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national news

California set to nix discrimination in schools

Rep. Sheila Kuehl (D-Santa Monica), the first openly homosexual member of the California Assembly, has introduced a proposal to ban discrimination against bisexuals, lesbians and gay men in public education. The measure would prohibit bias based on sexual orientation in school employment, curriculum and the treatment of students on campus. It would also prevent schools and universities from using public money to support groups, like the ROTC, that discriminate against gay and lesbian students.

According to a story in the *Orange County Register*, a similar bill was defeated last year in the Republican-controlled Assembly, but with the Democrats back in power, this time the bill is expected to pass. Lobbyists and legislators are scrambling for gubernatorial support, but so far, Gov. Pete Wilson has not taken a position on the bill. In six years as chief executive, Wilson has both supported and opposed sexual-minority-rights issues.

Kuehl, a former civil rights attorney who cofounded the California Women's Law Center, believes passage of this bill is an important first step in turning around the high dropout and suicide rates among queer youth. Major opponents of the proposed law include Assemblyman Steve Baldwin (R-La Mesa), who predicted that it would unleash a "cultural war."

S.F. bends on domestic partner ordinance

The City of San Francisco and the Roman Catholic Church have made peace regarding a new ordinance requiring that all city contractors provide domestic partner benefits. San Francisco Archbishop William Levada had requested an exemption for Catholic Charities, a 90-year-old nonprofit social service organization run by the diocese that receives 40 percent—\$5.6 million—of its budget from the city. Levada said he believes the law is unconstitutional and said he would sue the city if officials did not waive the ordinance for church-affiliated groups.

According to a story in the *New York Times*, Mayor Willie Brown and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors had said they would not make any exemptions in the ordinance, which affects more than 8,000 private companies, nonprofit agencies and city governments that contract with the city.

However, The Associated Press reported Feb. 11 that a minor change in language agreed to by both sides—and pending the endorsement of the city attorney—lets the church avoid officially sanctioning domestic partnerships and other non-traditional living arrangements. The compromise would permit employees of any organization doing business with the city to designate a second person in their household—be it a spouse, sibling, unmarried partner, platonic roommate, etc.—as eligible to receive "spousal-equivalent benefits."

Meanwhile, AP reports that United Airlines has reached compromise with the city on the same issue. City officials had said they would not approve the airline's \$13.4 million, 25-year lease at the San Francisco International Airport until it promised to comply with the ordinance. The deal with United allows the company 20 months to develop a spousal benefits program.

American Airlines runs afoul of S.F. supervisors

Flight attendants working for American Airlines have filed a complaint against their employer with the Human Rights Commission of San Francisco and are seeking an undisclosed financial settlement, according to the *San Francisco Examiner*. The complaint, filed last year,

alleges a pattern of homophobic acts and attitudes that violate city ordinances; the list of grievances includes claims of workplace bias based on HIV status and sexual orientation, surveillance and targeted harassment of gay and lesbian employees. If the commission finds the airline at fault, it could recommend that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors revoke or modify the airline's contract with the city.



The board has already rejected the airline's proposal for lease of a site at San Francisco International Airport because American has not agreed to comply with the new domestic partners benefits ordinance.

American has provided sensitivity training on gay and lesbian issues for its employees and travel industry professionals—and has stepped up marketing to the lesbian and gay community—since it attracted international scrutiny in 1993 during a suit brought by a man with AIDS who had been ejected from one of its planes.

Negotiations between the attendants and the airline were planned for February.

Lesbian engaged in custody battle dies

Mary Ward of Pensacola, Fla., the lesbian plaintiff in an ongoing court battle to regain custody of her daughter, died Jan. 21 of a heart attack, reports The Associated Press.

In August 1995, Circuit Judge Joseph Tarbuck gave custody of Ward's daughter to the girl's father, who had served eight years in prison for shooting his first wife to death in 1974 during a custody dispute involving another child. In his ruling, Tarbuck said he wanted to give 12-year-old Cassey Ward the chance to live in "a non-lesbian world."

Ward's death puts an end to the case, which had been stalled in appellate court for the past several months. Other courts across the country have issued a variety of rulings on the custody of children of lesbian or gay parents, but experts say this case was important because of the marked contrast between the mother and father.

In a footnote to the story, Allan Terl, a retired Fort Lauderdale lawyer and sexual-minority-rights activist, says he has filed a complaint against Judge Tarbuck with the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission. Citing Tarbuck's comments about Mary Ward's lesbianism at the 1995 custody hearing, Terl contends that Tarbuck violated a judicial canon against bias or prejudice based on sexual orientation. Terl says he had prepared the complaint last year, but told reporters he waited to file it because he was afraid Ward's case would be returned to Tarbuck's jurisdiction and that the complaint might aggravate his apparent prejudice against her.

Fair housing victory in Washington state

The City Council of Lacey has amended its fair housing legislation to include lesbians and gay men among the people protected from discrimination. The Jan. 23 decision makes Lacey one of a handful of cities in Washington outside King County, where Seattle is located, to extend such civil rights protection to homosexuals.

Rich Pfouts, president of a 31-unit homeowners association in Lacey, considers the council's ac-

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