

POLITICS & THE NATION

County clerks across South reluctantly issue licenses

But some are holding out for more guidance on unions

BY SANDHYA SOMASHEKHAR

County clerks in Southern states that had struck a defiant tone on same-sex marriage began issuing marriage licenses to gay couples Monday, with state leaders pledging to protect the religious liberties of county workers who oppose such unions.

Gay couples reported receiving marriage licenses in parts of Louisiana and Mississippi, the two holdouts among the 14 states that before Friday's U.S. Supreme Court ruling had not allowed same-sex couples to legally marry.

In Alabama, many county officials were granting licenses to gay couples, despite confusion created by the state's firebrand chief justice. And a large number of Texas's 254 counties were either issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples Monday or indicated that they will do so soon, said Chuck Smith, executive director of Equality Texas, an advocacy group.

"We're very pleased to see that clerks are recognizing the freedom to marry is the law of the land," he said.

But many counties across the region said they were not ready to comply with the Supreme Court ruling that declared marriage a constitutional right for all Americans, with at least some waiting for firmer guidance from their state attorneys general. And some state leaders advised county officials that they may opt out of their duties if they have a religious objection to same-sex marriage.

Among those officials was Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton (R), who on Sunday called the Supreme Court ruling a "lawless decision" and pledged to assist clerks who face legal challenges. Late Monday, a legal adviser to Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) offered similar guidance.

"Appropriate accommodations may be made for state employees who express a religious objection



Michael Robinson, left, and Earl Benjamin of New Orleans, partners for 14 years, exchange vows at Orleans Parish Civil District Court.

to involvement in issuance of same-sex marriage licenses," Thomas Enright Jr., executive counsel to the governor, said in a memo.

The situation was different in Mississippi, where Attorney General Jim Hood (D) had informed county officials last week that same-sex marriage was not technically permitted in the state until a lower court confirmed the ruling. But on Monday, he sent an e-mail to clerks clarifying that there would be "no adverse action" if they issued same-sex marriage licenses.

In Alabama, state Chief Justice Roy Moore caused a stir when he interpreted a letter issued by the state Supreme Court asking for input on the same-sex marriage

ruling as an order to halt marriages for 25 days. Many county officials did not seem fazed by his statement, however.

By Monday afternoon, it became clear that the question of religious liberties — and whether county officials are permitted to opt out of their duties because of their faith — will be a central issue going forward.

Several experts said it is unlikely that a clerk would be legally permitted to opt out of same-sex marriage services.

"I'm aware of no general legal doctrine or precedent holding that county or other public officials are exempt from abiding by rights articulated by the Supreme Court in the event the religious beliefs of those public employees

are in conflict with the federal right," said Daniel Pinello, a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

But some religious conservatives argued that support of same-sex marriage cannot be a prerequisite for these jobs, particularly when these officials are elected.

"If we come to the point where you can't run for public office [because] you have to do something that goes against your convictions, what that's saying is that Christians no longer have a right to serve in public office, and I think that's wrong," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program.

For many of the clerks who started issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples Monday, the

reason was practical. Jon Gegenheimer, the clerk in Jefferson Parish, La., next door to New Orleans, said he and his attorney reviewed the ruling over the weekend and decided early Monday morning that they would issue the licenses.

"We made the decision based strictly on an unemotional and rational basis, and we didn't consider religion or anything like that," said Gegenheimer, who declined to reveal his beliefs about same-sex marriage. "Based upon careful examination of the Supreme Court's opinion, my counsel and I concluded that the order is definitive, so it should be implemented without delay."

sandhya.somashekhar@washpost.com

Philip Bump contributed to this report.

Device that grabs clots is urged for some strokes

BY LENNY BERNSTEIN

New guidelines issued Monday for treating strokes recommend that doctors, in certain cases, use a device to grab and remove blood clots, as well as administer a clot-dissolving drug.

A "stent retriever" is inserted into a major artery in the groin and threaded up into the large vessels that deliver blood to the head and brain. The wire mesh of the stent is pushed into the clot and expanded so the physician can grab the clot.

The clot-busting drug — commonly called tPA — is the best treatment for life-threatening blockages of blood flow to the brain, but some clots are too large for the drug dissolve, said William Powers, chairman of the Neurology Department at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, and chairman of the group that wrote the new guidelines. In those cases, the stent retriever, in concert with the drug, is often more effective, according to the results of various trials.

The guidelines were issued by the American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association.

The guidelines are designed to be used only in specific cases, including when a patient can be treated within six hours of the onset of stroke symptoms, has received tPA within 4 1/2 hours of experiencing those symptoms, has clots in certain areas of the large arteries that feed the brain and has a certain level of function before the procedure begins. The procedure should be performed only at comprehensive stroke centers, which are able to provide the most sophisticated care.

Although tPA, a blood thinner, can cause bleeding from blood vessels, the device also has risks. Infections can occur at the site where the artery is punctured to insert the device, and damage to the blocked artery can occur, causing bleeding into the brain.

Koto Ishida, medical director of the NYU Langone Comprehensive Stroke Care Center, who was not involved in formulating the new guidelines, said she "absolutely" supports the recommendations.

