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Woman charged with bomb threat against Boston Children's Hospital

By Alanna Durkin Richer
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP)—Federal authorities on Thursday arrested a woman accused of calling in a fake bomb threat at Boston Children's Hospital amid a barrage of harassment and threats of violence over its surgical program for transgender youths.



see **BCH**, page 7 Photo via www.childrenshospital.org.

An energetic trip down Sing Street

Sing Street, pre-Broadway production by The Huntington in association with Sing Street Broadway L.L.C., Calderwood Pavilion, through October 9. 617-266-0800 or huntingonthetheatre.org



Elijah Lyons, Michael Lepore, Adam Bregman, Gian Perez, and Ben Wang. Photo by Evan Zimmerman/MurphyMade.

By Jules Becker
Contributing Writer

A high-energy ensemble means a lot to any musical, especially a new one. John Carney's Tony Award-winning

"Once" had one, and so does the Huntington pre-Broadway staging of "Sing Street"—based on Carney's 2016 film of the same name.

see **SING STREET**, page 7



Renewing the Fight Against Book Banning

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

This week marks Banned Books Week, the American Library Association's (ALA's) annual celebration of the freedom to read—but this year feels more like a call to action than a celebration. Book bans and other attempts at censorship, largely targeting the LG-

BTQ and other marginalized communities, are raging across the country.

Between January 1 and August 31, 2022, the ALA documented 681 attempts to ban or restrict a total of 1,651 unique titles—already surpassing 2021's 1,597 titles and on track

to pass its 729 attempts, the highest number since ALA began tracking the numbers more than 20 years ago. Additionally, more than 70 percent of the attempts in 2022 involved multiple

see **MOBBIAN**, page 5

editorial

Boston Gay Men's Chorus leader left his mark



Craig Coogan. Photo via Facebook.

By Sue O'Connell
Co-Publisher

I've sung the praises of Craig Coogan's leadership of Boston Gay Men's Chorus (BGMC) before. This time my tune is bittersweet, as Coogan has left his post as BGMC executive director to become interim executive director of Seattle Choruses, the shared home of the

Seattle Men's Chorus and the Seattle Women's Chorus. It's a huge loss for BGMC and Greater Boston's LG-BTQ community.

From the late, great Urvashi Vaid's early activism to GLAD's pioneering legal work and the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition's (MTPC) foundational organizing

see **COOGAN**, page 5

Boston Marathon to welcome nonbinary athletes to 2023 race

By William J. Kole
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP)—Nonbinary athletes will be able to run in next year's Boston Marathon without having to register as members of the men's or women's divisions, race organizers announced Monday.

The Boston Athletic Association,

which administers the prestigious marathon, said it's been working to expand opportunities for nonbinary people—not just for the marathon but for the BAA's other races, which include a 5K, a 10K and a half marathon.

Organizers confirmed the change

see **MARATHON**, page 2



"I was born and raised in Boston, and I still haven't made it to Martha's Vineyard."

—Billy Masters

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

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analysis

Yeshiva University ruling a temporary LGBTQ victory

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

Chief Justice John Roberts and conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh voted with the U.S. Supreme Court’s three liberal-leaning justices September 14 to reject a request that would have undermined a New York City law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations.

While marking a temporary victory for civil rights for LGBTQ people, the 5 to 4 vote is unlikely to be a reliable indicator of whether the Supreme Court is inclined to allow entities to evade public accommodation laws by claiming a religious motive to discriminate. That question will likely be resolved by another case, 303 Creative v. Elenis, which has already been accepted for argument before the Supreme Court in the coming 2022-23 session.

The Supreme Court vote this month came in response to an emergency request from Yeshiva University, asking the Supreme Court to issue a temporary stay on a New York State trial court decision—a first stage of litigation at which the Supreme Court seldom gets involved.

The trial court issued a “non-final order” June 14 that the university’s loose association with Judaism did not qualify it as a religious institution that is already exempt from the law. The trial court then held that the university did violate the non-discrimination law when it refused to allow a student LGBTQ group to meet on campus.

Yeshiva University first said it would appeal the state trial court decision to the next level of state court; but, last month, it abruptly filed an emergency motion with the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who handles such requests for New York, referred the matter to the full court. The majority did not issue an opinion with its order; it simply indicated the university still had “at least two further avenues for expedited or interim state court relief.”

So, for now, the discrimination law prevails and Roberts and Kavanaugh were on the LGBTQ side of that.

Justice Samuel Alito wrote a dissent to the majority’s order, joined by Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, and Amy Coney Barrett. The dissent relies on the university’s claim that it is a religious institution, even though it is incorporated as an educational institution and “has no religious rules of governance or stated religious affiliation in its corporate charter,” according to attorneys for the student group. Rather than focus on the issue of whether a student group should have access, the dissent claims that the case is about whether the law can “force a Jewish school to instruct its students in accordance with an interpretation of Torah that the school” disagrees with. Tossing aside a longstanding tradition of not speculating how they might rule on a case that might come before them at a later date, the dissenting justices announce that “Yeshiva would likely win if its case came before us.”

The identification of the dissenters meant that the other justices—Roberts, Sotomayor, Kavanaugh, and Justices Elena Kagan and newly minted Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson—were in the majority.

