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Colorado Anti-Gay-Rights Amendment Takes Toll in State

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AMENDMENT 2, the constitutional change that overturned gay-rights laws in three Colorado cities and banned other communities from adopting such laws, is on a temporary, court-ordered hold. But the issue has already taken a heavy toll on state revenues and has dominated the state's political agenda.

A nationwide boycott of Colorado has cost Denver some \$26 million, as 27 scheduled or tentative conventions and conferences have been canceled. The boycott has been honored by entertainers, municipal governments, business and professional associations, and others. By March 10, projected statewide revenue losses totaled \$33.8 million, according to Rich Grant of the Denver Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Adoption of Amendment 2 was blocked in January when District Judge Jeff Bayless issued an injunction just hours before the amendment would have become law. "There is a fundamental right here, and it is the right not to have the state endorse and give effect to private biases," he ruled.

The attorney general has appealed to the state Supreme Court.

Oral arguments will be presented May 24 when the state challenges the lower-court ruling before the Supreme Court. The court could make a ruling by mid-summer, and Judge Bayless is slated to open a trial on Oct. 11.

A second boycott effort, initiated in New York City and known as New York Boycott Colorado (NYBC), touched off a firestorm when organizers tried to drag Celestial Seasonings, a Boulder-based tea firm, into the fray, threatening a boycott of its products in the Big Apple because its chief executive officer, Morris Siegel, would not take a high-profile stand against the amendment. The efforts of NYBC - which is also calling for a ban on all Colorado-made products, such as Samsonite luggage and Coors beer -



fizzled, however, when Mr. Siegel refused to comply with an alleged demand that the tea firm donate \$100,000 to the New York effort.

Gay activists in Colorado opposed the New York plans by forming Citizens for a Sensible Boycott and scheduling a Denver tea party in support of the firm.

KNOWN for hiring gays, Siegel said he was "singled out and targeted ... because our home is in Colorado. These are very gun-to-your-head tactics. We don't discriminate."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Colorado's United States attorney, Michael Norton, are trying to determine whether extortion was involved.

Passage of Amendment 2 has left Gov. Roy Romer (D) in a quandary since he opposed the amendment during the election. It is the state, however, that is appealing the lower court's ruling,

in effect pushing for the amendment's enactment. A recall movement of the popular governor is in the works because of his preelection stance.

During the election campaign, Amendment 2 supporters argued that gays were seeking "special rights," an argument that helped the measure get passed. But Jeanne Winer, an attorney fighting Amendment 2, said residents "were duped. Gays never had special rights and were never asking for any special rights, and if the amendment is declared unconstitutional, they still won't have any special rights.... The three [existing municipal] ordinances simply said that among all the groups you can't discriminate against in housing, employment, and public accommodations" are gays.

There have been efforts to draft compromises, but Colorado for Family Values (CFV), the conservative Christian group that initiated the amendment, has opposed any compromise. Group co-founder Tony Marco, who created the amendment, has separated from CFV, saying it portrayed gays as "perverts."

Members of Denver's gay community say violence against gays has "skyrocketed," more than doubling since the amendment's adoption, but Denver police say they cannot verify this claim. Recently, five gay men were murdered, but police have not found a link among the men or connection to the amendment's passage.

The initial success of Amendment 2 has led to anti-gay-rights efforts being considered in Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Missouri, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Ohio, Maine, Georgia, and Florida.