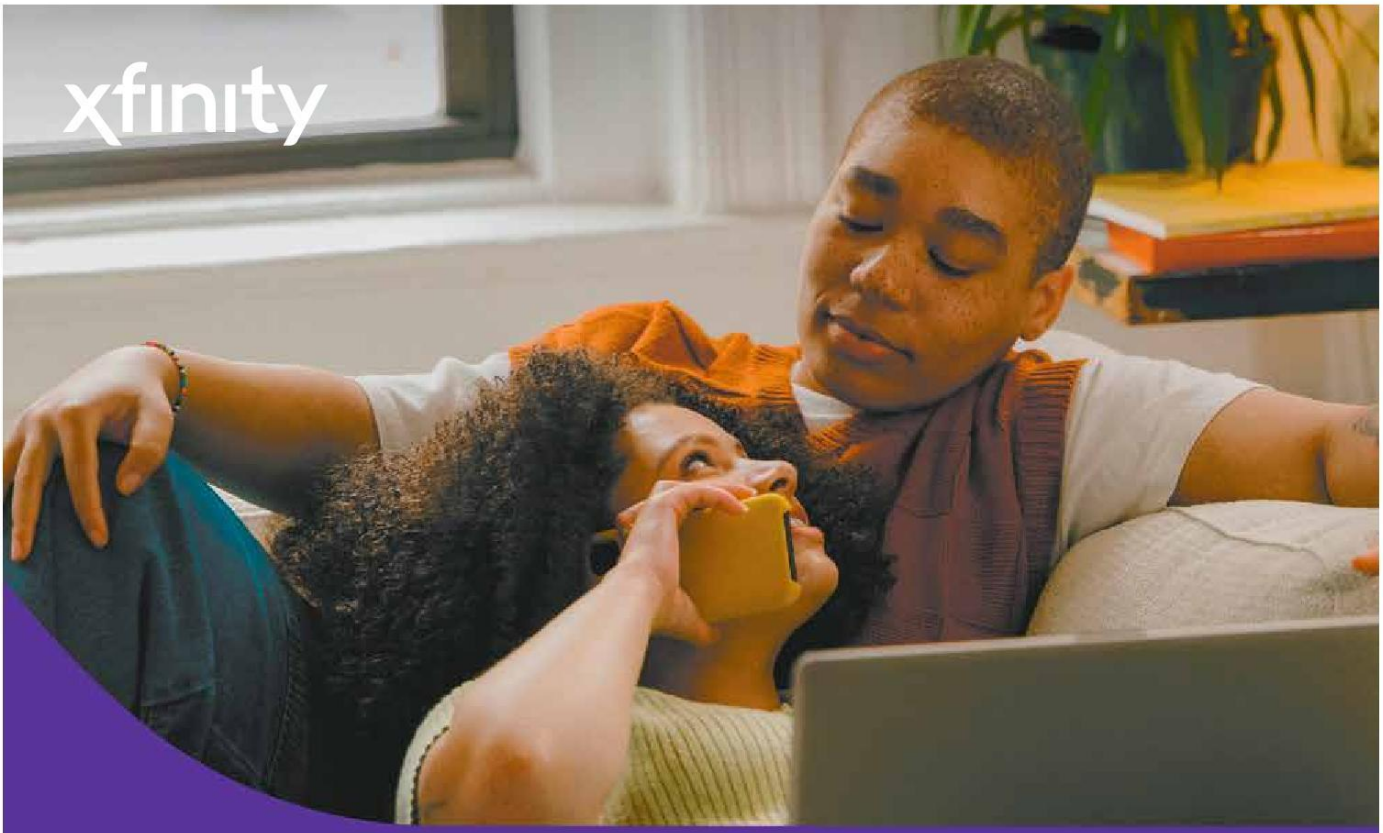

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