Yeshiva is being represented by the conservative legal activist group known as the Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty. The Beckett Fund filed a lawsuit for Catholic Social Services against Philadelphia when that city ended its foster care contract with CSS because CSS had a policy that violated the city law against discrimination based on sexual orientation. In 2021, the Supreme Court ruled that the city had a “weighty” interest in eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation, but that the facts of the *Fulton v. Philadelphia* case could “not justify denying [CSS] an exception for its religious exercise.” In that decision, Justice Roberts and Kavanaugh also joined three liberal-leaning justices, as did Justice Amy Coney Barrett.

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Marathon

Continued from page 1

as registration opened Monday for the 127th running of the marathon on April 17, 2023. A field of about 30,000 is expected for next spring’s edition of the storied race.

Nonbinary athletes can submit entry applications if they’ve completed a marathon as a nonbinary participant during the current qualifying window, the BAA said. It said it’s still working to establish qualifying standards for nonbinary participants, but that its online applications will include “nonbinary” as a gender option.

“Discussions are ongoing with nonbinary athletes in an effort to further promote inclusion at all BAA events,” the organization said, adding, “We view this first year as an opportunity to learn

and grow together.”

Nonbinary pro miler and 1,500 runner Nikki Hiltz, who came out as transgender last year and narrowly missed a spot on the U.S. team for the Tokyo Olympics, lauded the move.

“There’s still so much work to be done but I’m thrilled that nonbinary runners are being acknowledged by the Boston Marathon and BAA,” Hiltz tweeted.

The Boston Marathon is the latest major marathon to begin adding nonbinary divisions.

Last year’s Philadelphia Distance Run, a premier event offering a half marathon and a 5K, became the first large race in the U.S. to establish a nonbinary division and offer equal prize money.

The Brooklyn Marathon and Half Marathon followed in April. Eighty-two competitors who had registered as nonbinary participants were among the finishers.

Democrats punt same-sex marriage vote until after election

By Mary Clare Jalonick
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP)—Democrats are punting a vote to protect same-sex and interracial marriages until after the November midterm elections, pulling back just days after Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed to put the Senate on the record on the issue “in the coming weeks.”

The delay was requested by key senators who have been negotiating changes to the legislation and comes at a time when many Republicans have been signaling opposition.

Wisconsin Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin, the lead champion of the bill, had predicted they would be able to secure the 10 Republican votes needed to break a filibuster and push it to passage. But hopes dimmed in recent days as some Republicans raised concerns about whether the bill would protect the rights of religious institutions, business owners or others who oppose same-sex marriage.

The decision adds to the uncertainty facing the legislation, as it gives interest groups and other lawmakers opposing the bill more time to rally Republicans against it. But supporters hope that by pushing the vote back, they will relieve election-year pressure from some conservative voters and persuade more Republicans to support the legislation.

“We’ve asked Leader Schumer for additional time and we appreciate he has agreed,” Baldwin said in a statement, along with other members of

the bipartisan group that is negotiating the bill. “We are confident that when our legislation comes to the Senate floor for a vote, we will have the bipartisan support to pass the bill.”

The statement from Baldwin, Democratic Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Rob Portman of Ohio and Thom Tillis of North Carolina came after a meeting with Schumer, who had been considering a vote as soon as next week.

A spokesman for Schumer said he is “100 percent committed” to holding a vote.

“Leader Schumer will not give up and will hold the bipartisan group to their promise that the votes to pass this marriage equality legislation will be there after the election,” said Schumer spokesman Justin Goodman.

Democrats and the small group of Republicans have moved to safeguard same-sex marriage following the Supreme Court decision over the summer that overturned Roe v. Wade and the federal right to an abortion. Lawmakers fear the court’s ruling, and a concurring opinion from Justice Clarence Thomas, indicate that an earlier high court decision protecting same-sex marriage could come under threat.

“We all want to pass this quickly,” Schumer said last week. “I hope there will be 10 Republicans to support it.”

The Senate push for the historic vote—and the openness by some Republicans to back it in an elec-

tion year—reflects a large shift on the issue since the Supreme Court’s 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision legalizing gay marriage nationwide. Polling shows widespread public support for allowing such unions.

The bipartisan group has been working closely with the GOP senators who are open to the legislation but have religious liberty concerns. They finalized an amendment this week that would clarify that the legislation does not affect the rights of such private individuals or businesses—rights that are already enshrined in law. The legislation requires the federal government and states to recognize all marriages that were legal where they were performed, along with interracial marriages.

“Through bipartisan collaboration, we’ve crafted commonsense language that respects religious liberty and Americans’ diverse beliefs, while upholding our view that marriage embodies the highest ideals of love, devotion, and family,” the group said in the statement.

But some Republicans who had wavered on the bill were not yet on board.

Responding to the group’s statement Thursday, the White House emphasized again that the administration was leaving the mechanics of the legislation—such as the timing of a vote—to the Senate.

“We believe the Senate should find consensus just as the American people have,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday.

The bill protecting same-sex marriage cleared the House in a July vote with the support of 47 Republicans—a larger than expected number that gave the measure a boost in the Senate. But as the weeks went on, more Republicans raised religious liberty issues.

Another proposed tweak to the bill would make clear that a marriage is between two people, an effort to ward off some far-right criticism that the legislation could endorse polygamy.

