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**NATIONAL news**

**CALIFORNIA**

By a unanimous vote, the West Hollywood City Council defeated a measure that would have required bars and nightclubs to distribute condoms.

Establishments that would have been affected by the mandatory program include those with liquor licenses, adult businesses, coffeehouses and nonprofit organizations that serve those at risk for HIV, reports a Jan. 3 Associated Press story.

Speaking about the proposal, Councilman Steve Martin said: "Mandatory condom distribution does not adequately address the issue of safe sex. A fish bowl of condoms just doesn't compare to aggressive street outreach and one-on-one education."

Supporters of the measure included health advocates.

Said Ged Kensela, spokesperson for the AIDS Healthcare Foundation: "It's not an imposition to have a condom made available to you in a city whose principal economy is night life-driven."

The city currently has a voluntary program that last year provided 300,000 condoms to approximately 30 nightclubs. The clubs agreed to place the condoms in containers accessible to customers.

A new law that created a statewide domestic partnership registry went into effect Jan. 1. On the first business day of the year, 71 California couples took advantage of the law to register with either county clerks or the secretary of state's office.

According to a Jan. 4 *San Francisco Chronicle* story, lesbian and gay couples and straight couples older than 62 can register their relationships for \$10.



Those living in Sacramento, San Francisco, Fresno, Los Angeles and San Diego now have the right to visit their partner in the hospital. Retired state workers can obtain health care

benefits for their partners. Current state and local government employees who are enrolled in the state's retirement program also get benefits for their partners.

The law was authored by Assemblywoman Carole Migden, D-San Francisco, who called the registry "a step toward legitimization" for lesbian and gay couples.

To be eligible to register, couples must share a common residence, agree to be jointly responsible for each other's basic living expenses, be at least 18 years old and not be related by blood in a way that would forbid them from marrying.

**KENTUCKY**

A second soldier at Fort Campbell has been sentenced in the beating death of Pfc. Barry Winchell.

Under a plea agreement, Army Spc. Justin R. Fisher, 26, admitted he lied to investigators and obstructed their inquiry.

Fisher wiped blood from the baseball bat used by Pvt. Calvin Glover to bludgeon Winchell while he slept. He was sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison.

According to media reports, the Army dropped other charges, which included participating as a principal to premeditated murder and acting as an accessory after the fact.

Fisher apologized to his family and to Winchell's family members.

"Barry, I hope you can hear me," Fisher said. "I'm sorry for the part I played in this. I know you are now in a better place. I hope you know that if I could go back to the morning it happened, I would have changed it all."

Winchell was plagued by rumors that he was gay. Prosecutors contended he was murdered because Glover hated gays.

**NATIONAL**

The U.S. Supreme Court let stand without comment or dissent an appeals court ruling that allows an insurance company to place a low cap on health care benefits paid for AIDS-related conditions.

The appeals court ruling stated that the Americans with Disabilities Act does not apply to insurance companies.

In 1997, two HIV-positive Chicago-area men sued Mutual of Omaha Insurance Co. over insurance policies that had payment caps of \$25,000 and \$100,000 for AIDS or AIDS-related conditions. Both policies provided lifetime limits of \$1 million for other illnesses, reports a Jan. 10 story from Reuters.

The initial ruling by a federal judge found that the policy limits violated the federal Americans with Disabilities Act. The ruling was overturned by an appeals court, which found that, while denying coverage to someone with AIDS



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