

Nation/World

from The Associated Press

Student-produced show about homosexuality censored

DALLAS — A Dallas school official pulled the plug on a student-produced television show that featured a man in a dress discussing his homosexuality.

Robert Hinkle, an official with the Dallas Independent School District, said he made the decision because "maybe there was a constituency out there that wasn't prepared maturely for accepting this information."

School officials are crafting guidelines to regulate the programs students broadcast over a school cable channel.

Lincoln High School student Tserilyn Tse produced the "Getting Personal" episode with the approval of her teacher, parents and principal.

"I didn't do that show because I personally like gays or I hate gays," Tse said. "I did this show because I want you to know more. From what I understand, education is basically teaching somebody how to go out and get the knowledge for themselves."

Police take over media, assault Milosevic opponents

KRAGUJEVAC, Yugoslavia — Police beat up opponents of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic Thursday to clear a roadblock impeding access to this central Serbian town. Officers barricaded themselves inside a TV and radio station to keep it out of the hands of new city officials.

Control of the news media is a central issue in the struggle between Milosevic and the opposition. Whoever wins city hall controls local radio and television stations.

Milosevic's opponents won control of Kragujevac and 13 other cities Nov. 17 in local elections. After initially annulling the vote results, Milosevic has allowed opposition politicians to take power in some of the towns.

Milosevic has used a monopoly on the media to keep support, especially in provincial towns and rural areas. He especially needs control this year as Serbia prepares for presidential and parliamentary elections.

America offline

Customers criticize AOL for glitches, betraying its standards

NEW YORK (AP) — Consumer-protection officials from 20 states met with America Online Thursday to try to resolve a rash of complaints against the nation's largest online service — even as a fresh technical glitch further annoyed its customers.

The meeting in Chicago was spurred by customers' growing difficulty in getting the online access they paid for. A new pricing plan that charges customers \$19.95 a month for unlimited online time has strained AOL's network, creating long delays in going online and other frustrations.

The representatives from 20 state attorneys general offices tried to get the company to "give some relief to AOL customers who feel the company is not living up to its pledge," said Dan Curry, a spokesman for Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan, whose office was host to the meeting.

Details from the meeting weren't disclosed, and state officials said they were waiting for America Online's next move. AOL said only that the meeting was constructive and that the company was cooperating with the states.

Meanwhile, AOL's latest brownout, which prevented customers from receiving e-mail for two hours Thursday morning, has only heightened concerns about its ability to accommodate a flood of new users.

America Online spokeswoman Tricia Primrose characterized the

brownout — triggered by the installation of new computer hardware to increase AOL's capacity — as a minor problem. Overall, AOL reduced downtime to 1 percent from 3.5 percent last year, she said.

But AOL users experienced two other episodes of technical glitches just last week, and at least five lawsuits have been filed by consumers against AOL this past month accusing the company of breach of contract and deceptive marketing.

"It has been virtually impossible to log on from 6 p.m. until midnight," said Michael W. Fine of Avon Lake, Ohio, one of three AOL users in Ohio who filed suit Thursday.

Primrose said the company was working to upgrade its network and expects "to prevail in the class-action suits."

A source close to the attorneys general talks, speaking on condition of anonymity, said some states were interested in trying to get AOL to refund some money to customers.

Any agreement would be America Online's second in two months with state attorneys general. Last month, America Online agreed to revise its new pricing strategy in a settlement with 19 states that followed complaints from subscribers that they weren't given enough notice when automatically switched to the new flat-rate plan for unlimited Internet access.

One of AOL's biggest rivals tried to exploit the company's woes.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

A new television commercial for CompuServe breaking in Sunday's Super Bowl stresses the theme that people can get online access through CompuServe on the first try "97 percent of the time," said Scott Kauffman, CompuServe's vice president of Interactive Services.

Meanwhile, in a Washington hearing, Federal Communications Commission regulators began exploring ways to ease network congestion by giving companies incentives to provide more high-speed connections into homes.

The congestion has pitted Internet providers and computer companies against local telephone companies, which contend that soaring Internet usage could cause a breakdown in the public telephone network. They want Internet providers to pay them for using local lines to route Internet traffic.



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PepsiCo spinning off its restaurants

NEW YORK (AP) — PepsiCo Inc. is getting out of the fast-food business two decades after taking its first bite, spinning off the KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell chains into the world's second-biggest restaurant company.

The move frees PepsiCo to concentrate on its faster-growing Pepsi and Frito-Lay businesses, while creating a new company with \$20 billion in combined sales — trailing only McDonald's Corp. In terms of units, it will be the world's biggest, with 29,000 restaurants.

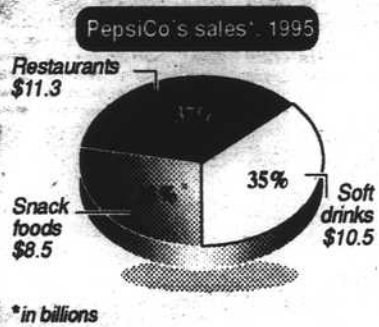
The plan to give shares in the new company to PepsiCo shareholders marks the boldest step taken by Roger Enrico since becoming chief executive last April. PepsiCo bought Pizza Hut in 1977 and added the others later.

PepsiCo also said it was exploring the possibility of selling its food distribution unit, which ships more than \$3 billion worth of restaurant equipment and supplies every year.

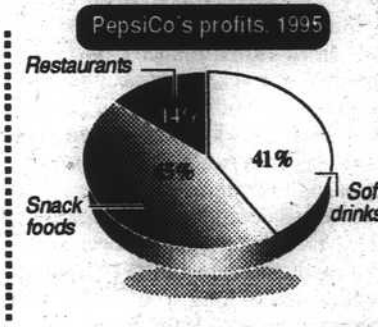
While PepsiCo feels the future for its restaurant business is bright, the business can do better if separated

Pepsi spinoff

PepsiCo's restaurants, which include KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, have traditionally been less profitable than other divisions of the company. The restaurant division will have about 29,000 stores worldwide.



*in billions Source: PepsiCo Inc.



AP/Amy Kranz


from PepsiCo's beverage and snack foods operation, Enrico said.

Even though the announcement came after markets closed Thursday, PepsiCo shares countered a broad

stock downturn. PepsiCo shot up almost 11 percent on reports the spinoff was being considered. As the most active issue on the New York Stock Exchange, it rose \$3.50 to close at \$35.50 a share.

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