It’s not clear how many Republicans would support the bill. In addition to Collins, Portman and Tillis, a fourth GOP senator, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, has supported same-sex marriage in the past. Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, who is up for reelection this year, has said he doesn’t see a “reason to oppose it” but has talked on both sides of the issue in recent weeks.

Most Republicans opposing the legislation have said it is simply unnecessary because the court ruling still stands. But others have gone further.

One group that has been opposed, the conservative Alliance Defending Freedom, has pushed back on the legislation.

“In the grander scheme, the Respect for Marriage Act is a way of putting an exclamation mark on the sexual revolution and its ideology,” wrote Ryan Womack, who works for the group, in a blog posted on its website.

Associated Press writer Seung Min Kim contributed to this report.

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The Vineyard rises above MAGA cruelty

A stirring rebuke of the politics of hate

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

The cruelty of MAGA Republicans is a feature, not a bug. Whether their targets are migrants, women, or trans youth and supportive parents, politicians who put ambition over service have not exactly had to exhaust themselves to bring out the worst in their supporters.

Drown us in bots as they will, the resulting cacophony bears no more resemblance to American greatness than to Christianity.

The trashing of civic and faith-based values by the Trumpists can fill us with dark thoughts. But that's what they want: to drag everyone else down to their level. We must not let them. Recognizing one another's common humanity must be at the heart of any enduring republic.

The people of Martha's Vineyard provided a glowing example of humanity on September 14 in response to a cynical stunt by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. He used taxpayer money to trick fifty Venezuelan and Colombian migrants in Texas, including children, into boarding two charter planes that deposited them on Martha's Vineyard without providing promised jobs and housing. Homeland Security officials falsified migrants' addresses to far-flung cities to ensure their removal from the country.

Vineyard residents, instead of reacting to the sudden influx by posting "No Trespassing" signs as some Twitter trolls claimed, responded with an outpouring of welcome. St. Andrew's Church, immigration lawyers, and translators quickly mobilized to help. Meals were prepared. Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker, a moderate Republican,

provided shelter and resources at Joint Base Cape Cod.

What a contrast with the former president and his aspiring political heirs, who exploit people's lowest impulses in service of the Big Lie about a stolen 2020 election. Their scheme is to replace the give-and-take of representative government with coercion by a seething, nativist mob.

To defeat them, we must face the danger we are in, not give ourselves false assurances. One Trump-appointed federal judge in Florida, Aileen Cannon, provided a reminder of how far the MAGA subversion of the Constitution has advanced with her skepticism toward the government's task of defending national secrets and her sympathy for the meritless claim that the former president retains executive privilege.

The cynical move by DeSantis, resembling human trafficking or kidnapping, was accompanied by mirthful self-congratulation over its brilliance, as if he was "owning the libs." In fact, the cruel Republican ploy, driven by an assumption that Democrats are just as bigoted as they, revealed the Vineyard's allegedly selfish elitists to be far more humane.

The blame for xenophobic ugliness rests not only with the pols trading in it, but with voters who confirm their low expectations. This midterm election is about our character as citizens. It will show whether we have the decency and courage to summon one another to do the right thing.

Immigration reform legislation would have been passed

by Congress and signed into law twenty years ago if Republicans wanted a solution. Instead they perpetuated the problem as a source of grievance for campaign purposes.

Some people build, some dig ditches, and others drive wedges. Lincoln in his second inaugural address deplored the spectacle of those who "dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces." Here we see a modern equivalent. As with neocolonialism, overt force is replaced by economic exploitation. It is not just that many states depend upon migrant labor to do work our own citizens will not. It is that the migrants are stigmatized as fearsome brown invaders and treated as parasites despite working in our economy and paying taxes while being ineligible for public benefits.

Awfully brazen for descendants of Europeans to call others invaders, isn't it?

I count among my friends people who began here as undocumented immigrants. Each of them loves this country despite not always being loved in return. In recent years I have helped LGBTQ refugees in Kenya who seek resettlement to countries where they can live in greater freedom and opportunity. Those who come to America honor us by embracing the values we have proclaimed around the world.

From their moment of arrival, these pilgrim souls are truer patriots than those who demonize and scapegoat them. America is not built on a particular race or sectarian doctrine, but on the most liberating idea in human history: that all of us are created equal. We serve our country best not by insisting on her greatness as an entitlement, but by applying ourselves to the task of proving her goodness through our own example.

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

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Remembering a fellow journalist of back in the day

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Since I received the news that Charles "Chuck" R. Colbert, III (April 21, 1955 - June 30, 2022) died on June 30 in his hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, I've been flooded with memories of our time as queer journalists for the now defunct LGBTQ+ weekly, "In Newsweekly" (1991-2008).

Chuck was a regular political columnist for "In Newsweekly," and I penned the weekly column "The Religion Thang." We were covering queer news in and around Greater Boston at a time when major newspapers- local and national- were not. As journalists, we were educating and informing the public by chronicling our lives and LGBTQ+ topics as newsworthy. Both "In Newsweekly" and our competitor "Bay Windows" functioned as important community-based media.

