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NATIONAL news

CALIFORNIA

The California Legislature has granted domestic partner health benefits to employees at the Capitol and at district offices around the state, reports the May 11 *San Francisco Examiner*.

Blue Shield health, dental and vision care coverage is now available to unmarried couples who live at the same address and who are "in a close and exclusive relationship in which each is responsible for their common welfare." The new policy applies to same-sex and opposite-sex couples. Costs are projected to range from \$170 to \$340 for each covered partner and dependents.



CALIFORNIA REPUBLIC

The decision to implement the new policy was made by the Assembly Rules Committee, which functions like a board of directors and personnel department for Capitol employees. Democratic leaders on the committee sent a memo to the members of the Senate and Assembly rules committees requesting that each member vote by checking "aye" or "nay" on the memo. The policy was approved on a party-line vote.

Republicans are upset with the method by which the policy was approved and implemented. No formal hearings were held, and there was little public notice. Although there have been demands for a public hearing before the Joint Assembly-Senate Rules Committee, no hearing date has been set. It seems the new policy is something of a *fait accompli*.

Having all the right people in the right places at the right time appears to be a major reason domestic partner benefits were finally offered to employees of the Legislature. Both Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, D-Los Angeles, and Senate President pro tem John Burton, D-San Francisco, support domestic partner benefits. Additionally, California's new governor, Gray Davis, supports the expansion of domestic partner benefits.

A new mural on display at San Francisco's Mission High School features gay and lesbian figures both past and present.

The mural measures approximately 15 feet by 8 feet. It features 20 people, including poet Langston Hughes, assassinated San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, singer Elton John, and author Truman Capote.

"This mural is the first of its kind at any school in the nation and it's about time," school board president Juanita Owen told *The Associated Press*. "With hate crimes continuing across the country, and even here in San Francisco, what better way to educate all our youth than to honor this wide array of meaningful figures from history who just happen to be gay or lesbian?"

INDIANA

Dale Stewart, a senior at Arlington High School, knew what he wanted to wear to his high school prom—a fashionable black formal dress.

The school, however, preferred that Stewart wear more traditional male garb, insisting that it would be a violation of the school's dress code for Stewart to wear a dress, according to media reports.

An Indianapolis federal judge saw things a little differently and ruled that Stewart's decision to wear a dress is a form of speech protected by the First Amendment. The ruling was handed down just in time for Stewart to attend the prom his way.

NATIONAL

Steven Dunlap has a dream. It involves the Internet, banking, and gay men and lesbians. More specifically, his dream involves combining those three elements to create the Gay and Lesbian Bank, a virtual bank that would offer everything from joint checking accounts to mortgages. All business would be conducted online. The target market? Gay men and lesbians.

According to Reuters, Dunlap hopes to win regulatory approval for the bank in time to open by National Coming Out Day on Oct. 11.

Dunlap thought about creating the virtual bank after a frustrating effort to raise money to build a gay and lesbian resort in Florida.

"Lenders snubbed their noses at it. No matter how strong the business plan was, they just didn't want anything to do with it," he said.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

It is no longer illegal for gay men and lesbians to serve as foster and adoptive parents in New Hampshire. Earlier this month, Gov. Jeanne Shaheen signed a law repealing the ban.

New Hampshire's action leaves Florida as the only state in the nation with such a ban in place, states a May 3 *United Press International* story.



The old law, enacted in 1988, prohibited gay men and lesbians from serving as foster or adoptive parents. Additionally, foster and adoptive parents were not allowed to have gay men or lesbians as either members of their households or as long-term visitors to their homes.

When signing the bill, Shaheen said: "For too long, too many qualified families have been denied the opportunity to provide a child in need with a healthy, loving environment. This law will allow more children to be with supportive and nurturing families. That's good for New Hampshire and good for our children."

NEW YORK

John Pickett, a gay man accused of killing his lover, can use "battered-wife syndrome" as a defense at his trial, a Brooklyn judge ruled in April.

The landmark ruling by state Supreme Court Justice John Leventhal marks the first time a man has used the defense strategy, which previously has been applied in cases involving beaten and abused women.

The judge said Pickett's attorney, Arthur Aidala, can call an expert on battered women and an expert on abuse in gay relationships, according to the April 24 *New York Post*.

In December 1997, Pickett allegedly stabbed