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Va. Legislators Seek Solution to Online Porn

By Weston Reeves
Capital News Service
(From the issue of 1/20/05)

RICHMOND - Libraries that receive state funds would have to install Internet filters that block Web sites with child pornography and other obscene content, under legislation filed by two Republican lawmakers.

Sen. Mark Obenshain of Harrisonburg and Delegate Samuel Nixon Jr. of Chesterfield County have filed such proposals with the support of the Family Foundation of Virginia, a conservative activist group.

"We have a duty to protect the children of our Commonwealth from being subjected to viewing this kind of material," said Obenshain, sponsor of Senate Bill 882. "This is an inexpensive and effective way to keep our children safe."

Victoria Cobb, the foundation's executive director, said a recent incident in a Henrico County public library underscored the need for such a law.

She said a man at the library was viewing "obscene material" on a computer and a child nearby was exposed to it. The child's parent asked the librarian to require the man to remove the material from his computer screen, but the librarian refused, Cobb said. The parent later called the Family Foundation about the matter.

Nixon said computer users can do an innocuous search for information on the Web and find themselves redirected to sites containing pornography.

"Equally disturbing is the ease by which children can be exposed to graphic sexual images even though they are only using the Internet in a very routine way," he said.

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Opposing Groups Square Off Over Same-Sex Marriage

By Thomas Gehring
Capital News Service
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RICHMOND - The state's largest gay-rights group, Equality Virginia, and a prominent "traditional values" organization, the Family Foundation of Virginia, have squared off in a legislative debate over same-sex marriage.

The Family Foundation wants to amend the state Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman and to ensure that Virginia won't recognize same-sex unions.

"The national elections in November were a clear statement by the American people that traditional values and traditional marriage matter," said Victoria Cobb, the group's executive director.

Equality Virginia has mobilized against the proposed constitutional amendment. During last week's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Lobby Day at the Capitol, more than 200 gay-rights supporters turned out to voice their concerns to their legislators.

"We know we'll win; it will just take some time," said Dyana Mason, Equality Virginia's executive director.

Gay-rights advocates' goals for the session include:

Defeating the proposed amendment to the Virginia Constitution. The amendment, which requires approval by the General Assembly and by voters, "provides that marriage may exist only between a man and woman and that nothing in the Constitution shall be interpreted to require the Commonwealth to recognize or permit same-sex marriages."

Repealing last year's House Bill 751 (titled the Affirmation of Marriage Act), which