Chuck "was a conscientious reporter with a passion for justice," said Arthur Lipkin of Cambridge. An example of Chuck's fierce passion for justice was expressed in the "Philadelphia Inquirer" February 2004 op-ed titled "Why it has to be 'marriage' for gays." In 2004, marriage equality movement activists contested that civil unions denied same-sex couples more than 1,100 federal rights protections and benefits conferred to married heterosexual couples. In defense of marriage, Chuck wrote that "A civil union would be a substantial trade down. In a pluralistic, secular America, civil marriage is a fundamental civil right - for all of us - gay and non-gay. There really is no such thing as separating the word marriage from the protections it provides. That's because one of the most impor-

tant protections of marriage is the word itself - the word conveys the status everyone understands as the ultimate expression of love and commitment."

Also, he was undeterred by potential danger in covering the news. On a shared assignment to cover the controversial consecration of the Rev. V. Eugene Robinson as the ninth bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire, Chuck and I drove up to Durham together on that Sunday, November 2, 2003. Outside the Whittemore Center Arena at the University of New Hampshire was the notorious anti-gay activist Rev. Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, KS, and his group protesting the event with placards spewing hate like "Fag Priest" and "Episcopal = sin. I hesitated to go past Phelps' folks, but Chuck calmly took me by the arm and ushered me through.

Chuck constantly emailed me his questions and thoughts on religious freedom. In an email to me dated July 9, 2013, he expressed his concerns about the Religious Right's weaponizing religious liberty as a guise to discriminate beyond LGBTQ+ issues - was prescient, especially with the 2018 Supreme Court Masterpiece Cakeshop ruling in favor of the Colorado baker who refused to make a wedding cake for a same-sex couple on the grounds of religious freedom, and now the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*.

"Here is what is on my mind about media and their coverage of religion, faith, and religious liberty.

The religious liberty issue is growing with respect to LGBT matters such as same-sex marriage and reproductive issues, among others. What I mean here is those who

oppose our full equality and rely on their faith tradition to voice disapproval of our relationships (meaning we are immoral) and feel they are being asked to go against strongly held beliefs even so far as renting spaces for wedding receptions and/or providing basic services such as being photographers at wedding ceremonies. So I am wondering your take on this development and its right-wing strategy from two perspectives - one as a columnist and commentator, the other as an ordained minister?"

The news of Chuck's passing leaves many with fond memories.

"We shared a passion for Catholic theology. It was a pleasure to engage Chuck in theological discussions as he was so well educated and informed and posed serious faith questions. We are deeply saddened by his death and extend our condolences to his wonderful mother," Joseph B. Sankovich, a childhood neighbor, wrote on the John Henderson Company Funeral Home website.

Chuck was indeed well-educated: the University of Notre Dame, with advanced degrees in business, psychology, and theology, from Georgetown University, Harvard University, and Weston Jesuit School of Theology.

Chuck was a contributor to several LGBTQ+ newspapers and magazines like Boston Spirit Magazine, Press Pass Q, and Bay Area Reporter, to name a few. Also, he was a contributor to numerous mainstream daily newspapers and magazines, like Boston Globe, Boston Herald, Harvard Business Review, Philadelphia Inquirer, and the National Catholic Reporter, covering the clerical sex-abuse crisis in the Boston archdiocese. And he was a national board member of NLGJA and Boston/New England chapter president.

Many will fondly remember Chuck as Tom Simonton, a lifelong friend and close neighbor depicted on the funeral website: "He was the smartest guy I knew! He was kind and gentle! Great wit! Very funny! May his memory be a blessing."

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Coogan

Continued from page 1

and advocacy, our Commonwealth has a long and proud tradition of transformative LGBTQ leadership, which is why we've long been at the forefront of the national struggle for equality. Coogan fits squarely within that tradition.

Founded in 1982, BGMC was already a Boston institution when Coogan became executive director in 2012. But even the most beloved institutions get a little musty. When Coogan took the reins, BGMC was struggling financially and artistically. Worse, it was declining in relevance as the LGBTQ community and its issues moved further into the mainstream in Massachusetts after the legal and political victories that secured our right to marry. BGMC, with its mission to make music "to inspire change, build community and celebrate difference," needed to reclaim the spotlight and Coogan had the juice to get it done.

With a commitment to artistic excellence, plenty of media savvy, and an entrepreneurial spirit, Coogan set about raising BGMC's profile across Massachusetts and around the globe. One of his first acts was to bring BGMC into the digital age by pivoting from producing CDs of BGMC concerts—an expensive endeavor for a small nonprofit—to uploading videos of their live performances to YouTube and streaming recordings on iTunes and Spotify. Aside from saving money, the free and easy access to BGMC's music dramatically increased their

visibility and reach. BGMC videos have racked up more than 11 million views from people around the world, including those who live in African and Asian countries where it remains dangerous—deadly, even—to be openly LGBTQ.

These videos also caught the attention of a Disney executive, which led to BGMC's June extravaganza "Disney PRIDE in Concert," which was the first time Disney engaged in a full collaboration with a community choral group, much less an LGBTQ organization.

When COVID-19 forced the chorus into an indefinite hiatus, Coogan harnessed BGMC's digital archives to produce more than 100 videos—including collaborating with WCVB Channel 5 on three fabulous TV specials—to entertain, comfort and inspire us all during the darkest days of the pandemic.

Coogan also got BGMC back out on the road, conceiving and raising funds for BGMC's historic Middle East and South Africa tours, in 2015 and 2018 respectively. The excursions marked the first time since 2005 that BGMC traveled abroad. Both tours attracted international media attention, raising the profile not just of BGMC, but also of the LGBTQ people and organizations working for social justice in parts of the world where such work can range from a near solitary endeavor to being dangerous. Gov. Charlie Baker declared BGMC "cultural ambassadors" for the Commonwealth on the occasion of their South Africa tour.

