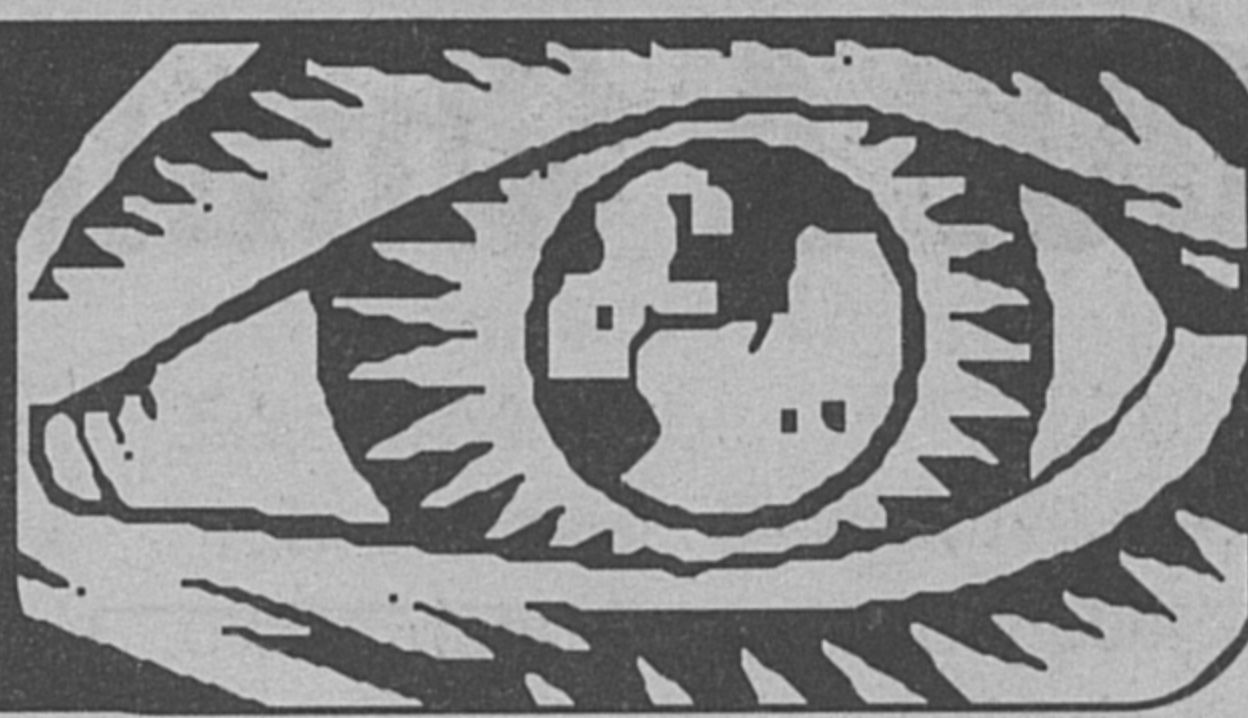


# the rest of our world...



## Canuck couples protected

OTTAWA – Canada is on the verge of endorsing same-sex partnerships.

The justice minister has proposed legislation that would give gay and lesbian couples the same rights as common-law heterosexual couples.

The measure, introduced by Justice Minister Anne McLellan, would alter 68 federal statutes, including the Pension Act and Income Tax Act, to provide same-sex couples with increased benefits and obligations.

While the proposal avoided the issue of equating same-sex marriages with heterosexual marriages, gay and lesbian advocates praised the proposal for aiming to give same-sex couples recognition under the law.

“It all boils down to the right to have the same respect, the same accountability and the same responsibility as any heterosexually based family unit,” said Patricia Maguire, 34, who lives with partner Marion Steele.

The changes, which require approval by Parliament, would allow same-sex couples to claim their partners as dependents on income tax returns and collect survivor benefits under the Canada Pension Plan if one partner dies.

## Partner cut out of estate

TACOMA, Wash. – A state appeals court has dealt a blow to gay couples.

A man who shared a house, business, and financial assets with his gay lover for 28 years cannot inherit his partner's estate, a state appeals court ruled in reversing a judge's decision.

Frank Vasquez was denied any of Robert Schwerzler's \$230,000 estate, including the home they shared in suburban Puyallup, because the state's community property law only applies to heterosexuals, the Washington State Court of Appeals Division II ruled. Schwerzler left no will.

“We find no precedent for applying the marital concepts, either rights or protections, to same-sex relationships,” Appeals Court Judge C.J. Bridgewater wrote in the 3-0 decision issued last Friday.

Extending the law that governs unmarried, long-term couples to gays “is for the Legislature to decide, not the courts,” Bridgewater wrote.

The ruling reversed a decision by a Pierce County superior court judge to award virtually all of Schwerzler's property to Vasquez, who is in his mid-60s. The appellate panel sent the case back to the trial court, where the judge had rejected claims by two of Schwerzler's four siblings.

## Gay immigration bill in House

There may be hope for binational same-sex couples struggling with immigration issues.

On Valentine's Day, Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) introduced a House bill that would allow gay and lesbian US citizens to sponsor foreign national partners for immigration into the United States.

“Why do we allow the government to tear apart committed and loving couples just because of who they love?” he asked. Nadler called the bill a simple “matter of common sense and fairness.”

The bill would allow a new class of “permanent partners” to qualify under immigration law similar to the way married couples may presently.

