

# just briefs

## Seattle gay city employees get benefits

Seattle quietly became the largest American city to provide health insurance and other benefits to gay city employees and their partners last month when a City Council measure that had placed the health benefits on hold expired.

The process began last April when the Human Rights Department determined that the absence of such benefits for unmarried partners violated the city's fair employment regulations.

In response, the City Council granted city employees with domestic partners sick and bereavement leave rights. The possibility of health benefits for unmarried spouses, however, had been placed on hold three months earlier when the council learned that such a move could disqualify the city from deducting the premiums on its income taxes.

But in the intervening months, Congress repealed the problematic IRS statute, and when the Seattle suspension expired March 1, domestic partners became eligible for insurance along with the other benefits.

The new benefits face opposition from fundamentalist Christians who are collecting signatures to place a repeal initiative on the ballot.

Other cities providing health insurance to unmarried couples include Berkeley, West Hollywood and Santa Cruz, California.

## Alternative media: writing between the lines

A group of Portland alternative media people, who earn their livings communicating with readers and listeners, have begun talking to each other.

The yet-unnamed group, which includes representatives of the Clinton Street Quarterly, unCommon Women's Press, Portland Cable Access, the Portland Alliance and KBOO, plans to form an alternative media association that could serve as an information center, professional society, free speech defense network and resource for journalists.

## Team Portland: the clothes on their backs

Team Portland athletes will bring a little piece of Portland business with them to the third annual Gay Games. Bridgetown Realty has agreed to finance \$750 worth of uniforms in exchange for having the Bridgetown name inscribed on the outfits. The team is seeking two other Gold Medal sponsors who will also have their business names printed on the uniforms.

More than 100 athletes are registered so far to compete in most of the 27 sports at the Gay Games. Interested athletes may get registration forms and learn about Team Portland at a registration fair on April 18. This event, open to team members and interested parties, will be at the downtown YWCA, 1111 SW 10th Avenue, from 6-8 pm.

## Europeans join AIDS conference boycott

Delegates to the First European Conference on HIV and Homosexuality have signed on to the growing boycott of the Sixth International Conference on AIDS, scheduled for June 20-24 in San Francisco.

The 200 delegates join numerous AIDS service organizations, scientists and governmental health officials from Europe, Canada, Australia and the US in refusing to attend the gathering. They all object to US immigration rules that require HIV-positive foreigners to receive an "HIV waiver" before entering the country.

In a resolution, the European delegates "demand[ed] the abolition of travel restrictions based on HIV antibody status throughout the world and in particular the USA."

The conference, held in Copenhagen, was subtitled, "Re-Gaying HIV," in recognition of the fact that the "AIDS establishment" is rapidly gaining control of the AIDS organizations founded and nurtured by homosexuals.

British activist and conference organizer Simon Watney charged that the "heterosexual professionals who have entered the field have refused to learn anything from gay community experience, which is demonstrably the most important factor in safer sex. There is a recalcitrant homophobia," he said.

## Activists protest NY phone sex restriction

About 50 members of Safe Call, a coalition of gay and AIDS activists, civil liberties groups and phone-sex line owners, demonstrated outside the offices of New York Telephone last month to protest the company's plans to stop billing for "adult" phone services.

The protestors charged that the phone company's decision limits free speech, cuts off safe-sex alternatives and will cause severe damage to the gay and lesbian press, which receives advertising revenue from phone-sex services.

New York Telephone had announced it would no longer bill for any "adult" phone services in order to protect its corporate image. Phone sex operators say this move will drive their companies out of business, since they cannot afford the technology to do their own billing and since many phone-sex customers do not have credit cards, the only other billing option.

"It's murderous," said Kendall Morrison, who owns several New York adult lines and is also the publisher of OutWeek magazine. "Phone sex fights AIDS."

