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national news

First in the nation

*Domestic partner bill passes California legislature
by a narrow margin*

by Rex Wockner

California became the first U.S. state to pass a domestic partner registration law Aug. 25.

The measure is on the desk of Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, who has not said if he will sign it.

"We should do everything in our power to urge the governor to sign this bill," said Laurie McBride of Life AIDS Lobby, the main pressure group behind the measure. "The legislature is getting more conservative—our window of opportunity is now."

The bill passed the Senate by a 21-17 vote, with not a vote to spare. It passed the Assembly 45-26 in final form.

Senate passage came only after frustrated supporters went to the home of 76-year-old legislator Leroy Greene and fetched him from his sickbed to cast the decisive vote. The measure had sat stalled in the Senate for several hours prior to Greene's arrival.

Introduced by Assemblyman Richard Katz (D-Los Angeles), the legislation allows committed couples who live together and share expenses to register with the secretary of state as "domestic partners" and receive some benefits of marriage.

Registered partners would have family visitation rights in hospitals, legal preference to administer each other's affairs should one partner become incapacitated, and the ability to use a standard legal form to will each other property.

Lobbyists for the bill used a new tactic this year—arguing the measure would be good for senior citizens, who often live together without marrying to maintain certain Social Security benefits.

Testimony by senior citizen advocacy groups was crucial to the bill's success, lobbyists said. Supporters included the Older Women's League, the Gray Panthers, the California Senior Legislature, the California Congress of Seniors, and the American Association of Retired Persons.

Sponsor Katz said the bill "reaffirms what I believe is a

basic family value—the ability to care for someone you love."

Gov. Wilson's fax number is (916) 445-4633.

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San Diego's Gay and Lesbian Times
contributed to this article.

New White House counsel

Abner Mikva's appointment as White House counsel to the president may have significant impact for the lesbian and gay communities.


The 68-year-old former representative is a traditional liberal. As chief judge of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, he wrote the opinion of a three-member panel that ruled in favor of Joe Steffan and his challenge to the ban on gay men and lesbians serving in the military.

In the opinion, Mikva wrote, "A court need not close its eyes to the dictates of the Constitution whenever the military is involved—not even when it professes a national security interest in its conduct. There is no 'military exemption' to the Constitution."


He wrote, "The secretary [of defense] has accorded Mr. Steffan differential treatment solely because of the content of his thoughts, as revealed by his truthful statement that he is a homosexual. We think this is repugnant to the various common law and constitutional principles that guard the sanctity of a person's thoughts against government control."

Gay men and lesbians can take heart from the prospect that a man of these views will join the inner circle of the White House on Oct. 1, a date determined by the full vesting of his court pension. One can hope that he will have some positive influence on administration policy and actions towards the sexual minority community.

Bob Roehr




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