As BGMC's profile grew, so did its reputation for musical excellence, which resulted in

history-making gigs at Baker's 2015 inauguration (injecting a little camp into the pomp and circumstance by serenading the new Republican governor with "Holding Out For A Hero"), Holy Cross College, and Fenway Park.

Knowing the importance of the arts to the LGBTQ community—and to the life and economic health of Boston—Coogan leveraged his position with the Chorus to advocate for increased funding and other support for local arts organizations and artists. On his watch BGMC became an active member of the influential arts advocacy organization MASSCreative, and he regularly penned op-eds on his own and with others in addition to speaking to the media about local arts issues.

Last, but equally as important as his work to raise the Chorus's artistic profile, Coogan made major advances in ensuring that BGMC better reflects the diversity of our community and the city as a whole. It's no secret that Boston's LGBTQ community and its institutions have long been dominated by cis white people and their interests. BGMC is no exception. Change is happening though, slowly but surely. Coogan deserves credit for deepening BGMC's work on diversity, growing both BIPOC membership and audience members while also welcoming gender diverse members.

During Coogan's tenure the chorus explored theme of racial injustice in its 2019 concert "Raise You Up" which featured the powerful "Seven Last Words of the Unarmed," a piece by Joel Thompson that sets to music the final words of seven black teenagers and adults—among

them Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner—who were needlessly killed by police or other authority figures. The concert was in part a response to BGMC's eye-opening visit to the Apartheid Museum during the South Africa tour, where they easily recognized parallels to the structural racism that plagues the U.S. in South Africa's brutal history of oppressing Black people.

And when murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020 sparked a racial reckoning across the country, BGMC wasn't afraid to say "Black Lives Matter," and paid tribute in song to all Black people who have been victims of police violence. They also supported their members who joined the protests for racial justice, producing this video in which chorus members shared their feelings about—and experiences with—racism and rallying in the streets in support of Black lives.

Coogan's leadership stands in sharp contrast with the actions of the former leaders of Boston Pride, who in 2020 found the phrase "Black lives matter" too controversial to include in a press release—thus sparking a boycott by Pride volunteers and community members alike.

Of all these accomplishments, perhaps the most impressive is that Coogan worked his magic as a later-in-life transplant to Boston, which has a well-deserved reputation for chewing up and spitting out newcomers to the city (with a notable exception made for college students).

Boston will miss Coogan's leadership at BGMC and the greater arts and LGBTQ communities. We wish him well in Seattle.

Mombian

Continued from page 1

titles; previously, the vast majority only sought to remove or restrict a single book.

LGBTQ content is among the most frequently challenged. The ALA's latest annual list of the Top 10 Most Challenged Books includes five books targeted for "LGBTQ+ content," including the number one book, "Gender Queer," by Maia Kobabe, a memoir about growing up nonbinary and asexual. Six of the Top 10 books also had protagonists of color.

"The unprecedented number of challenges we're seeing already this year reflects coordinated, national efforts to silence marginalized or historically underrepresented voices and deprive all of us—young people, in particular—of the chance to explore a world beyond the confines of personal experience," said ALA President Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada.

A similar study by PEN America, from July 2021 to June 2022, found 2,532 book bans and restrictions—40 percent including people of color as protagonists or prominent secondary characters; 21 percent directly addressing race and racism; and 41 percent explicitly addressing LGBTQ themes or having LGBTQ protagonists or prominent secondary characters. Texas had the most bans (801), followed by Florida (566) and Pennsylvania (457), but bans had occurred in a total of 32 states and 138 school districts.

These censorship efforts are taking place alongside nationwide legislative attacks on LGBTQ youth. Three bills censoring LGBTQ content in schools were signed into law in 2022, in Florida, Alabama, and South Dakota, according to HRC. More than 70 other discriminatory education bills were introduced across the country aimed at preventing classroom discussion of LGBTQ or other marginalized people and issues. These include Florida's "Stop WOKE Act" (HB 7) that was signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis (R). Additionally, more than 100 bills this year have targeted transgender youth via bans on affirming health care, bathroom access, sports participation, and more.

The same national conservative organizations are behind many of these legislative and book banning efforts, according to GLAAD. If we look at the books being targeted, too, which include picture books that simply show LGBTQ people and families in everyday situations, it's clear that the goal is often not just to block young adult books like "Gender Queer" that mention sex and sexuality. It's also to censor any depiction, however innocuous, of LGBTQ lives. This is nothing new; Lesléa Newman's 1989 picture book "Heather Has Two Mommies" has faced challenges since shortly after its publication. Coupled with the broader legislative attacks against LGBTQ youth, however, today's challenges form part of an ominous threat both to first amendment rights and to LGBTQ children, youth, and families.

There are signs of hope, however. Just two examples: In Texas, the Austin City Council unani-

mously adopted a resolution earlier this month promoting the ALA's Freedom to Read Statement, opposing book bans, and supporting the Austin Public Library's materials-selection policy. And after community members in Jamestown, Michigan, voted to defund the public library over LGBTQ books on its shelves, others launched a GoFundMe campaign that has raised over \$260,000 for the library.