It's considered unlikely the bill will go anywhere in the current Congress, where both houses are led by Republicans. But supporters are still pleased that the issue has been broached.

“We look at it as the very beginning of an important dialogue in Congress,” said Lavi Soloway, chairman of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force.

## CT benefits

HARTFORD, Conn. – Gay and lesbian couples who work for the state of Connecticut are about to get domestic partnership health benefits.

An arbitrator says the state would be required to offer health benefits to employees in same-sex relationships.

The ruling applies only to gay couples and does not affect employees in unmarried, opposite-sex “domestic partner” living arrangements. It will take effect unless a two-thirds majority of one house of the Legislature determines there is

not enough money to pay the benefit.

Similar benefits are offered to state employees in New York, California, Oregon and Vermont.

Arbitrator Roberta Golick estimated the change would cost Connecticut \$1.3 million to \$1.5 million per year. The overall state personnel costs are about \$2.8 billion.

## Knight battle

LOS ANGELES – A ballot measure to deny legal recognition to same-sex marriages performed in other states is supported by most segments of the state's population a month before the election, the Field Poll reported.

A representative sample of likely voters contacted in the six-day period that ended Sunday favored Proposition 22 by 52 to 39 percent, with the rest undecided, the independent polling organization reported.

The poll was based on responses from 775 likely voters, and had a margin of error of 3.6 percentage points.

Meanwhile, rock star Melissa Etheridge has made the jump to the political stage, joining the battle against the ballot measure she says is fueled by hate and bigotry.

“There are hundreds and thousands of people that I represent that are just like me that don't happen to have two Grammys that this affects. And this affects me deeply,” said Etheridge.

## British consent

LONDON – Lawmakers in Britain say it's time to make the age of consent for gay sex the same as it is for straight sex.

The House of Commons overwhelmingly approved lowering the age of consent for gays from 18 to 16, but the proposal faces stiff opposition in the House of Lords.

The unelected House of Lords has already thrown out two previous attempts by the government to equalize the gay and heterosexual ages of consent.

The bill, which would bring Britain in line with most other European Union nations, was approved in the House of Commons by 263 votes to 102.

Opening the debate, Home Secretary Jack Straw said lowering the age of consent for homosexual men was about

creating a society “free from prejudice.”

Straw's counterpart in the opposition Conservative Party spoke against the move.

“It's wrong that a young person of 16 should be free in law to embark on a course of action that might lead to a lifestyle which would separate him, maybe permanently, from the mainstream life of marriage and family,” Anne Widdecombe said.

## Gays in British schools

LONDON – The top religious leaders in Britain agree that homosexuality shouldn't be in the schools.

The Anglican bishop and Scotland's Catholic cardinal both oppose the Labor Party government's attempt to repeal a law that prohibits the promotion of homosexuality in the schools.

The Rt. Rev. James Jones, bishop of Liverpool, said that English society should acknowledge “that those who give moral and social priority to marriage are not necessarily homophobic.”

Jones' comments, which he wrote for London's Daily Telegraph, added to the controversy in Scotland, where Cardinal Thomas Winning has denounced gay sex.

“It would not surprise me to discover a silent majority who believe that children should be taught that the family based on marriage is morally and socially expedient,” he added.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's aides reiterated that the government is determined to repeal the law – known as Section 28 after its clause in a bill passed by the Conservative government, which lost power in 1997.

## Twins to stay in UK

LONDON – A gay couple has won the right to keep their newborn twins in England.

The twins were born Dec. 9 to a surrogate mother in Modesto, Calif., with the help of an American egg donor and an American surrogate mother. Sperm was taken from one of the British partners.

The fathers, Barrie Drewitt, 35, and Tony Barlow, 32, won a landmark case in California to have their names recorded on the birth certificates as parents of the twins. Under British law

however, the legal parents of twins Saffron, a girl, and Aspen, a boy, are still the surrogate mother and her husband.

Home Secretary Jack Straw took into account the exceptional circumstances of the case and the needs of the children while making his decision, his office said in a statement.

“Although UK law does not recognize Messrs Drewitt-Barlow as Saffron and Aspen's parents, the Home Secretary has been in no doubt that it would not be in the children's interests to be returned to the United States,” the statement said.

## HRC backs Gore

LOS ANGELES – The nation's largest gay rights group is endorsing Vice President Al Gore's presidential campaign.

The Human Rights Campaign has 350,000 members nationwide, including 40,000 in California and 25,000 in New York – two states holding Democratic primaries March 7. Gore faces Bill Bradley in those contests, and a strong gay turnout could help. Both men have courted gays.

“We feel that Senator Bradley's words of late have been very uplifting and quite inspiring. However, the vice president has toiled at our side through one issue after another over the last seven years,” said Elizabeth Birch, the group's president. “Senator Bradley didn't start speaking out on these issues until he started running for president. At the end of the day, that's late in the game.”

## McCain 'knows' gays

EAST GREENWICH, R.I. – John McCain knows us when he sees us.

But the presidential candidate has decided he's not going to talk about it anymore and instead will focus on his support for the ‘don't ask, don't tell’ policy in the military.

He told reporters he had served in the Navy with many gay men, though they had not told him their sexual orientation. Asked how he knew, he said, “Well, I think we know by behavior and by attitudes. I think that it's clear to some of us when some people have that lifestyle.”