

# Briefly noted

News in the [August 24, 2004](#) issue

**The House of Representatives** has approved a bill that would prohibit federal courts from ruling on the merits of a 1996 law that allowed states not to recognize gay marriages performed by other states. On July 22 the House adopted, 233-194, the Marriage Protection Act, which would tie the hands of all federal courts—including the U.S. Supreme Court—from deciding the fate of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. Supporters say the bill is necessary to keep courts from forcing states to recognize gay marriages performed in Massachusetts. The measure faces an uphill fight in the Senate, however, which last month blocked a proposed constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage.

**The Chinese government** is blocking a wide range of foreign-based religious Internet sites that relate to persecution of Christians and other believers, according to a report by the Oslo-based Forum 18, which monitors state restrictions on religious freedom worldwide. While the overall rate of Internet usage in China is low by developed-country standards, China had 87 million Internet users in June, reported the China Internet Network Information Centre. “Victims of automatic barring are sites that cover the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, China’s Falun Gong spiritual movement, sites in Chinese detailing persecution of religious communities in China and a perhaps surprising number of Catholic sites,” said the Forum 18 report.

**Lutheran World Relief** has received a \$500,000 grant from the founders of eBay to provide water, sanitation and other emergency needs in the Darfur region of Western Sudan and Chad. LWR announced August 5 that the gift came from the Pierre and Pamela Omidyar Fund at the Peninsula Community Foundation of Menlo Park, California. The Lutheran organization and its partners in Action by Churches Together and its Catholic counterpart, Caritas Internationalis, are seeking \$17.5 million for the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.