Stent retrievers have been in use for several years, she said, but the latest generation is proving most effective at removing clots.

Nearly 800,000 Americans have strokes each year and 130,000 die from them, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By far the most common are "ischemic strokes," which occur when a clot blocks blood flow to the brain. Symptoms include drooping or numbness on one side of the face, weakness or numbness in one arm and difficulty speaking.

leonard.bernstein@washpost.com

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DIGEST

SOUTHERN STATES

Authorities look into blazes at 6 churches

Federal authorities said Monday that they are investigating a spate of fires at predominantly black churches across the southern United States, although so far no link between the incidents has been established.

Six church fires from Florida to Tennessee have attracted attention because they all occurred shortly after the killing of nine churchgoers at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church

in Charleston, S.C., on June 17.

So far, two of the fires have been ruled as arson and others are being investigated, the FBI said. There is no apparent link between the incidents. None have yet been labeled as hate crimes.

— Reuters

DIPLOMACY

U.S. to resume aid to Bahrain's military

The State Department said Monday it is resuming aid to the military in Bahrain, which has been withheld since Bahrain

cracked down on demonstrations in 2011.

Bahrain was still cited in the department's recently released human rights report for its curbs on protesters and arrests of students and journalists. But department spokesman John Kirby said the Persian Gulf nation has made "some meaningful progress on human rights reforms and reconciliation," including the release of a number of political prisoners.

Bahrain is home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet and has flown airstrike missions over Syria as part of the anti-Islamic State coalition.

The State Department says that military sales to Bahrain since 2000 total \$1.4 billion.

— Associated Press

IMMIGRATION

New ICE rules take gender into account

Immigration authorities will consider housing transgender detainees based on the gender they identify with in the wake of criticism about detention conditions for the population, officials said Monday.

Detention staff should consid-

er transgender detainees' preferences when making decisions about housing and clothing and what pronouns should be used, Immigration and Customs Enforcement said in new guidelines for the treatment of transgender detainees. The agency will start tracking data for transgender detainees, train detention staff and draft individual detention plans for transgender detainees to deal with issues ranging from hormone therapy to safety, said Andrew Lorenzen-Strait, ICE's deputy assistant director of custody programs.

— Associated Press

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Iran's nuclear plans are intrinsically linked to its destabilizing policies in the region, Mr. President

We support engaging with the Iranian regime to persuade it to abandon its military nuclear program. Diplomacy should indeed be given a chance to prevent a major military conflict in the region. The use of force should be the very last option.

At the same time, the US administration is insisting on separating the nuclear issue from Iran's destabilizing policies in the region, even though the two issues are in reality one and the same. The main reason for the Iranian regime's determination to save the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad at any cost is to maintain Iran's ability to ship arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon via Syria, so as to keep Hezbollah a strong deterrent against any possible Israeli or Western attacks on Iran's military nuclear facilities. Syria has been the lifeline of Iran's army in Lebanon, i.e. Hezbollah, since 2006. Hezbollah's raison d'être is to enable the Iranian regime to build a nuclear bomb.

Agreeing to lift the economic sanctions on Iran for the sake of limited concessions from the Iranian regime about its nuclear program, and without any serious commitment to end its intervention in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, is effectively giving Iran a green light and the financial ability to carry on with its destabilizing policies in these countries. And to eventually run for the nuclear bomb.

That is why, Mr. President, we ask you to:

- Push for a fundamental shift in Iran's foreign policy, without trading Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen for the Iranian nuclear bomb.
- Link the Iran nuclear talks and sanctions to the Iranian regime's intervention in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.
- Tell Iranian negotiators that there will be no lifting of economic sanctions until Iran pulls its troops and militias out of Syria.

- Treat the war in Syria as an international armed conflict involving a foreign occupation by the Iranian regime and its militias and a liberation struggle by the Syrian people against this occupation.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court to investigate the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria, including Iran's and Hezbollah's role.
- Impose no-fly zones to protect civilians and allow humanitarian access throughout Syria, in line with the international 'responsibility to protect' norm.
- Fulfill your promises by arming and training enough moderate Syrian rebels, not only to fight ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked groups, but also Syrian and Iranian regime forces and militias.

Mr. President, only the US can save Syria from disintegration. Only the US can seriously pressure the Iranian regime to withdraw its Revolutionary Guards and Shia militias from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

To visualize the Iranian occupation of Syria, Naame Shaam produced a photomontage of a Syrian bank note with the counterfeit of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the de facto ruler of Syria. For more information, see Naame Shaam's report, "Iran in Syria – From an Ally of the Regime to an Occupying Force", www.naameshaam.org

Naame Shaam, which means "Letter from Syria" in Persian, is a group of Iranian, Syrian and Lebanese activists and citizen-journalists that focuses on uncovering the role of the Iranian regime in Syria. The group is supported by the Netherlands-based Rule of Law Foundation, www.lawrules.org.

This is the last ad out of four.
The first was published in this newspaper on May 5,
the second on May 19, the third on June 23, 2015.

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