

# California dreaming & gay civil-rights reality

By **CHUCK COLBERT**

*San Francisco, open your Golden Gate, you leave no one to wait outside your door...*

Let's change the lyrics in the battle hymn of gay civil rights. The state of California — not just San Francisco — has opened its Golden Gate.

Earlier this month when Democratic Gov. Gray Davis signed into law three gay civil-rights laws, he made the Golden State — arguably our nation's cultural and political bellwether — the front runner in the good fight for lesbian and gay equality.

"These three bills will send a message across this country and around the world that we are determined to unleash the full potential of the human spirit here in California," Davis said, addressing a black-tie crowd of more than 1,000 people on hand for a gala fundraiser of the state's largest gay political organization.

"This [legislation] is not just about one community," he went on to say. "This is about every human being who — if they are given an opportunity — will not only achieve their dreams for their sake, but for our sake ..."

It was one lesbian's hope for and dream of a harassment- and violence-free public school system that proved to

be the most controversial of three bills signed into law.

Spearheaded by Democratic Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl of Santa Monica, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act 2000 outlaws harassment and dis-

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The new law adds the term "sexual orientation" to the existing education code law that already bans discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, disability, and sex. The bill brings California's education code in line with current hate crime laws.

In a dramatic, horse-race finish, this bill — four years in the making — passed state house muster by one vote, having failed earlier this year. Kuehl's leadership and perse-

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orientation. Previously, gays had only limited employment protection and remedies under the state's labor code.

"Awesome," is the word Laurie McBride used to describe her feelings about the legislative milestone in a *Frontiers* Newsmagazine, a Los Angeles-based gay publication. In 1979 "I personally suffered discrimination on the job. I had been fired for being a dyke at UC Medical Center in San Francisco where I was working as a research associate," said McBride, who now serves as the liaison to the

another's lives in an intimate and committed relationship of mutual sharing." Registered domestic partners cannot be related by blood.

The new law also requires that medical facilities recognized domestic partner visitation rights. It permits the state government and municipalities to offer domestic partnership health benefits under the state's Public Employees Retirement System.

Four other states, Hawaii, New York, Oregon, and Vermont, provide some sort of partner benefits.

Granting few tangible legal benefits, the statewide domestic partnership registry is nevertheless an important national first: It boldly affirms the need to value same-sex love and commitment.

Isn't that ultimately what the Declaration of Independence empowers all Americans — gay and non-gay alike — to dream, hope, and ultimately achieve: life liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

Gov. Davis thinks so. "[I want] a new California based on hope instead of fear, tolerance instead of ignorance, [and] issues that unite us instead of issues that divide us," he said.

Sounds very California — and quite all-American — to me. ▼

*Chuck Colbert, who serves on the board of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, lived in California — San Diego and San Francisco from 1981-85.*

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GLBT community for state Democratic Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles.

Eleven states, including all in New England except Maine, now ban job discrimination. Nine states ban discrimination in housing based on sexual orientation.

The third California milestone in gay civil rights is the new statewide domestic partnership registry. Sponsored by Democratic Assemblywoman Carole Migden of San Francisco, this legislation creates a registry for same-sex domestic partnerships of all ages (18 or older) and for opposite-sex couples who are 62 years of age or older, and who have "chosen to share one

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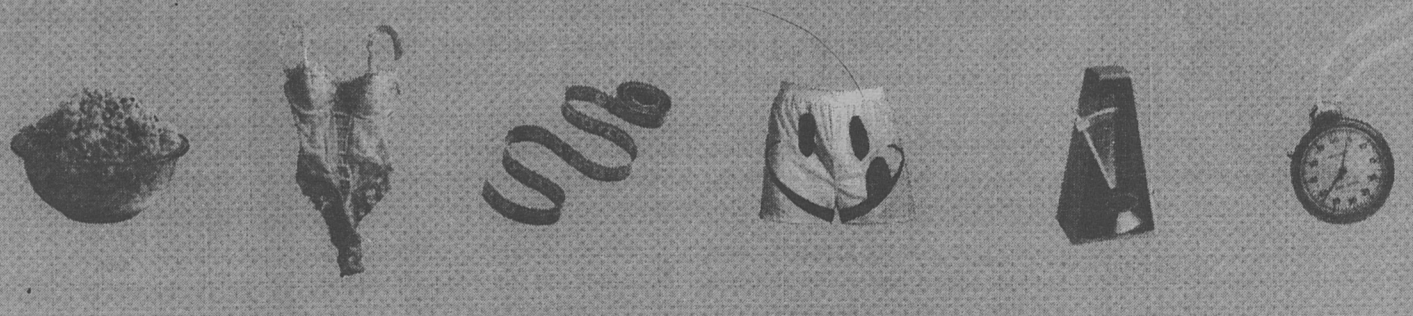
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Gateway Plaza, 30 Main Street  
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800-869-9600 802-863-7728  
802-865-2137 Fax

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