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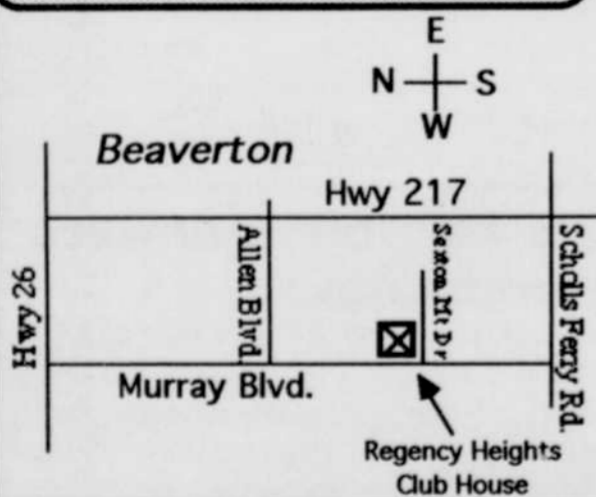
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NATIONAL news

HIGH COURT ISSUES SAME-SEX HARASSMENT RULING

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled March 4 that a federal law which prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace applies to cases involving harassers and victims of the same sex.

In a case closely watched by sexual minority rights groups, the decision provides victims of same-sex harassment with their first-ever federal remedy.

In a unanimous vote, the court revived the federal lawsuit of a Louisiana man who says he was sexually pursued and harassed by his male supervisor and two other men during the four months that he worked on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

According to The Associated Press, the court made it clear that someone claiming same-sex harassment must prove the alleged discrimination was based on gender, and "not merely tinged with offensive sexual connotations."

The decision made no specific mention of harassment based on sexual orientation.

COURT STRIKES DOWN ALASKA'S MARRIAGE BAN

A judge has ruled against Alaska's ban on same-sex marriages, ordering the state to show why it should be able to regulate whom people marry.

The ruling forces the state to prove a compelling reason why such unions should be illegal. According to The Associated Press, last year Jay Brause and Gene Dugan of Anchorage challenged a 1996 law banning same-sex marriage. The couple tried to get the state to recognize its relationship of nearly 20 years, arguing that the law violates the state Constitution.

On Feb. 27, Superior Court Judge Peter Michalski threw out the state's bid to dismiss the case and ruled that choosing a partner is a fundamental right.

John Gaguine, the assistant attorney general who argued the case, said the state will likely ask the state Supreme Court to review Michalski's decision.

LOW-COST HIV TREATMENT JUST MIGHT WORK

Some AIDS researchers are hailing the arrival of hydroxyurea, calling it the first inexpensive AIDS drug and touting its potential for the 50 percent of HIV-positive people in the United States who cannot afford protease inhibitor therapy, reports the *Los Angeles Times*.

Some claim the drug, taken in conjunction with two other AIDS drugs, has induced remission in three HIV-positive patients who have now gone for more than a year without further treatment.

Used for decades in treating leukemia and recently approved for cases of sickle cell disease, hydroxyurea affects host cells rather than the virus itself. As a result, HIV cannot develop resistance to it. Moreover, researchers believe that hydroxyurea can lessen chances of HIV resistance to other drugs as well.

Laboratory testing performed by Drs. Jeffrey E. Galpin and Franco Lori indicate that hydroxyurea enhances the effects of ddI, a reverse transcriptase inhibitor also known as didanosine, which is already being used to interrupt the reproductive processes of HIV.

Galpin reports that a combination of hydroxyurea, ddI and d4T—another reverse transcriptase inhibitor—reduced the level of

HIV in the blood of 42 patients to below detectable levels. Freed from the harmful effects of the virus, the patients' immune systems began to recuperate.

Lori and colleague Dr. Julianna Lisiewicz have reported similar results in another 42 patients, and found successful suppression of HIV in 24 newly infected patients who were treated with hydroxyurea, ddI and the protease inhibitor indinavir.

More research is needed, however, to determine if hydroxyurea can replace protease inhibitors in long-term therapy. Trials are set to begin later this year at eight to 10 U.S. centers, although they have not been chosen yet.

At a cost of no more than \$30 a month, Galpin said, hydroxyurea is markedly less expensive than treatment with combinations of protease inhibitors and reverse transcriptase inhibitors, which cost about \$1,300 per month.

SAFER SEX MAY STILL HAVE RISKS

While giving and receiving oral pleasure is generally considered to be "safer sex," a fresh examination of previous studies suggests the practice does carry a risk for transmitting HIV, according to a Reuter report.

According to work published in the journal *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, past research indicates the virus can be passed from penis to mouth, or vagina to mouth, during oral sex.

There also have been a few recorded instances of HIV transmission from mouth to penis, but this type of infection is only possible

in the unlikely event that "blood-stained saliva was involved," says lead author Dr. Sarah Edwards, of the Department of Genitourinary Medicine at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, U.K.

HIV is not the only concern, the researchers say, because receptive oral-genital sex may carry a small risk of contracting the hepatitis C virus or an oral case of human papilloma virus. Oral contact with the anus also involves possible exposure to hepatitis A and B.

Researchers say the risk of contracting such diseases during oral sex is still much smaller when compared to anal or vaginal intercourse.

But Edwards adds, "The relative importance of oral sex as a route for the transmission of viruses is likely to increase as other, higher risk sexual practices are avoided for fear of acquiring HIV infection."

FIRM MATCHES GAY MEN WITH SURROGATE MOTHERS

A Los Angeles company called Growing Generations is matching gay men who want to have children with surrogate mothers, says a Feb. 22 *Los Angeles Times* article.

Growing Generations is the only surrogate-parenting agency in the United States exclusively serving gay men, according to Shirley Zager, director of the Organization of Parents Through Surrogacy, an Illinois-based national nonprofit group that includes prospective parents, surrogacy clinics, psychologists and attorneys.

The report quotes Zager as saying most agencies turn away same-sex couples.

Growing Generations founder Gail Taylor,

