

# Poll finds support for removing interracial marriage ban

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP)—A survey found that most Alabamians favor removing a ban against interracial marriages from the state Constitution, but about one-fourth of those surveyed preferred to leave the ban as it is.

The poll conducted for the Alabama Education Association Nov. 16-23 asked 569 registered voters if they favored removing the interracial marriage ban from the constitution.

Sixty-three percent of those surveyed said they favored or strongly favored removing the ban, 26 percent wanted it left in and the

rest didn't know or had no opinion. The random telephone poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points for each result.

A Montgomery legislator, Democratic Rep. Alvin Holmes, has said he will sponsor a bill to remove the interracial marriage ban from the Constitution in the 1999 legislative session.

"It's like when the Confederate flag was flying over the Capitol," said Holmes. "There were people who said it wasn't bothering anybody. But it's a symbol of racism. For this to be in the Alabama Constitution is a symbol

of racism."

Holmes' bill would be a proposed constitutional amendment, which requires a three-fifths vote of the Legislature and the approval of a majority of voters in a statewide referendum.

Holmes sponsored the same measure this year, but it failed.

"I don't think many legislators will vote against it because they couldn't logically explain it," Holmes said. "But what will happen, a lot of them just won't vote. All of a sudden, they'll have to go to the restroom when it comes up for a vote. That will be the

same as voting against it."

AEA pollster Gerald Johnson said the poll was the first time the organization had sought information on what voters think about interracial marriages.

"The results pleased me," Johnson said. "I didn't know what to expect from that since we've had such a long history of racial tensions of one sort or another."

Seventy-one percent of the 131 black poll respondents favored lifting the ban on interracial marriages, compared to 62 percent of the 405 whites surveyed. The remaining 33 respondents were of other racial groups.

# Environmentalists call for ban on common toxic toys

By Danielle Knight

WASHINGTON, Nov. 24 (IPS) — A coalition of environmental and consumer organizations want the United States to follow the lead of several European nations and ban the sale of children's toys made out of vinyl, because of possible links to kidney and liver damage.

While scientists do not agree on whether toys made with vinyl are safe, environmental groups say toys made with PVC, a chemical used to soften plastic, when exposed to saliva can reach up to seven times the acceptable levels of toxic substances called phthalates, which include the chemical known as DINP. Phthalates have been linked to liver and kidney damage and possibly cancer, according to reports.

"The phthalates that make up so many common teething rings and plastic toys, are not bound to the plastic at all," said David Ozonoff, MD, MPH and chair of the Department of Environmental Health at Boston University School of Public Health. "So, when a child chews on the toy, the saliva wets the plastic so the phthalates reach out into the saliva and are ingested by the child."

"This year, Denmark,

Sweden and Austria banned the sale of some soft vinyl toys that contain hazardous additives," observed Greenpeace-USA. "While other countries such as Norway may soon follow suit, the U.S. government still allows toxic children's products, including teething toys, pacifiers, rattles, bottle nipples and squeeze toys, to be marketed to children in America."

Instead of supporting the ban, the U.S. Commerce Department has allegedly been lobbying to keep European markets open to vinyl toys, according to the coalition of more than 10 organizations. In response to the claims dozens of members of Congress recently sent a letter of protest to the department demanding that, if such lobbying efforts are occurring, they be stopped.

While several companies including Lego, IKEA and Nike have pledged to make all of their products PVC-free, other major toy manufacturers like Mattel, Hasbro, Warner Brothers and Disney say vinyl toys have not been proven to be unsafe.

"After exhaustively reviewing scientific studies conducted by industry and regulatory agencies as well as our own independent research, we have come to

the conclusion that vinyl is safe in toys," read a statement released by Toy Manufacturers of America, an industry association.

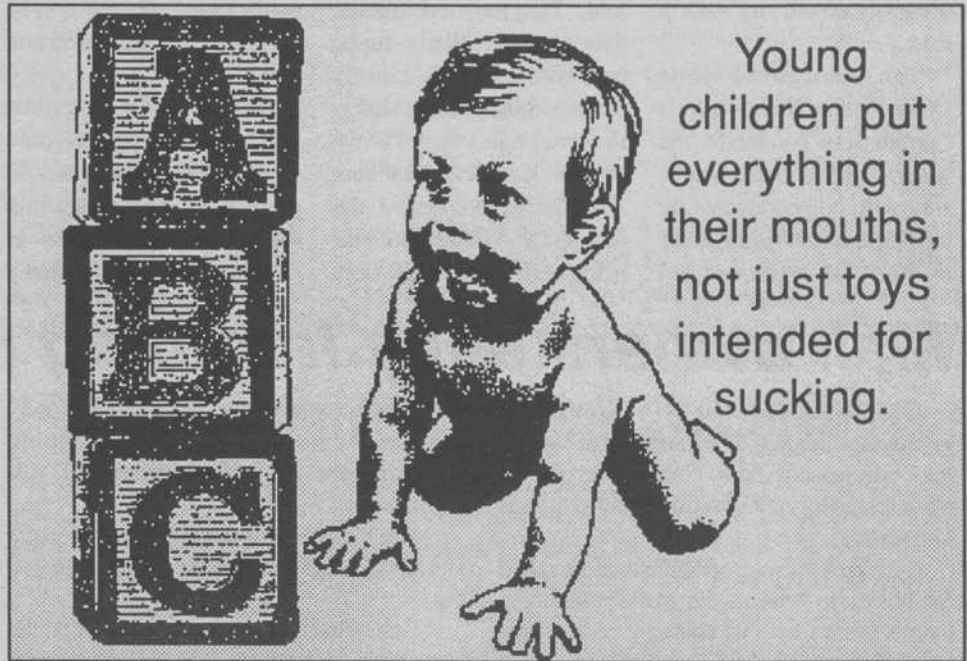
"Greenpeace's allegation simply does not stand up to scientific scrutiny and only spreads needless fears among parents of young children," it contends.

In September, California-based Mattel Inc. announced it was removing the phthalates only from toys intended for children's mouths, such as teething toys. Yet, health advocates say this step ignores that young children put everything in their mouths, not just toys intended for sucking.

"Infants and toddlers don't distinguish between toys intended for the mouth and all other toys," said Philip Clapp, president of the Washington-based National Environmental Trust.

Several weeks ago, Canadian health officials joined the growing number of governments concerned about vinyl toys. Officials advised parents of small children to throw away vinyl teething toys and rattles because of possible adverse health affects.

"Parents or caregivers are advised to watch their children's use of other small, (See Toys, Page 16)



Young children put everything in their mouths, not just toys intended for sucking.

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## Shooting

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men were driving the wrong way down a one-way street when Thompson approached their red Mustang to tell them they were going the wrong way, police said. But before she could speak, Berry lifted a 9 mm rifle and fired a single shot through the passenger-side window into the right side of Thompson's neck, they said. After their arrests, the two men allegedly made statements to police about wanting to shoot a black person.

"It was a racial thing. They were looking for the first black person they could find to shoot," a police source close to the case told *The Daily Gazette* of Schenectady in last Thursday's editions.

Nationally, the number of hate crimes

reported to the FBI has risen from 4,755 in 1991 to nearly 10,700 in 1996, the latest year for which figures are available.

New York reported 920 hate crimes to the FBI in 1996 — the second highest number of offenses in the country, according to the FBI.

Several leaders of local church and civic groups rallied in front of the state Capitol last Friday afternoon to speak out against racial violence and to promote tolerance.

"Our community today is in fear that this could be repeated," said Anne Pope, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "We hope that children will be taught in the schools to appreciate the differences that exist among us."