

# national news

## No response in the streets

Gov. Pete Wilson vetoes California domestic partner legislation

by Rex Wockner

Sept. 11, Republican Gov. Pete Wilson vetoed California's domestic partner legislation, AB 2810, which had cleared the state Assembly and the Senate.

The measure would have allowed same-sex and unmarried heterosexual couples to register with the secretary of state. Registered partners would have been granted hospital visitation rights, the right to will each other property, and the right to act on the behalf of a partner who became incapacitated. It would have been the first such legislation in the country.

In contrast to Wilson's September 1991 veto of gay and lesbian civil rights law AB 101, there was no visible response from queers in the streets of San Francisco, Los Angeles or San Diego.

In a prepared statement, Wilson said, "Government policy ought not to discount marriage by offering a substitute relationship that demands much less, and provides much less, than is needed both by the children of such relationships and, ultimately, much less than is needed by society."

Government has an obligation, Wilson said, to "encourage and reward marriage and the formation of strong families—families that provide the fundamental and best hope of preventing increasing welfare dependency and increasing teen-age crime and violence. A society that devalues marriage, and which accepts illegitimacy as commonplace, encourages the explosion of teen-age out-of-wedlock births that California has in fact experienced."

He stated: "AB 2810 is unnecessary to achieve its specific aims in terms of hospital visitation, conservatorship, and testamentary disposition. There are already provisions in existing law allowing the naming of any individual as a beneficiary in a will or creating a durable power of attorney. Therefore, these goals of AB 2810 can be achieved by exercising appropriate foresight."

Wilson added, "I am issuing an executive order that will allow competent adult patients to designate whomever they choose as hospital visitors."

The bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Richard Katz (D-Los Angeles), labeled Wilson's veto as "paranoia, right wing rhetoric." Katz said the measure reaffirmed "a basic family value—the ability to care for someone you love."

Longtime gay activist Chuck Frutchey, who lives in the heart of San Francisco's Castro District, said lesbians and gay men probably didn't riot or demonstrate—as they did when Wilson vetoed AB 101 in 1991—because the partners bill had a low profile in the media.

"I don't think that many people even knew it was around," Frutchey said Sept. 12. "It hasn't been in the press that much up here.... There was a lot more advance press about AB 101. This is a bill a lot of people didn't even know was up for approval."

Chris Thomas, editor of the San Jose gay newspaper *OutNOW!* agreed. "Throughout the history of AB 2810, it's received very little interest in many parts of the Bay Area," he said. "Other gay newspapers have traditionally buried news about it deep inside, and there have not been any high-profile awareness campaigns as there were for AB 101. The possible reasons for all of this are many—we expected the veto all along; some segments of the gay community don't care about 'traditional' relationships; you name it."

In 1991 some 8,000 protesters rioted at the State Office Building in San Francisco, smashing every window on the ground floor, tossing computers out of second-floor windows, and setting fires in the building that caused damage totaling \$250,000.

In Los Angeles in 1991, demonstrators marched on the Ronald Reagan State Building, splashed red dye on it, and broke windows. The next evening, several thousand people marched across West Hollywood and burned the state flag. Various protests continued for a month, with some observers dubbing them "Stonewall West."

In 1991 in San Diego, 600 gay men and lesbians rallied at the state building downtown.

"I think a lot of people saw AB 101 as watershed civil rights legislation," said Jeri Dilno, editor of *San Diego's Gay & Lesbian Times*. "I don't think the domestic partners bill ever caught the same kind of political fire with people."

"This bill was kind of technical and didn't have an emotional edge to it. It was a partial bill to start with, giving only limited rights, and I think people just didn't understand it as being civil rights legislation, or the lack of it passing being a threat to their rights."

"I think they are wrong," Dilno added. "But because it had a more subtle tone to it, it wasn't good for sloganeering. Also, the lobbyists deliberately played down the gay side of it, saying it was good for senior citizens [who often live together unmarried to protect their Social Security benefits]. The other side of that coin is that it didn't catch the political awareness of the gay and lesbian community."

A year after the 1991 protest, Wilson did sign a scaled-down state gay and lesbian civil rights law that bans discrimination in employment and housing.



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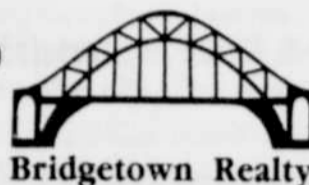
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