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The Supreme Court's Double Standards

By Jack C. Landau

Newhouse News Service

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court approved this past week some new rules for the conduct of federal trials which permit:

- Police (but not newsmen) to protect the identity of their confidential informants.

- Attorneys (but not accountants) to protect confidential information obtained from their clients.

- Psychiatrists (but not psychologists or any other type of physician) to protect information they obtain from their patients.

- Clergymen (but not marriage counselors) to protect information obtained from couples seeking their advice.

These new rules were approved by the Supreme Court under a power granted to the Court by Congress to set rules for the admis-

sion of evidence in all federal civil and criminal cases.

Rules of Evidence

Although they are described as technical "rules of evidence," the new rules can just as effectively win or lose a case for a particular defendant as a major Supreme Court decision on constitutional law.

If for example, an accountant is required to incriminate his client under an evidentiary rule, then for

all practical purposes the Supreme Court has decided that accountants have no constitutional right to protect their clients' confidences.

Although an advisory committee of 15 lawyers and judges worked for more than seven years drafting the new rules, some of their inconsistencies are confusing.

Under the rules, husbands and wives may be forced to

testify against each other in negligence cases and other civil-type litigation, but not in criminal trials.

Destroys Bonds

The legal theory has generally been that forcing spouses to testify against each other destroys the bonds of marriage. But it is difficult to see how a marriage would be aided by making a distinction between criminal and civil trials.

In giving the secrecy privilege to clergymen, the advisory committee notes that clergymen frequently conduct marriage counseling sessions where confidences must be disclosed.

But there is no discussion of why a non-religious marriage counselor should have less protection for the couples he counsels.

The advisory committee notes that the courts should encourage drugs users to

communicate confidentially with psychotherapists. And yet, the family general practitioner (who must tell all under the rules) is most commonly consulted initially about drug problems.

Search for Truth

Albert Jenner, a Chicago attorney who headed the advisory committee, said that the underlying "principle of the new rules is you search

Light Show

VANDENBERG AFB — UPI — The Air Force launched a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile at 6 p.m. Friday, creating a light show in the evening sky.

for truth best if all the relevant information is obtained."

If Congress makes no objection, the new rules will go into effect next July. Only Justice William O. Douglas did not approve. He said the Supreme Court had not really researched or drafted the new rules but was merely acting as "conduit" for the advisory committee.

Eye Pole Ban

ANN ARBOR (Mich.) — (AP) — The Ann Arbor City Council is considering extending a sign ordinance ban on "visual pollution" to include revolving barber poles.