Students, parents, librarians, and other community members are also speaking out against bans and challenges elsewhere, sometimes with success. Organizations like the ALA, ACLU, EveryLibrary, GLAAD, National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), Freedom Fighters, Red Wine & Blue, and others are also taking action and providing resources to fight censorship.

Additionally, LGBTQ-inclusive children's books continue to be published in record numbers. People are also finding innovative ways to connect children with these and other diverse books. The Brooklyn Public Library is letting young people ages 13-21, throughout the U.S., apply for a free eCard to access the library's full eBook collection and learning databases. In San Francisco, two educators are launching a mobile bookshop that will not only sell LGBTQ-inclusive books, but also host story times, youth book clubs, and community events, sometimes in partnership with local schools. (Visit OutandAboutBookshop on Instagram.) And in Rhode Island, after some parents called for removal of "Gender Queer" from area high schools, several local authors developed "We Are ALL Readers,"

a weeklong festival last April celebrating diversity in children's literature. A second one is planned for April 2023.

How can we help address and prevent book bans and other forms of censorship?

Confidentially report censorship attempts to the ALA (ala.org) and/or to NCAC (ncac.org). Visit Unite Against Book Bans (uniteagainstbookbans.org), an ALA-led coalition that includes LGBTQ organizations, publishers, and others, for talking points, suggested actions, and more resources.

Participate in town, school board, and library meetings. Vote even in purely local elections.

Consider running for school and library boards yourself.

Donate to organizations fighting book bans, if your means allow.

Recommend books about LGBTQ and other marginalized people to your local libraries to show there is community support and need for them.

Leave reviews for LGBTQ-inclusive children's and young adult books on Amazon, Goodreads, and similar sites to counter reviews that claim they are inappropriate.

Fighting censorship will take much more than this one week—but this is a good time to renew (as the librarians would say) our efforts.

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

Check us out online @ **BAYWINDOWS.COM**

billy masters

Continued from page 1

They're dropping like flies in England—literally! My faithful followers know that nothing makes me happier than a video of someone falling—why, seeing **Beyoncé** plummet down a flight of stairs face-first is almost as enjoyable as seeing Madonna nearly strangled by her cape! But even I was concerned while watching the honor guard standing by **Queen Elizabeth**. One member was noted to be swaying—which is never a good sign in a guard who isn't even allowed to crack a smile (not that there's much to smile about around the queen's coffin). Suddenly, the swaying guard collapsed. But he didn't just faint, he fainted face-forward and down a step! And, he didn't quickly pop up—he laid there until he was helped up. We hear he was uninjured and returned to his post a few hours later. And then he started swaying again. Needless to say, he was removed before any other incident took place.

The newly minted **King Charles III** is not without scandal, goodness knows. But did you know there have been gay rumors? I guess that goes with the territory. Apparently **Princess Diana** made mention of a servant's claim to have caught Charles in flagrante delicto with a member of the same sex. That servant, **George Smith**, claims that he once brought Chucky his breakfast in bed and found him with a male aide in what is described as an "unmistakable sexual position". Shortly thereafter, palace insiders branded Smith a drunk. And?

Several of you have written in wondering what will become of Lizzie's beloved corgis. In her later years, Elizabeth stopped breeding the bitches, most of which descended from the first pup she had in the 1940s. Once the last one passed away in 2018, QEII said she didn't want any more—primarily because she couldn't bear to leave a pet behind after her passing. Leave it to **Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie** (they of those very special hats) to ignore the Queen's wishes and gift her in 2021 with two corgi pups—**Muick and Sandy**. Muick was allegedly presented as a companion following the death of **Prince Philip**—because nothing says, "Sorry about your dead husband" like a puppy! In actuality, Muick was selected by **Sarah Ferguson**, who continues to live with her besmirched ex-hubby **Prince Andrew** on the Windsor Estate. We hear the dogs will live out their days with Andy and Sarah.

Since I'm in Europe, I was unable to attend the Emmys. But I'm always glad when friends win awards, and two of my nearest and dearest are **Sheryl Lee Ralph** and **Jennifer Coolidge**. Both embraced their moments memorably—one by singing and one by dancing. And yet, neither of them won for a musical. Go figure.

A Broadway-bound musical is taking a hiatus on the road to the Great White Way. The Elton John musicalized version of "The Devil Wears Prada" played Chicago to a tepid response. "It's not ready," said **Elton John**. "It'll be ready in about another year..We learned a lot from our run in Chicago and look forward to continuing to work on the production and make the necessary changes. We have every intention of bringing the production to the stage again when we have the proper theater and the timing is right."

This does not mean that Elton is taking a hiatus from all theatre. His collaboration with **Jake Shears** on a musical about **Tammy Faye Bakker** is still moving forward. "Tammy Faye" opens at the Almeida Theatre in London's West End on October 13th. It will star **Katie Brayben** as Tammy Faye and our own **Andrew Rannells** as **Jim Bakker**.

As we went to press, a shocking announcement was made. "The Phantom of the Opera", the longest running Broadway show of all time, is closing after 35 years! The final curtain will fall on February 18th, 2023.

Broadway's biggest box office blockbuster has also announced plans to close. The **Hugh Jackman/Sutton Foster** helmed revival of "The Music Man" will shutter once Jackman's contract expires on January 1st—not unlike

when he played **Peter Allen** in "The Boy from Oz".

