

NATIONAL news

have made a commitment in life deserve the legal commitment to match. This historic ruling affirms the state constitution's promise of equality and fairness for all people. The court recognized that when the government denies lesbians and gay men the right to marry, it is treating them unequally."

"Hardworking, taxpaying Californians are now one step closer to equal rights under the law, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender," said Seth Kilbourn, who heads the Human Rights Campaign Marriage Project.

Massachusetts is the only state with full marriage equity for gay and lesbian couples. However, lower courts in New York and Washington have ruled similarly to California, and those decisions are under appeal.

—Bob Roehr

AFL-CIO AGAINST FEDERAL MARRIAGE AMENDMENT

In a unanimous resolution March 3, the AFL-CIO Executive Council declared that the Federal Marriage Amendment "and its state counterparts threaten the rights of working people by creating an environment across the nation that is hostile to the rights of domestic partners, regardless of their sexual orientation. Unions will have an increasingly difficult time making gains in domestic partner benefits, and preserving those benefits that they have already won at the table."

The council resolution noted, "The AFL-CIO recognizes that families come in all shapes and sizes." It added that for more than a generation, unions have negotiated domestic partner benefits—including health care, family and medical leave and other benefits—for their members, both queer and straight.

The resolution also reiterated the AFL-CIO's "long-standing support for the full inclu-



Rashawn Brazell's dismembered limbs were discovered last month in a Brooklyn subway tunnel.

sion and equal rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the workplace and in society."

Pride at Work, the national organization of queer workers, praised the AFL-CIO for criticizing the proposed amendment.

"We're delighted that the AFL-CIO has taken this stand," co-presidents Nancy Wohlforth and Josh Cazares said. "It's the right thing to do. It happened because of the strong leadership of President John Sweeney in bringing this resolution to the entire Executive Council and the hard work of Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson."

National Stonewall Democrats also chimed in with their support of the statement.

"Republican scare tactics have fueled dozens of discriminatory anti-marriage amendments in statehouses and in Congress," executive director Eric Stern said. "This historic resolution by the AFL-CIO recognizes that the implications of these amendments threaten long-standing

employee benefits. Congressional Democrats, who have stood against the federal anti-marriage amendment, should now follow the lead of the AFL-CIO in opposing similarly destructive state amendments."

The resolution is online at www.union-voice.org/ct/Edqex4s1pqvT.

—Sarah Dougher

ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT CALLS FOR MEETING WITH NYPD

Representatives from the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project announced March 8 that they have requested an emergency meeting with George A. Grasso, first deputy commissioner of the New York Police Department to discuss their displeasure with the level of communication in the wake of last month's gruesome murder of Rashawn Brazell.

"Despite weeks of reaching out to the investigators working on Rashawn's murder, we have primarily been the recipient of unreturned calls and unmet promises of information and community alert and information materials related to the case," said Richard Haymes, the project's executive director. "In recent years, the

NYPD had come to acknowledge the importance of collaborating with and engaging AVP as a community-based organization that has more direct connections to the city's lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual communities than the NYPD could ever have.

"Unfortunately, on this case in particular, we have experienced somewhat of a retrograde attitude in the NYPD's attitude towards actively engaging the LGBT community with respect to a horrible murder in its midst," said Haymes. "In what is without a doubt the most gruesome and alarming murder of a young gay man in New York City since the discovery of 19-year-old Steen Fenrich's dismembered body in March 2000, we believe that the NYPD has tragically failed in its duty to provide information to the community about this investigation and also failed to utilize all of the resources that may be available at the community level to solve the crime, and that is simply unacceptable. We trust that Commissioner Grasso will acknowledge the import of our meeting request and agree to meet as soon as possible so that we can address these issues before it is absolutely too late."

—SD

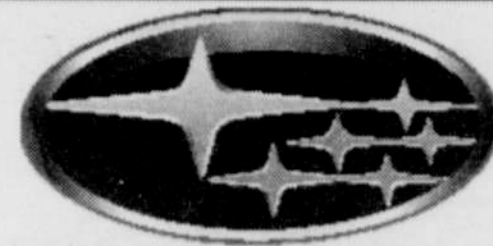
TOPEKA VOTERS DEFEAT ANTI-GAY INITIATIVE

Voters in Topeka, Kan., narrowly defeated an ordinance March 1 that sought to prevent the city from taking any action to protect queers from discrimination for the next 10 years and overturning existing ordinances banning employment discrimination in city government on the basis of sexual orientation and a 2002 hate crimes ordinance. The campaign to pass the initiative was launched and funded by supporters of the Rev. Fred W. Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church, sponsor of the GodHatesFags.com Web site.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force was a central support behind the "Vote NO on March 1st" campaign to defeat the ordinance. It recruited and paid for campaign staff, provided technical assistance, contributed about \$20,000 and organized volunteer phone banks in other regions of the country.

The vote against the ordinance was 52 percent to 48 percent.

—SD



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