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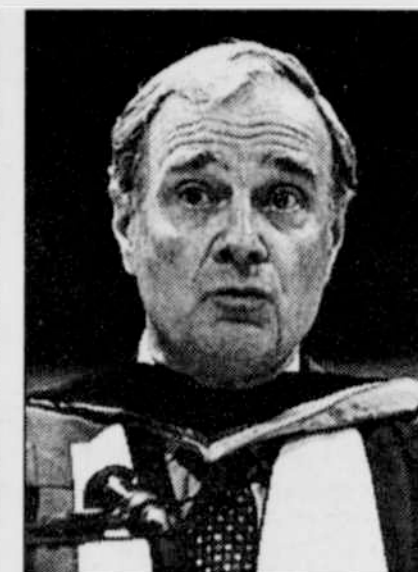
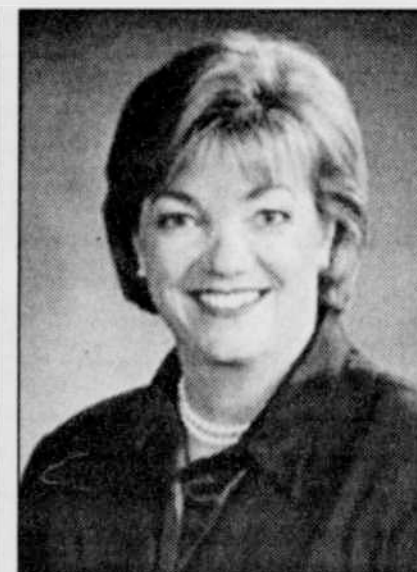
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WORLD news



From left, John Manley, Sheila Copps or Paul Martin will become Canada's next prime minister early next year

CANADA

A third province has ordered the federal government to legalize ordinary marriage for same-sex couples. The British Columbia Court of Appeal, the province's top court, ruled unanimously May 1 that restricting marriage to "one man and one woman" is unconstitutional.

The court gave the government a deadline of July 12, 2004, to change the law. If the government does not act, the court itself will legalize same-sex marriage beginning that day.

"Civil marriage should adapt to contemporary notions of marriage as an institution in a society which recognizes the rights of homosexual persons to nondiscriminatory treatment," Justice Kenneth Mackenzie wrote. The ruling overturned a lower court decision declaring that the main goal of marriage is procreation.

"I find that procreation...resulting from sexual intercourse between a husband and wife can no longer be regarded as a sufficiently pressing and substantial objective" to justify discriminating against same-sex couples, Justice Jo-Ann Prowse wrote. "Same-sex couples can 'have' and raise children, given technological developments and changes in the law permitting adoption."

Pro-gay marriage decisions handed down by lower-level courts in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario are being appealed by the federal government. A decision is expected this summer.

Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination that cannot be "demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society."

Two of the three candidates for leadership of the Liberal Party support opening full marriage to same-sex couples. The winner will replace Jean Chretien as prime minister when he steps down in early 2004.

Deputy Prime Minister John Manley and Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps propose letting gays marry just like straights do. The front-runner, former Minister of Finance Paul Martin says Canada could consider following the lead of the Quebec province, which registers straight and gay partnerships but leaves matrimony to the churches; however, he promised not to appeal any court rulings ordering legalization of gay marriage. The federal government is appealing decisions in Ontario and Quebec that found the ban on gay marriage unconstitutional.

Only two nations let gay people wed exactly like straight people do, under the ordinary marriage laws: the Netherlands and, beginning in June, Belgium. Numerous nations, mostly in Europe, have comprehensive gay partnership laws granting up to 99 percent of the rights and obligations of marriage.

The British Columbia College of Teachers, the province's educator certification and regulation body, will suspend an instructor from the south-central town of Quesnel for writing

anti-gay letters to a local newspaper.

Chris Kempling is set to be decertified for a period of one month, but the punishment could be delayed while he appeals to the provincial Supreme Court. He says his rights to freedom of expression and religion have been violated.



Chris Kempling

The college ruled that Kempling's "discriminatory" and "derogatory" statements constitute unbecoming conduct that conflicts with the education system's commitment to equality, dignity and respect for gay people.

BELGIUM

Belgium will become the second nation in the world to let gays marry under the same laws as straights June 14.

Brussels City Hall is prepared to conduct the first weddings at midnight in its ornate, gothic wedding hall, but activists have been unable to find two people who are willing to get married in the glare of an international media frenzy. "No couple has been found that is willing to subject themselves to a lot of worldwide publicity," said a reliable source who preferred not to be named.

When the Netherlands became the first nation to allow full gay marriage April 1, 2001, four couples tied the knot in the Amsterdam City Council chambers at the stroke of midnight with the mayor officiating. Belgium's first same-sex weddings might take place without any hoopla at all.

FIJI

Gays are evil and sinful, the Methodist Church of Fiji's media officer said April 26.

"We as the church love these people, but as for the practice, we are against it," the Rev. Iliesa Naival said. "It's very important that we stick to our biblical beliefs on these issues based in the Holy Scriptures."

MEXICO

Mexico's Congress banned discrimination based on "sexual preferences" in mid-April, according to the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

Article 4 of the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination also bans bias based on ethnic or national origin, sex, age, disability, social or economic status, health, pregnancy, language, religion, opinion and civil status. It further bans discrimination based on an individual's decision to "openly acknowledge one's sexual preference," be that via "dress, talk [or] mannerisms."

The law applies in the areas of education, employment, medical care, social security benefits, public services, private institutions providing public services, reproductive rights, property rights, sports, cultural and recreation