Lea Michele's first week as Broadway's "Funny Girl" resulted in a box office record for the show—it brought in \$1.6 million. That's even more impressive when you consider that she only got to do four shows before she was felled by Covid. She is expected back on September 20th.

In a recent item about Lea, I jokingly referred to her as "the new belter"—a joke I trust doesn't require an explanation. As luck would have it, two young men are assuming the title themselves...at least temporarily. I've previously written about **Nicolas King** and **Seth Sikes**—both throwbacks to the age of crooners and, well, belters. So, why not bill themselves as such? "The New Belters" will play their first show at The Green Room 42 in NYC on October 28th. In November, they will also appear in Los Angeles, Palm Springs and Las Vegas. You can get more details on dates and venues at each of their websites—TheNicolasKing.com or SethSikes.net.

Remember that story about **Ricky Martin**'s nephew suing him for sexual assault? And then, suddenly, the entire thing disappeared and the nephew was discredited? It suspiciously seemed like some deal was brokered—and, indeed, I wasn't the only one to jump to that conclusion. But I don't think anyone expected Ricky to file a \$20 million lawsuit for defamation against **Dennis Sanchez Martin** who, I think it's safe to say, doesn't have a pot to piss in (a phrase Big Mama Masters is fond of). "The reckless, malicious and culpable actions by Defendant Sanchez were motivated by the desire to expose Plaintiff to hatred and disdain from his fanbase, to threaten his business opportunities and to destroy his reputation." And, speaking of malicious, Sanchez is described in the suit as "maladjusted". So, what is the point of this? Obviously it isn't money. Stay tuned.

Congrats to my pals, **Gary and Larry Lane**. Otherwise known as the Lane Twins (or the Filth2Go Twins), they have released a new documentary, "Still Working 9 To 5". It spotlights the social relevance of the film "9 To 5" and how things have (and have not) changed for women in the workplace over the past 40+ years. Not only is the doc beautifully produced, it is massively educational and moving. Cast members from the original film are included, and the Lanes even persuaded Dolly Parton to re-record the iconic theme song—as a duet with Kelly Clarkson! To learn more and find out about how to see it, check out StillWorking9To5.com.

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Henry in NYC: "I was surprised to see **Zac Efron** on a magazine cover looking even younger than usual. Has he had some work done?"

He has—but it seems to have been mental work. Zac claims that he has found some balance in his life in the October issue of "Men's Health". Remember his incredible "Baywatch" physique? He now says, "I don't know if that's really attainable". He now confesses that achieving that body required endless workout sessions, a severely limited diet, and very powerful diuretics. The medication and supplements led to bouts of insomnia and depression. "At one point, that was a dream of mine—what it would be like to not have to be in shape all the time. What if I just said, 'F*** it' and let myself go?" Welcome to my world, Zac Efron! He claims to have discovered how to be in good physical shape and also be happy. You can see the results on BillyMasters.com.

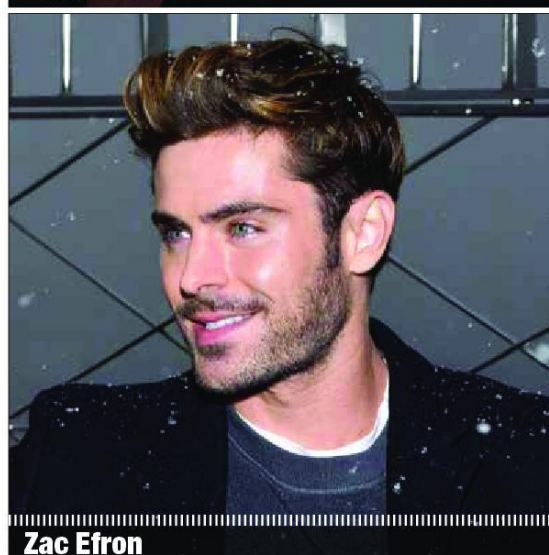
When the difference between Zac and me is a diuretic, it's definitely time for me to go on the dark web and end yet another column. Perhaps these drugs can be found in my undisclosed Eastern European locale. While I look into that, you can check out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that never falls short. If you have a question, dash it off to Billy@BillyMasters.com, and I promise to get back to you before someone explains where Posh was. Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.



Beyoncé



Elton John



Zac Efron

BCH

Continued from page 1

Catherine Leavy, 37, was arrested at her home in Westfield, Massachusetts, and authorities recovered the phone they believe she used to make the bomb threat on Aug. 30, Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Rachael Rollins told reporters.

The caller said: "There is a bomb on the way to the hospital, you better evacuate everybody you sickos," according to court documents. The threat resulted in a lockdown of the hospital, and no explosives were found.

Leavy initially denied making the threat during an interview on Thursday with FBI agents, according to court documents. After agents told her that phone records indicated her number made the threat, she admitted doing so, an agent wrote in court papers. She "expressed disapproval" of the hospital "on multiple occasions" during the interview, the agent said.

Leavy is being held pending a detention hearing scheduled for Friday in Boston federal court, Rollins said. She is charged with one count of making a false telephonic bomb threat. It was not immediately clear on Thursday if she has an attorney to comment on her behalf.