## Court orders jail visitation for lesbian couple

A Pennsylvania county jail cannot prevent an inmate's lesbian lover from visiting her, a federal judge ruled last month. The warden of a western Pennsylvania jail had refused to

allow the inmate visitation with her lover on grounds that the prison "can't condone such relationships."

The American Civil Liberties Union challenged the policy as a denial of the inmate's rights under the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause. A federal judge agreed with the ACLU and declared the jail's policy unconstitutional on March 14.

The case arose last summer when the inmate, identified as Jane Doe, wrote the warden to request that her lover be allowed to visit. "I love her and she loves me, and I sure would like to see someone I love," she wrote. "She is all I got." At a December hearing in federal court, the warden said that at the time he denied Doe's request, he believed that homosexual conduct was illegal in Pennsylvania.

"This decision means an end to a policy under which lesbian and gay prisoners were second-class persons within the prison," said Nan D. Hunter, director of the ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project. "It represents another court's recognition that the Constitution's protection of equality rights must prevail over irrational prejudice."

## Senate rejects Anti-Gay Amendment

In a major victory for the lesbian and gay community, the U.S. Senate voted down an amendment that would have allowed Washington, D.C. organizations to bar lesbians and gay men from working with children. The victory last month represents the second time in less than 30 days that the Senate sided with the gay and lesbian community on a critical vote.

The Senate rejected an amendment by Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.) that would have allowed D.C. groups to bar any lesbian or gay man from serving as a "role model, mentor or companion to any minor."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) offered substitute language, which the Senate adopted, that would allow organizations to deny posts to heterosexuals, gays and bisexuals who have been charged or convicted of sexual offenses with minors.

"The Senate rejected the obviously false notion that lesbians and gays cannot be appropriate role models or that we pose a threat to children," said Stephen Smith, legislative director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

## A different kind of children's story

A new line of books from Alyson Publications will target the youngest people touched by gay and lesbian issues — the children of homosexual parents. Publisher Sash Alyson announced plans for the books at OUT/WRITE '90, a national lesbian and gay writers' conference held in San Francisco March 3-4.

"Ten years ago, this wouldn't have been possible," said Alyson. "We believe that these books will be popular not only with lesbian and gay parents but will all parents, teachers

and librarians who recognize and value the true diversity of families that exist today — and who wish to teach children about these new families."

## Western Union loses lesbian and gay account

From now on, when the nation's largest gay and lesbian political organization has something to tell Congress, it won't send the message through Western Union.

The Human Rights Campaign Fund director, Tim McFeeley, announced last month that the fund would pull its estimated \$350,000 worth of business — the cost of the "speak out" constituent mail program — from Western Union because of the company's efforts to overturn a San Francisco ordinance protecting lesbians and gays from discrimination.

"What Western Union is doing presents a threat to the rights of lesbian and gay Americans than any other corporate action in recent memory. We have no intention of remaining silent while efforts are made to undermine protections that lesbian and gay Americans have fought so long to achieve," McFeeley said.

Western Union is challenging the constitutionality of the San Francisco ordinance as part of a legal battle that began last year. Armand Ertag, a Western Union employee in San Francisco, sought damages against the company for harassment and intimidation he experienced at work. Rather than address the specifics of Ertag's suit, the company has sought to have the gay rights ordinance overturned.

## Human rights campaign fund backs women's health bill

The largest national gay and lesbian political organization, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, will give women's cancer legislation a high priority on its advocacy agenda, the fund executive director announced last month.

"Health issues are at the top of HRCF's political agenda. In 1989, there was an estimated 43,000 deaths due to breast cancer, 6,000 deaths due to cervical cancer, 4,000 deaths due to cancer of the endometrium and 12,000 deaths due to ovarian cancer. These statistics cannot go ignored," executive director Tim McFeeley said.

Women who have not had children are at particular risk for these forms of gynecological cancers.

The HRCF will work with U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) to build Congressional support for the Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act of 1990. The act would create new Public Health Service grants to provide low-income women with preventive health screening and referral services for breast and cervical cancer.