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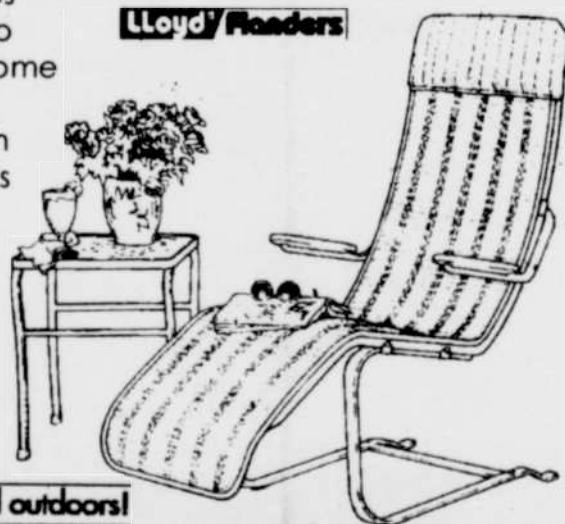
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NATIONAL news

CALIFORNIA

In a ruling with potentially broad-ranging implications for people who purchase disability insurance policies, the state Supreme Court ruled last month in favor of a man who claimed disability benefits for AIDS-related conditions even though he did not inform the insurance company of his HIV status when applying for the policy, reports the Associated Press story.

In March 1989, Mark Galanty purchased a disability policy from Paul Revere Life Insurance Co. The application did not ask whether he had AIDS or was HIV-positive, nor did the policy exclude people with either of those conditions. Galanty had tested positive for HIV in 1987.

Galanty claimed disability because of AIDS and an AIDS-related condition in September 1994. At first Paul Revere paid the benefits. When the company discovered Galanty's positive HIV test, approximately two years after it began paying him benefits, the company denied coverage. Paul Revere claimed Galanty's HIV status amounted to a pre-existing condition.

The court's June 19 ruling essentially requires insurers to ask about medical conditions before issuing a disability policy or to ferret them out within two years. After two years, the court ruled, policyholders must be compensated for illnesses—even pre-existing ones—not specifically excluded from the policy.

Said Jon Davidson, Galanty's lawyer and an attorney with the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund: "People who become disabled—regardless of the cause—need no longer worry that an insurance company will dig through their medical files in an attempt to find a previous lab result, genetic test or medical condition to use as an excuse for refusing payment."

The Supreme Court ruling, which overturns two lower court rulings, entitles Galanty to approximately \$72,000 in compensation.

Members of the religious gay and lesbian rights group Soulforce once again demonstrated outside the gathering of a major religious denomination. This time Soulforce was protesting at a gathering of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), according to a story from Cox News Service.

As at recent demonstrations targeting the United Methodist General Conference and the Southern Baptist Convention, members of Soulforce were arrested June 25. Roughly 80 protesters were charged by police with blocking a roadway, a misdemeanor, said Long Beach police spokeswoman Nancy Tabing.

More than 120 members and friends of Soulforce gathered outside the Long Beach arena where the Presbyterians were meeting.

Inside the arena, thousands of Presbyterians

listened as the outgoing presiding officer urged them to consider current problems to be opportunities.

Outside, Soulforce activist Rev. Jane Spahr told the crowd: "We are here to demand that the church think of us as whole people rather than sexual acts... We are here not only to claim our civil rights, but our baptismal rights."

Spahr, who was introduced as a "lesbian evangelist," was ordained by the church before homosexuality became such a hot-button issue. Her San Rafael-based ministry is called "That All May Freely Serve."

Back inside, the General Assembly of the 2.6 million-member denomination voted to continue a two-year moratorium on discussion of ordination of gay men and lesbians as ministers and elders.

The group was expected to discuss the issue of same-sex unions before the convention's end. Current policy forbids performing same-sex unions in such a way that they are understood to be "the same as a marriage ceremony." In May, however, the church's highest court, the Permanent Judicial Commission, ruled that the church's constitution, or Book of Order, does not prohibit all such unions.

While some would like to see the prohibition against same-sex unions strengthened, others, including Soulforce, want to see it removed entirely.

COLORADO

A coalition of Denver police, gay and lesbian activists and neighborhood residents has come together to combat problems such as after-hours cruising, loud noise and public sex at Cheesman Park.

Once so prevalent that it prevented the reporting of hate crimes and same-sex domestic violence, mistrust of police by lesbians and gay men in the area has decreased due, at least in part, to the new cooperation.

A June 25 story in the *Rocky Mountain News* reports that police, gay-rights activists from Equality Colorado and people who live near the park have joined together to hand out fliers to motorists in Cheesman and nearby neighborhoods.

The fliers inform people that the police are increasing enforcement of traffic problems, park curfew violations and inappropriate activity on nearby streets.

According to Lt. Jimmy Martinez, head of the community policing team in District 6, the joint efforts have resulted in a dramatic decline in complaints from neighbors about after-hours activities around the park.

Cheesman Park is a well-known gathering place for lesbians and gay men from throughout the Denver metro area. There was at one time a great deal of friction between park users and nearby residents.

According to Martinez, positive results occurred when the police brought together the neighborhood association and Equality Colorado, a statewide gay-rights organization.

Others agree with him.

"For one thing, our work with the Denver police has become a model for how an organization like ours can work with law enforcement," said Lori Girvan, director of Equality Colorado.

Dede DePercin, head of Equality's Anti-Violence Project, said that cooperation with the police has "built bridges" over the gay and lesbian community's fear and mistrust of law enforcement.

"Not everyone in our community is at that place of having a good relationship with law enforcement," she said. "It's a process. And not everyone in law enforcement has a good relationship with our community. Each year things get better, we take different steps."