Rollins did not comment directly on

the alleged motive in Leavy's case. But she condemned the barrage of attacks against Boston Children's Hospital, which is home to the first pediatric and adolescent transgender health program in the United States.

"This alleged conduct is disturbing to stay the least," Rollins said. "The people that work at Children's Hospital and the parents that bring their loved ones to Children's Hospital are under enough stress," she said.

Boston Children's Hospital thanked law enforcement for their work on the case.

"We will continue to focus on providing the highest quality care and work with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies - and our security and emergency response teams - to ensure the safety of all across our hospital," the hospital said in an emailed statement. "We stand firmly by our commitment to support transgender patients, their families and the LGBTQ+ community."

The hospital became the focus of far-right social media accounts, news outlets and bloggers last month after they found informational YouTube videos published by the hospital about surgical offerings for transgender patients. The hospital swiftly removed the videos.

Transition treatment is under attack in many states, with some labeling it a form

of child abuse or barring Medicaid coverage. Critics argue that safety should be well established before subjecting youths to potentially irreversible treatments.

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

The critics cited the videos and snippets of previous language on the hospital's website to claim that Boston Children's Hospital was improperly performing gender-affirming surgeries, such as hysterectomies, on minors and young children.

The response was swift and relentless, with a barrage of users demanding the hospital be shut down and calling the surgeries mutilation, barbarism and child abuse, while accusing its doctors of engaging in malpractice or illegal activity.

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

Far-right social media accounts and news outlets have also targeted hospitals in Pittsburgh, Phoenix and other major cities for their gender-care programs.

Sing Street

Continued from page 1

The former had a strong book by Enda Walsh and the affecting music that Glen Hansard and Marketa composed for the 2007 Academy Award-winning film of the same name. Now Walsh has also written the book for "Sing Street," but her effort at the Calderwood Pavilion needs strengthening as does the 1980's appropriate Gary Clark and Carney score which ought to have more memorable numbers.

As with "Once," Broadway-bound (2019 Off-Broadway) "Sing Street" is set in Dublin—this time a poor 1982 area with work-challenged and financially struggling families. A clever center stage miniature house—kudos to scenic designer Bob Crowley, who also co-designs the vivid 80's costumes and get-ups with Lisa Zinni—opens up to make way for the home of the focal Lawlor Family. The Lawlors—father Robert, mother Penny and siblings Brendan, Conor and Anna—are beset by marital strife and diverse growing pains.

Working mother Penny is having an affair with her boss, and jobless Robert is emotionally conflicted. Older brother Brendan has virtually dropped out of life outside his home as well as college, spending many months on the living room couch. Anna is approaching graduation but angry about her mother's infidelity and her father's apparent weakness in reacting to it.

Because the family is financially strapped, Conor has had to switch from private

school to a parochial one named Synge Street and run by Brother Baxter. Abusive despot Baxter makes him remove his non-black shoes which he considers a violation of his arbitrary regulations.

Central to the evolving family dynamics is Conor's desire to form a band with fellow students and find both haven from home problems and artistic fulfillment in rock music with an affinity to the decade's celebrated Duran Duran and The Cure. Very soon he establishes a songwriting partnership with keyboardist Eamon. While finding a lead singer, he falls for elusive enlistee Raphina.

If the formation of the band may seem too easy—with the student singer/musicians quickly coming together, the same can be said for Conor's enrapture with his older would-be girlfriend (who warns him that she is involved with a much older London-bound man named Dave). At the same time Conor and his fellow musicians see the band's name Sing Street—of course a change from the school's name—as a signal for cultural revolution.

Unsurprisingly, Father Baxter tries to reign in the students and stifle what he considers their controversial and unacceptable extracurricular activities. The students' retaliation may seem like unsatisfying plotting—especially if compared with the parents-impressing student performance near the end of the musical "School of Rock."

Bully Barry Bray initially puts down the band's Duran Duran-like rock but eventually changes his tune in a turnaround that many theatergoers are likely to find too neat.

=Plot and score issues notwithstanding,

the production team is first-rate and the cast—directed forcefully by Rebecca Taichman (a very deserving Tony Award winner for the play "Indecent")—winningly exuberant. As with "Once," the students play their own instruments—and with fine technique. Choreographer Sonya Tayeh (an equally deserving Tony winner for "Moulin Rouge") has the students high-stepping during their numbers and the Lawlors moving strikingly during tense family moments—particularly Brendan almost acrobatically on the couch. Luke Halls and Brad Peterson add imaginative video design to the band's 80's ambience.

Most of all, the cast keep the characters' inner music engaging. Adam Bregman has all of Conor's naivete and spirit—notably on the romantic "To Find You." Donal Finn is a standout as complicated Brendan; he demonstrates appealingly the older brother's closeness with Conor and he persuasively moves from the shoeless couch sitter (a smart symbol) to closing shoe-donning optimist.

Courtnee Carter combines sweetness and street savvy as Raphina. Alexa Xioufaridou Moster makes the most of the as yet underwritten Anne. Ben Wang catches Eamon's reserve as well as his commitment to songwriting. Anne L. Nathan finds all of his mother Sandra's wonderful support for his music and the band.

Sandra advises that "Collaboration is your best friend." That wisdom has proven very true for "Once." If the team working on "Sing Street" can fine tune their collaboration, audiences at the Calderwood Pavilion and on Broadway will embrace an enjoyable tryout turned true musical winner.

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