

NATIONAL news

The arbitrator's ruling could be overturned if either the state House or Senate decides by a two-thirds vote that the funds are not available.

Such a vote is considered unlikely because Connecticut currently enjoys a budget surplus of approximately \$240 million.

MASSACHUSETTS

A 16-year-old Moroccan high school girl was attacked last month allegedly by six teenagers who believed she was a lesbian. The victim was seen holding hands with another girl, a tradition in Morocco.

Three students from Boston High School have been arraigned in the case, reports *The Boston Globe*. One, 17-year-old Nyke-sha Gant, was charged with four felonies, including attempted rape and civil rights violations. The charges carry a combined maximum sentence of 30 years in prison.

Two 15-year-old girls could be indicted and tried as youthful offenders, which would allow the judge to impose adult sentences if they are convicted.

During the attack—which began on a Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority train and continued on a platform—the suspects fondled the girl, tried to tear off her pants, held her arms apart and tried to molest her at gunpoint, Suffolk County prosecutors told the *Globe*.

According to prosecutor Gerald P. Stewart, Moroccan girls have been harassed before at school. In December, girls were taunted for holding hands.

Hundreds of students, teachers and administrators at Boston High School signed a petition expressing concern about the incident and saying the school values diversity.

NATIONAL

People who have low levels of HIV in their blood appear to be less likely to transmit the virus to their heterosexual partners, according to results of a study conducted in Africa.



Dr. Thomas Quinn of Johns Hopkins University reported the study's results at the Seventh Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, which was held in San Francisco early this month.

According to a Feb. 3 Reuters report, the authors of the study caution that their findings may not be applicable to people in the United

States, who may have low levels of virus in the blood due to drug treatment. The African study subjects were not taking anti-HIV drugs.

The study of 415 heterosexual couples in the Rakai district of Uganda included 228 couples with HIV-positive men and 187 couples with HIV-positive women. Over a 30-month period, HIV was transmitted from partner to partner in 22 percent of couples. Researchers found that the average viral load was significantly higher among those who transmitted the virus to their partners.

When viral load was less than 1,500 copies of virus per milliliter of blood, HIV transmission did not occur. The transmission rate was highest in those aged 15 to 19, and it was increased in uncircumcised men. No new cases of HIV infection were seen among circumcised men.

Overall, the findings suggest that lowering viral load may reduce the risk of heterosexual HIV transmission. There may be differences, however, in the rates of transmission among patients with low viral loads as a result of drug therapy. Antiviral treatment may lower virus levels only in the blood while elevated levels persist in other parts of the body.

VERMONT

A key committee of the state House of Representatives voted Feb. 9 in favor of developing a comprehensive domestic partnership system for gay and lesbian couples instead of broadening marriage statutes.

According to *The Associated Press*, the House Judiciary Committee's vote was 8-3.

"It is clear to me that the will of the committee is to initiate and work on a civil rights bill," Chairman Thomas Little said.

The committee did not vote on an actual bill. The decision was whether members should write a bill addressing domestic partnerships or expanding the legal definition of marriage.

The Legislature has been grappling with how to respond to a state Supreme Court ruling that gay and lesbian couples are being unconstitutionally denied the rights and benefits that accompany legal marriage.

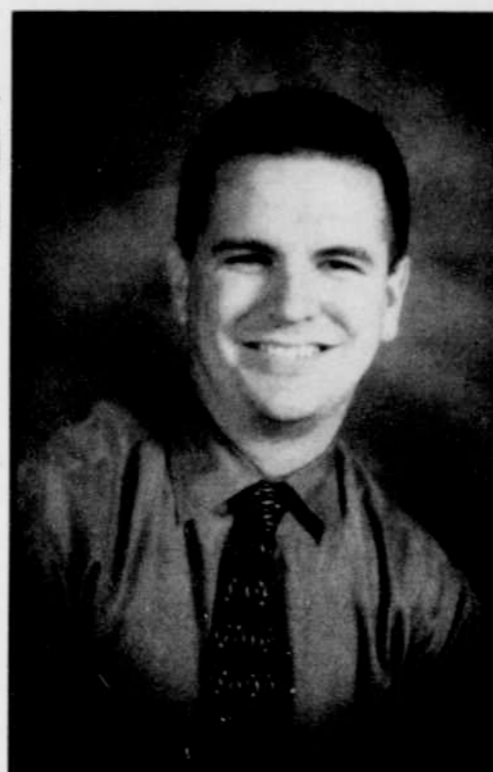
The court said the Legislature could rectify the inequality by expanding marriage or creating a parallel domestic partnership system.

According to the AP, the Judiciary Committee has held two public hearings attended by a total of more than 5,000 people and has heard testimony from religious and legal experts.

Rep. William Lippert, D-Hinesburg, the only openly gay member of the committee and the Legislature, said he believes broadening marriage statutes to include gay men and lesbians would be a major step toward dismantling discrimination.

"I trust whatever next step we take collectively, we take in a continual step to dismantle institutional discrimination," Lippert said.

■ Compiled by KRISTINE CHATWOOD, a Portland resident and longtime Just Out contributor.



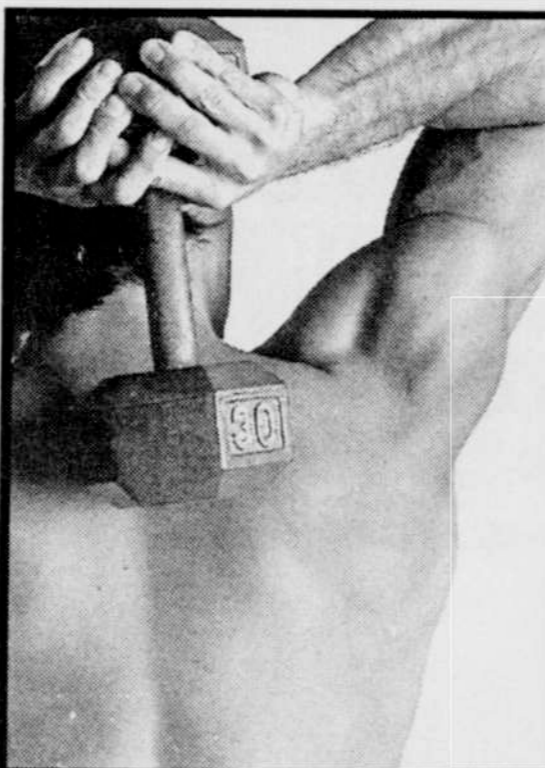
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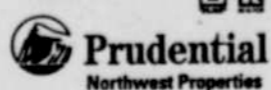
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